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Editor: Jim Harries, PhD, Chairman of the AVM



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**The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages some missionaries from the West to engage in their ministries using local languages and resources.**

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**Advance Conference Notice: 2021.**

The next UK-AVM conference is to be held at All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Details forthcoming.

Please suggest contributions to this Bulletin, to [jim@vulnerablemission.org](mailto:jim@vulnerablemission.org)

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•**Thorsten Prill** is BCMS Crosslinks mission partner and a minister of the Rhenish Church in Namibia, a united Lutheran and Reformed denomination. He has been seconded by his church to serve as Vice-Principal at Edinburgh Bible College (EBC). Before coming to Scotland in 2017 he lectured in missiology, practical theology and systematic theology at Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS) and served as a pastor in Lutheran and Rhenish congregations in Windhoek. He studied theology in the UK (Nottingham and Sheffield) and holds a Doctor of Theology in Missiology from the University of South Africa (UNISA).

[The Use of English in Cross-Cultural Mission: Observations from Africa](#) is the title of this article by Thorsten Prill.

“This article discusses the use of the English language on the mission field in Africa today. While the learning of indigenous African languages was a must for every missionary in the past, contemporary experience shows that more and more missionaries tend to operate only in English (or some other colonial language). This development, which can be observed especially among those missionaries who speak English as their first language, has proven to be problematic.”

[Ambassadors Of Christ Or Agents Of Colonialism? Protestant Missionaries in Africa And Their Critics](#) is the title of this article, by Thorsten Prill.

“The Protestant missionary movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries has for some time now come under severe criticism both by many Western scholars and an increasing number of their African peers. Missionaries are charged with displacing indigenous cultures and supporting the political and economic colonisation on the African continent and other parts of the world. They were driven by an attitude of spiritual and ethno-cultural superiority, so the critics claim.”

- Phan, Le Ha of the University of Hawaii, writes widely on issues concerning the internationalisation of higher education. This article, is entitled: **‘The Making and Transforming of a Transnational in Dialog: confronting dichotomous thinking in knowledge production, identity formation, and pedagogy.’** It looks at the case of a Muslim scholar of Islam acquiring a Western education in the UK. Named Azmi, he first has to unlearn what he knew as a Brunai’an Muslim in order to fit into the British educational system, then he has to unlearn what he picked up in Britain to re-learn the way of Brunai’an Muslims in order to fit into the educational process back at home! Thus Phan (originally from Vietnam) casts many questions over today’s secular globalised educational systems ... that it seems could equally apply to many educational efforts initiated or directed by missionaries.



(Phan, Le Ha, 2020, ‘The Making and Transforming of a Transnational in Dialog: confronting dichotomous thinking in knowledge production, identity formation, and pedagogy,’ 1-20, *Research in Comparative and International Education*, Sage.)



- See here for an article by Jenna Hanchey entitled [Reframing the Present: Mock Aid Videos and the Foreclosure of African Epistemologies \(Women & Language\)](#) in which Hanchey concludes: “But more broadly, every time we make a theoretical argument as if it were universal, without regard to other ways of knowing, we continue to reparticipate in the coloniality that undermines African epistemologies. I encourage all of us to consider how delinking from Western universalism and centering African knowledges could meaningfully restructure our scholarship and our politics.” Using African languages is clearly one way of doing such.

- Review of: Thigpen, Lynn, L., 2020, *Connected Learning: how adults with limited formal education learn*. American Society of Missiology, Monograph Series 44. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications.

By Jim Harries, August 2020.

### Connection = Education

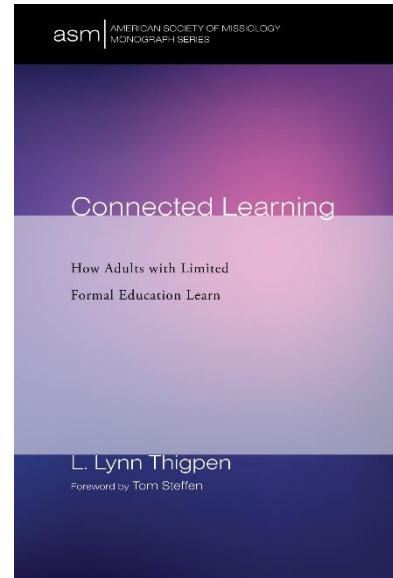
Anyone expecting an objective or scientific account of difficulties faced by people who have limited literacy, think again. This book advocates for empathy, and promotes connection.

According to Thigpen, prior authors in the area of orality have drawn a clear line between literate and illiterate people. Then they have told us that the latter are 'oral' learners. Thigpen disagrees with implicit presuppositions underlying that claim: non-literate people are not simply those who substitute learning from oral sources for learning from written sources. Much more is involved. People with limited literacy imbibe insights from the whole of their environment, especially those they connect with closely, trust, understand, identify with. They convert the outcome of interactions with such people, into learning.

The author of this book, one soon discovers, is no impassionate researcher. Thigpen sheds tears during her interviews. She stands up emotionally for people who, as a result of not being able to read, identify themselves as shamed, degraded, left behind, ignorant, or poor. Her actions demonstrate her implicit advocacy: we should shed tears with the poor, for the poor. For her, getting connection with people is more important than other missiological methods, like good ways of telling stories. Connection trumps other missiological methodologies.

For Thigpen, non-literate people are not just unfortunate ones who have missed out. They are the victims of a culture that through its emphasis on literacy, produces failures. For Thigpen, a society that does that to its people is on the wrong track. Good education is that which does not consider literacy as a prior necessity for learning.

Cambodian adults want to learn from older trusted known people connected to the sacred, Thigpen tells us. Cambodians depend on each other, they encourage each other. Also, though, Thigpen found that too many Cambodian people have a low self-valuation.



An intriguing experience that Thigpen imposed on herself, was to spend a week doing no reading or writing. The profound emotional impact the memory of doing that had on her, forms another thread, that is woven throughout this book.

The discussion and then conclusions drawn by Thigpen point to a radical, almost subversive, agenda for intercultural mission. If indeed connection and empathy are foundational to learning, and if that includes learning of the Gospel, then missionary's concentration should not be on programmes, but on vulnerability. Vulnerability that is, that forges connection. Instead of a missionary raising as many funds as possible to help a people, what if they worked hard instead on making themselves dependent on the community of those they are reaching? Relational dependence, dependence on one's host community for one's own emotional support, surely would be one means of bringing profound and deep connection. How about empathy? Deep empathy requires identification with where people are. Lynn denied herself literacy for a week. Building further on that same principle, what about a missionary denying themselves familiar Western food for a week, or access to electricity for a week, or Western friendships, for a week? Then, once that week is over, for them to search for ways of ongoing deep (some would say 'thick') connection?

Some of Thigpen's conclusions are extremely challenging: is it right to give literacy a primary status in education in countries such as Cambodia? If connection is the key to learning, what should be the role of formal classroom teaching? Advocates for orality as a kind of contrasting-opposite to literacy need to think again. The reality is that connection, empathy, and relationship are keys to the acquisition of helpful knowledge. They are the means used by less-literate or non-literate people in Cambodia. The opposite to literacy may be empathetic connection. Literacy might interfere with relationship.

Thigpen's courageous research is a clear pointer – true research about people, arises from relating to people. For this there is no substitute, in life, in education, or in learning.

[http://www.academia.edu/attachments/64162381/download\\_file?s=portfolio](http://www.academia.edu/attachments/64162381/download_file?s=portfolio)

## **Africa Foxed by Covid-19, and wily foreign experts**

Jim Harries 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020

All-in-all it seems that much of Africa, is seriously foxed by covid-19. Many of my African friends are telling me “Jim. Covid is not there!” They realise that fear of covid-19, like fear of a curse, is itself potentially very damaging, it may itself kill. Add to this: If my shaking someone’s hand can make them sick, as frequently re-iterated by today’s anti-covid-19 experts, then if someone gets sick, someone who shook their hand becomes the suspected witch. The prospect of friendliness shown by being close to someone being re-interpreted as attempted murder is horrific, to say the least. Already going to church, an activity that was revolutionising the prior constant terror of witchcraft that people were living under before the Gospel came, is under suspicion by no less an authority than government itself, backed by foreign experts.



Exorcism happening in Africa, July 2020

Add to the above: once it is shown that social distancing cannot work, advocating for it and other dehumanising practices is not offering any clear strategy for solving the crisis. That is to say, in many African countries at least, it seems clear, that people are not able to practice sufficient social distancing to stop the spread of the pandemic. They can only, at best, slow it. To postpone a crisis is not to resolve it. The postponement itself is vastly costly – children not at school, businesses failing, hunger and poverty on the increase, let alone (probably) exponential rises in suspicions; witchcraft accusations that are terrorising communities

Much of Africa also faces another dilemma. Everybody knows that African governments kowtow to foreign donors: they agree with their logic so as to acquire foreign funds, and then they interpret what is happening publicly (especially when using English) in a way that will facilitate the ongoing flow of

funds. As a result, declarations by politicians are suspect, understood as being rifled through with deception, from the start. It can become very difficult to tell who is being honest. Or, more accurately, because local leaders emerge from indigenous communities, and their colleagues know how members of their community think, it is easy to tell that leaders are not being honest. They are seen as advocating what they are not because it is in the interests of the people, but because it is in the interests of their personal coffers.

Given the above – I do not blame those of my Christian colleagues who say ‘there is no covid.’ Why declare a devil after all, if you have no way of defeating him? If you are suspicious that such a ‘devil’ is around, then it’s best to drive him away, to exorcise him, until you can declare that he is gone. That is the traditional way of encouraging people who live in terror of death and disease to instead hope in God. Exorcism provides close profound attention by people’s leaders (the exorcists, typically the respected church elders and pastors), combined with the possessed person’s own efforts at expelling their fears, in the name of Jesus. This is the formula that is working for Africa. To try and undo that formula could be compared to in the West, as a result of covid-19, closing all chemists and burning the pharmaceutical industry.

The hammer of condemnation falls fairly squarely on the global bodies (the media, experts, global scholarship) who are advocating so-called ‘scientific’ resolutions to covid-19. (Within the West, I am seeing, people are realising that science itself does not do away with a pandemic. The science always has to be interpreted in particular ways. That interpretation must happen in the context of the community it is designed to help. Because the community in Africa is different from the one in the West, interpretation for Africa should begin at square one. But it does not.) They do not live with the people they are trying to ‘save’! They want to save by remote control – like a computer game. (If they do live in sub-Saharan Africa, they do so in their own cocoons unfamiliar with profound ways of life of the mass of the population.) Most prefer to live in the West – where the issues surrounding covid-19 are radically different. Many ‘global-experts’ self-impose blindness. They do so via simple formulas like: Evolution is true so there is no God. If there is no God, then ‘religion’ is stupid. If religion is stupid, and Africans are religious, ... well, I think that’s clear.



Because 'religion' (including witchcraft) is about God and gods who do not exist, the best thing to do is to ignore all the practices people engage that relate to it. That is: ignore who African people are so as to treat them AS IF they are Westerners. That doesn't require learning language, risking getting malaria, going to places that are hot and smelly and full of insects. If that happens to result in millions of avoidable deaths, well, experts long-ago washed their hands of such liability.

Someone reading this may, in exasperation, be asking: well then, what should we do? In a sense, the question should be 'what should we have done'?

- 1. Not force (economically) majority world countries to use the language of the West, thus allowing almost zero possibility for adjusting covid-19 strategies to local context.
- 2. Not manipulate African leaders by always offering sweeteners if they (appear to) do what 'global-bodies' tell them. Right now, what to do?
  1. Pray.
  2. Take an intelligent look at African context. That requires thinking using indigenous categories, i.e. thought, and discussion, and planning, in African languages. I don't know how many global-foreign-experts are capable of that?
  3. It is probably far too late to try to stop manipulating using offers of foreign subsidy.
  4. Pray some more.
  5. When told 'Covid is not there,' accept that such is a wise approach taken by intelligent people to a difficult problem.

## **Western legal a-historicity: source of inter-racial tension<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Traditional African systems of payment and punishment often being in the so-called 'mystical realm' is miscomprehended by the West in a way that can contribute to violence against blacks. Use of curses to punish misdemeanours, a practice largely unknown or condemned by the West, being widely practiced in traditional Africa, confuses intercultural communication. The deep and profound acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus in the West over many centuries, through the Middle ages and beyond, in which Jesus' readiness to sacrifice himself on the cross cancels mystical debts, enabled Western people to escape the need for sacrifice. Today's black communities until recent times not having participated in Christendom, has resulted in the conceptual gaps in worldviews that underlie massive ongoing contemporary interracial tensions.

**Keywords:** Racism, Race, history, Christianity, religion, black, Africa.

### **Note on generalization**

I use the terms 'black' and 'African' interchangeably, to emphasise that the origins of the majority of black people in the West is in Africa. While my experience of African people is necessarily historically and geographically limited, I share Diangelo's understanding that so-called generalizations can be legitimate and even necessary.<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

Efforts at resolving interracial tensions, especially paradigmatically those between whites and blacks that are ongoing in the USA, have recently been redoubled. This article asserts

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<sup>1</sup> In-house peer-review provided by Nick Henwood.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Diangelo, *White Fragility: why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 11-12.

that such efforts are handicapped by contemporary scholarship's determined avoidance of certain themes. It looks particularly at present day academia's denial of the possibility of crediting the Gospel of Jesus with 'real' historical impact. This taboo results in historically oriented investigations that position Western modernism being blind to the formative processes that made Europe of the Middle Ages, on the back of which the Renaissance, Reformation and subsequently 'Enlightenment' and modern times could arise. This article takes a simplified legal case study to illustrate ways in which the Gospel is the missing but necessary link that can bring resolution to today's race issues.

### **One. Debts and punishment in Africa**

In this section I seek to sketch the contours of a 'traditional' African judicial system, including some hints on how when this system meets Western jurisprudence, excessive levels of punitive violence can arise.

Over-hearing a conversation on givedirectly,<sup>3</sup> a member of the Luo tribe in Kenya exclaimed: 'Look, people have not died!' (my translation) Givedirectly is a project that has over the last few years been applying the latest thinking on poverty reduction, by simply making unconditional payments into the phones of people in Kenya who are perceived to be 'poor'. Some sums, judging by conversations I overhear, can be large: The death of a child, I overheard, can result in a contribution of KSh30,000 (\$300) to assist a parent with funeral expenses. Certainly, regular payments can be \$20 monthly, or more.<sup>4</sup> The comment on 'not dying' reflects local people's fear that donations of money must have strings attached. Receipt of a large free-gift from an anonymous unknown brings a risk of death caused by what in English could be termed 'mysterious' means, that underlie the understanding that a gift can never be 'pure.'<sup>5</sup> The speaker's declaring that they had not so far seen evidence for such death, was a way of cautiously encouraging participation in the give-direct scheme.

Concerns over debt are hardly a new issue in human social living.<sup>6</sup> Theft may be interpreted broadly to include stealing, adultery (theft of sexual access to a woman belonging to someone else),<sup>7</sup> moving a boundary stone, rustling cattle, corruption (taking income over

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<sup>3</sup> <https://live.givedirectly.org/> see especially <https://www.givedirectly.org/operating-mode>

<sup>4</sup> However my readers may receive such a figure, local to Western Kenya, 10 days hard labour in someone's field can result in earning less than \$20.

<sup>5</sup> Barclay's detailed investigation shows that notions of 'pure gift' are a modern invention (John M.G. Barclay, 2017, *Paul and the Gift*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmanns Pub. Co., 2017), 59.)

<sup>6</sup> I use the term 'social living' reluctantly given the absence of alternative phrases, as terms like 'social' have these days (in English) largely been usurped by the secular social sciences (sociology, anthropology, and so on) that define them in ways other-than common African understandings.

<sup>7</sup> I appreciate that in gender-neutral terms, I might need to say 'sexual access to a person' rather than 'to a woman'. In my understanding of today's African communities, the person 'possessed' through payment of bride wealth is the woman, so a woman's services are the ones that can be stolen.

and above that legally<sup>8</sup> ascribed to you), cheating in an exam, and so on.<sup>9</sup> In many human communities, thieves are not expected to thrive: Stories are told to deter theft. Those stories tend to be of thieves suffering, becoming poor, being caught and lynched, living lives of fear and poverty, and so on.

A problem in many traditional communities in Africa arises when theft happens unobserved. If observed, 'instant justice' can come into play: the person can be lynched.<sup>10</sup> Difficulties in ascertaining truth and complications (such as corruption) that enter into situations where someone's crime is to be discussed or ascertained by a group, plus complications likely to be involved in implementing prescribed punishments, means that the use of curses is often preferred to other kinds of sentence. In other words, the threat of a beating, demands of compensation, or even a death sentence, can be transmuted into some kind of curse.<sup>11</sup> In the traditional thinking of many African people; 'ancestors' are responsible for implementing such curses.<sup>12</sup> Confirming a curse through shedding blood adds to its likely fecundity – for example, if members of a council declaring a curse consume a chicken that has been freshly killed on-site, at the end of their gathering.<sup>13</sup>

The use of curses illustrates a difference between many contemporary African understandings of 'justice' and those of the West: The Western worldview, as a result of long being led by positivistic positions,<sup>14</sup> having little understanding or faith in curses, rewards injustice by meting out physical punishment. Here is a cause for the tendency of

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<sup>8</sup> The legality of corruption, i.e. bribery, I understand in traditional Africa to be debatable, in so far as payment for justice might in the past have been very normal.

<sup>9</sup> Theft implies illegitimately denying someone of their property of some kind, whereas stealing is more specifically of an identifiable object.

<sup>10</sup> A reaction I overheard to recent news that a certain man had been lynched when caught stealing a chicken in my home community in Kenya, was that the instant lynching over this relatively small crime was understandable and excusable on the basis that the victim was known to have had a long history of suspected thieving.

<sup>11</sup> I say 'transmuted' for the benefit of Westerners who use language more 'literally'. For African people this is not a transmutation, but simply a natural and original use of language. An example of such transmutation amongst the Luo people of Kenya is clearly given by the late Luo elder Mboya: 'Should someone verbally abuse a senior man, be he the elder of a village, or the chair of a council, the elders will order that person to pay three sheep or goats, but should he refuse the elders will curse him so that he dies.' (my translation) (Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* np (originally published by Nairobi: East African Standard Ltd. 1984 printing by publisher Kisumu: Anyange Press), 1997 (1938), 14.)

<sup>12</sup> 'All of religion and life revolve around the indissoluble link between the living family and the ancestors.' (Opoku Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost.' PhD thesis. The University of Birmingham 2002, 2.) This role of ancestors is often evident in day to day life amongst Luo people in Kenya today.

<sup>13</sup> This practice clearly parallels the prescription for an 'unknown murder' found in Deuteronomy 21:1-9. In this account in which a murderer cannot be found, a heifer is killed. It illustrates how the Biblical text reaches into traditional cultures, in contrast to much contemporary modern thinking which roots its history only in 'modern' times (typically post 1500) – a major theme of this account.

<sup>14</sup> As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. (Roger Hahn, 'Laplace and the Mechanistic worldview,' 256-276 in: David C. Lindberg, and Ronald L., Numbers, (eds.) *God and Nature: historical essays on the encounter between Christianity and Science*. (London: University of California Press, 1986), 257.)

rational-legal systems when introduced into African contexts being liable to excessive violence. Simplifying a little: while African people may well agree that so-and-so deserves a certain punishment, that does not mean that they (including the victim) expect the punishment to be physically meted out by living people. Rather, the threat of the punishment, itself a kind of curse,<sup>15</sup> can be considered sufficiently effective. Hence the common shock when physical violence even that African people might have agreed upon, is actually meted out.<sup>16</sup>

Concerns over debt having a high profile in Africa, and often being interpreted mystically, contributes to the widespread African belief in witchcraft. The level of such debts may, in the absence of visible evidence, be measured by perceived levels of envy. For example, because one can conceal one's sleeping with someone's wife when the husband is away, envy (in this case related to adulterous lust, however perceived) can be taken as a crime in lieu of adultery. People being desirous creatures,<sup>17</sup> envy is widespread. Extrapolation of my self-understanding of my personal levels of envy to others (i.e. if I am easily very envious, then surely others are also), has me conclude that many people are 'after' my wealth (whether monetary, or otherwise). In the same way as is a curse, envy can be considered efficacious.<sup>18</sup> If curses (enacted by ancestors, mediated through people's hearts<sup>19</sup>) and envy (also coming from the heart of a living person) are both efficacious, this results in the position in which misfortune is commonly blamed on one of these two. In common parlance, if misfortune has not arisen from ancestral revenge following breaking of traditional prohibitions (taboos), then it is instead a result of witchcraft. A person considers others to be a victim of ancestral taboo (thus making them responsible for their own misfortune and alleviating himself from possible 'guilt'),<sup>20</sup> whereas he (and people on 'his side') consider their own misfortune to arise from witchcraft, a means of blaming others for misfortune that oneself becomes victim to.

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<sup>15</sup> On the basis of the understanding that 'words have power,' something I find to be widely believed in Africa, in ways beyond those familiar to the West.

<sup>16</sup> This could alternatively be explained by saying that language can be understood with different degrees of literality; where the West tends to conceive of a close link between language and what is perceived as being the 'real' world, this link can in indigenous uses of African languages be more tenuous.

<sup>17</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford, (California: Stanford University Press, 1987), 271-286.

<sup>18</sup> There is an intriguing parallel here with Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 5:28 to the effect that a lustful look is equivalent to adultery.

<sup>19</sup> I suggest that ancestors are in Africa understood as always working through people's hearts. (Jim Harries, 2007, 'Pragmatic Theory Applied to Christian Mission in Africa: with special reference to Luo responses to 'bad' in Gem, Kenya.' PhD Thesis. The University of Birmingham. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/15/> (accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2010), 245.)

<sup>20</sup> I appreciate that guilt is at times associated with the West, whereas non-Western cultures are supposed to be oriented to shame or fear rather than guilt. I go along with that understanding in broad terms, with the proviso that it is sometimes presented too simplistically. (Merz, Johannes, 2020, 'The Culture Problem: how the honor/shame issue got the wrong end of the anthropological stick. *Missiology: an international review*, 48(2), 127-141.)

Because the above mechanisms have pushed punishments for crimes into the 'mystical' realm, solutions are sought in the same realm. For example, should a 'court' have sat and declared someone worthy of death, and that conviction have been backed by shedding the blood of a chicken subsequently consumed, then the means of cancelling the inditement can be shedding the blood of another chicken in response. Hence sacrifice is an important means of self-protection. In a parallel sense, sacrifice (for example of animals) is a way of enforcing the debt of someone else to you, of 'crediting' your account, so to speak. This is graphically illustrated outside of Africa by the potlatch,<sup>21</sup> equivalents to which (wasteful over-generous feasts that act as displays of wealth) one can only assume, might have existed and might still be practiced amongst African people. In a more extended case: the kinds of generosity a 'wealthy' person (sometimes known as a patron) can engage, help to 'buy' protection for her. This can be assumed to be the underlying cause for 'generosity'; empowering the giver in a way that drains power from receivers, hence the fear of death arising from receipt of aid through givedirectly mentioned at the beginning of this article.

## **Two. Debts and punishment in Western history**

In this section I demonstrate that much Western contemporary understanding of legal history presupposes that the above traditional African ways of meting out justice have already been overcome. Because they are assumed to have already been overcome, any efforts to overcome them are considered superfluous.

Western legal systems being rooted in the secular tend to perceive interhuman conflicts and issues in a physical realm, and not to be mediated by the shedding of blood, be it human or animal. An assumption, first held around 1700,<sup>22</sup> and increasingly laboured since then, that a category known as 'religion' can be considered separate to that of the secular, has contributed to this. A de-emphasis on religion can result in the secular-material world representing the perceived totality of interhuman engagement. This has taken the shape of positivism, a very widely spread and hegemonic philosophy in Europe for hundreds of years, not seriously challenged until the 1970s.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 'A ceremonial feast of the American Indians of the northwest coast marked by the host's lavish distribution of gifts or sometimes destruction of property to demonstrate wealth and generosity with the expectation of eventual reciprocation,' <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/potlatch>

<sup>22</sup> 'After 1600, it became possible to speak of religion in general, although it was usually used to refer to "the Christian religion," which indicated that the various religions in Christendom were true or false forms of an abstract essence of Christianity. As the seventeenth century progressed, it became possible to see Christianity as one species of the genus religion,' William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.

<sup>23</sup> Henderikus, J. Stam, 'The Demise of Logical Positivism: Implications of the Duhem-Quine Thesis for Psychology', 17-24 in: C.W. Toman, (ed.) *Positivism in psychology: Historical and contemporary problems*. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1991).

While Western legal systems, as social and other systems in the West, are clearly rooted in the Bible, I argue in this article that contemporary scholars under-play such roots, to the extent that for practical purposes they are ignored, an outcome of which is that the Bible is considered to have no role in contemporary life.<sup>24</sup> Such can clearly be traced in the history of sociology: The widely accepted founder of sociology Comte, is known for his efforts at designing a 'religion' that required no faith in God and no role for the Bible, but instead 'application of science permitting enlightened men to govern the ignorant.'<sup>25</sup> Other founding fathers of social science disciplines followed suit. Masuzawa explains how by sleight of hand Christianity, up to then a dominant if not universal practice in the West, was side-lined around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>26</sup> An examination of Weber's writing, that occurred in the same period (Weber lived from 1864 to 1920) clearly demonstrates this. Weber, 'arguably the foremost social theorist of the twentieth century,'<sup>27</sup> studies others so as to 'ascertain the distinctive elements of Western civilization.'<sup>28</sup> Time and time again, Weber presupposes 'religion' to be a slough-off-able category that can be left aside in pursuit of modernity.<sup>29</sup>

The above has resulted in today's formal legal systems operating almost exclusively on a positivistic basis. That means in practice, that use of curses is not approved. Similarly, no formal use is made of animal sacrifices. Suffering inflicted on people is not considered redemptive: i.e. people are sentenced to jail or other punishments as deterrent, as a means of removing someone liable to perform criminal acts from the scene, or as a means to change them, without their suffering being seen as providing cleansing to individuals or communities against whom their crimes were committed. Any notion that things may be otherwise, can be considered abhorrent. (This is in contrast to beliefs in traditional societies that the killing and chasing away of people, including through cursing them, was a means of cleansing a community.<sup>30</sup>)

### **Three. The absence of a bridge between the West and Africa**

My reason for articulating what I have in sections one and two above is to consider what might be a bridge between traditional (still operational in much of Africa and elsewhere in the majority world) means of justice, and those that function in today's secular world. This is

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<sup>24</sup> For example, in the UK government, there is no officially acknowledged place for prayer or bible reading.

<sup>25</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comte/>

<sup>26</sup> Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: how European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism*. (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 327.

<sup>27</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/>

<sup>28</sup> Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: an intellectual portrait*. London: (University of California Press, 1977), 388.

<sup>29</sup> Illustrated by Weber's reference to Old Testament prophets as 'exclusively religious men [so] otherworldly" (Bendix *Max Weber*, 479.)

<sup>30</sup> René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, (Translated by James G. Williams) (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 19-31. (Girard explains this with reference to the effect that Christianity has had on it, on the understanding that the Gospel has both revealed the deception in tradition, and provided release from it.)

to address the question of how movement may be enabled from the traditional to the modern, i.e. how 'traditional' people may be able to grasp the modern.

My thesis in writing this article, is that the contemporary modern West holds-out no bridge. Instead, practices associated with traditional justice are condemned without being understood. When such practices are associated with people of a certain ethnicity, such as blacks in the USA, such condemnation, by denigrating those of that ethnicity results in what we call racism. As a result of such denigration being considered abhorrent and illegal, it is countered by a determined effort at ignoring it. Modernists, given the history we have alluded to above, may have little choice but to ignore traditional means of bringing justice such as use of curses, because according to their positivistic undergirdings, they do not 'exist'.

To reiterate the content of the above paragraph; black people can in the USA (and elsewhere) be condemned for doing things that are innate to their understanding of themselves and of the world around them. Those things may be so innate, that they can be consciously unaware that they are doing something not approved by their host culture, and unaware of the real possibility that it is feasible to live without them. Meanwhile those doing the condemning (contemporary Westerners, i.e. predominantly whites in the West) are probably either unaware of what they implicitly condemn ( my key example the power that is inherent in spilt blood), or find it so abhorrent as to consider it degrading to imply that someone (i.e. blacks) might 'believe in' such. In outcome, blacks are condemned for what is profoundly inherent to what they are, by people who are unaware that they are occluding something from view, or of the origins of their abhorrence for what they are condemning.

The 'bridge' that I offer, is the Christian faith in general, and the Bible in particular. I note in passing that for modern Christians, it remains challenging to perceive ways in which the Bible acts as such a bridge. Contemporary Western people who are practicing Christians may also have an underrated evaluation of, or even ignorance of, what their faith constitutes in relation to traditional cultures such as those still widely practiced in Africa. To illustrate this, the late scholar Girard considers his noting ways in which the Gospel impacts on traditional views of witchcraft to be revealing 'things hidden since the foundations of the world.'<sup>31</sup> It is my suspicion that although what he has 'discovered' may in modernity be hidden to many, it was common knowledge in earlier centuries and is common knowledge in much of Africa today. Hence in Africa the frequent drawing of the contrast between witchdoctors (that aggravate tensions by identifying people who can be blamed for your problems) and Christian pastors who talk about forgiveness rooted in Jesus' already having paid the price for people's sins.

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<sup>31</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987).



There is, it seems to me, a clear Biblical theme which parallels the change from fear of blood, to confidence in what is these days known as secularism. This can be articulated as occurring in three steps:

1. Practice of sacrifice. Older books in the Bible clearly advocate for sacrifice and consider its practice normal: Job performed regular sacrifices to protect his children from misfortune (book of Job 1:5). A fascinating account in the book of Numbers gives a prescription for a man who suspects his wife of being adulterous, that involves her taking a curse upon herself should she be guilty (5:11-31). The book of Deuteronomy, also in the Bible, includes an account of a killing of a heifer in a case where a murderer may not be found (21:1-9). Those are just illustrative examples that include reference to the Hebrew term *zebach*, which occurs 162 times in the Old Testament of which 155 times in the King James Version are translated sacrifice, and *oloh* which is 266 times translated as burnt offerings.<sup>32</sup> These Old Testament passages make reference to practices that are implicit to much contemporary African life, that can seem totally foreign to the modern West.

2. Denial of sacrifice. Later parts of the Bible come out clearly against animal sacrifice. Listing verses proclaimed by prophets and others that counter sacrifice, would hardly do justice to the vigour of the Biblical approach to this issue: The Bible is consistently in favour of the victim, Girard observed, the one who is or was to be sacrificed.<sup>33</sup> That is the person who is forgiven (Cain should have been killed as a result of his murdering of his brother, but a mark put onto him prevents this from happening (Genesis 4:15)), or saved (as Joseph was saved from murder by his brothers (Genesis 37:26-27), or glorified (as in the case of Jesus).) Prophetic figures frequently declare that God does not desire sacrifice: Psalm 40:6, Isaiah 1:11, Jeremiah 6:20. In other words: Unlike modernity, the Bible is highly aware of and provides 'resolution to' traditional ways of life that continue to be dominant in Africa.

3. Jesus as 'great sacrifice' to end all sacrifices Jesus' death on the cross was the sacrifice that was to be effective on an ongoing basis, for eternity (as mentioned in a book in the Bible called Hebrews, 10:12), an act which summarily declared the end of the need for the blood of others to be shed in order for someone to be forgiven. Faith in Jesus was the foundation that has led to the current situation in which sacrifice is no longer required, a situation which had become sufficiently widespread in early modern Europe as to be considered normal. (The removal of sacrifice and its part in explanatory systems for all kinds of misfortune marked the beginning of the possibility of 'modern' scientific observation.<sup>34</sup>)

This is the process that modernism fails to articulate, because it merely presupposes it. This is clearly demonstrated by ways in which modern history these days typically begins from

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Young, 'Index Lexicon to the Old Testament.' 1-56 In: Young, Robert, (ed.) 1939, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the whole Bible*. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1939), 56, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Girard *I See*, 103-120.

<sup>34</sup> I here take 'modern' science as being that which has distinguished itself from human factors such as the impact of curses in causation, an example of which would be the double-blind trial, invented in 1835. (M. Stolberg, 'Inventing the randomized double-blind trial: the Nuremberg salt test of 1835', *J R Soc Med.* 2006, Dec; 99(12): 642-643.)

Christian Europe, and demonstrates how the church has become 'less powerful' with the advance of the modern, without giving the slightest acknowledgement for an essential role the church played (and plays) in enabling people to benefit from modernism, e.g. its doing away with the need for sacrifice.

The above mechanisms leave us with today's sharp racist issues, in which whites implicitly condemn blacks on a basis that they find too embarrassing to articulate, often condemning that which is so foundational to blacks that doing without it would seem to cancel life itself.<sup>35</sup> The contemporary West's insistence on the practice of secularism, i.e. ignoring faith in God, prevents it from even beginning to see the massive blooper on which it is continually embarked.

## Conclusion

The way debts and punishments are dealt with in Africa, that forms a bedrock to black people's ways of life in many parts of the world up to today, have been resolved in the West through a Christian history that rejected animal sacrifices. However, the importance of the Gospel influence on the Western world is now considered outdated and taboo. Such taboo results in neither white nor black being able to grasp the differences that separate them, and aggravates the sharpness of the cut of today's inter-racial tensions. The mechanism for resolution, often popularly known as 'religion' (more accurately, the Gospel<sup>36</sup>) having in the West formally been declared irrelevant to public life, leaves a massive lacuna that secular liberals are determined to ignore. The one clear way to resolve today's ongoing inter-racial issues, is a return to open recognition of Biblical authority. The these-days underrated bridge that has got the West to where it is now, Biblical faith, is the bridge that can link disparate sides in today's inter-racial battles. This solution having in Europe and America been declared taboo, forces an ahistorical approach that pretends that Christianity, or certainly, Christendom, never was, or if it was, that it's once having been, is today irrelevant. Thus the *fragility* of white efforts at dealing with racism, graphically identified by Diangelo, arises from the hidden taboo nature of underlying causes of differences, identified in this article.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Blacks becoming Christians does not instantly do away with their traditional worldviews. It begins to transform them in various ways. The same can be said of whites in relation to their traditional worldviews.

<sup>36</sup> Contemporary understanding of the term 'religion' is foundationally rooted in various expressions of the Gospel of Jesus. The term religion often describes a 'disguised form of liberal Christianity' (Carole M. Cusack, 'Vestigial States: secular space and the churches in contemporary Australia.' *George Shipp Memorial Lecture* at the Workers Education Authority (WEA), 72 Bathurst Street, Sydney, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015, 4.)

<sup>37</sup> Diangelo *White Fragility*. I identify the fragility identified by Diangelo as arising from blasphemy: because whites who deny God, effectively claim themselves to be God, (Oludamini Ogunnaike, 'From Heathen to sub-human: a genealogy of the influence of the decline of religion on the rise of modern racism.' *Open Theology*, 2016, 2, 785-803, 791) blacks' threat to their supremacy is a type of blasphemy.

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