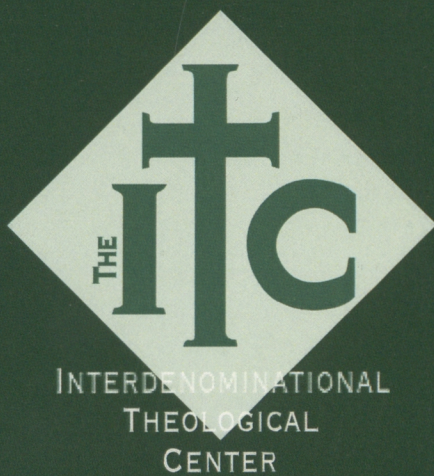


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*SCHOLARLY RESEARCH
FROM AN AFRICA PERSPECTIVE*

Volume 42, Spring Issue 2016

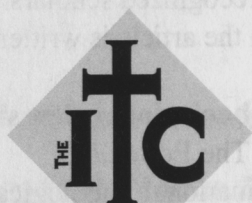
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Volume 41 Spring Issue 2016



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Editorial

This Journal issue focuses on the African research perspective of the Bible. The articles are intended to provoke a debate between western and African scholars concerning the western misconception of Africa and African contribution to scholarship.

A group of scholars of the University of Botswana, Africa, have collaborated on an article entitled, "*botho/ubuntu*, Community-building and Gender Constructions in Botswana." Writing about *botho/ubuntu* ethic and spirituality, they have shown how it might build community and empower members of the community to live dignified lives. They have observed that the "... role of women is central to the practices of *botho/ubuntu* spirituality, since it is rooted in welcoming, affirming and respecting the Other." Their study has revealed that community, in most African tribal communities is comprised of the living, the divine beings and the environment. They see an interconnectedness between the people and the animal world; which explains the principle of totemism.

In the second article, Professor Musa Dube, also of the University of Botswana, address the subtle prejudice that unfolds when a westerner writes, even impartially, about Africa and its people. Under the topic: "Refusing to Read: Precious Ramotswe Meets Rahab for a Cup of Bush Tea," Dube explains why she has refused to read the popular series: *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* written by McCall Smith. In a well articulated narrative, Dube shows how when westerners write about Africa, they consciously or unconsciously include many derogatory words or phrases that are very disturbing to an African reader. Because the novels fit the western stereotypical depiction of Africa, it is not surprising they are so popular in the West but not in Africa. The bone of contention, in her own words is this, "...when African writers tell their own story, they hardly receive the same attention on the global stage of knowledge production. This article "seeks to begin detective work on Alexander McCall Smith's narratives, from a postcolonial feminist perspective."

Dr. Temba Mafico's article "The African View of the Biblical Covenant" presents another way of looking at western selective research. His main argument is that western scholars have not shown interest in investigating the possible impact

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that the Africans might have made on the Israelite religio-culture. They should now pay attention to the research that African biblical scholars are doing on linking some aspects of the Israelites' religio-culture to Africa. Focusing on the covenant idea, Mafico argues that while textual evidence corroborates that the Israelites borrowed the idea of the covenant from the Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians and several other nations, western scholars should now include the oral tradition of the African people because of the many similarities that exist between Israelites and the African religio-cultural lives.

Dr. Mark Ellingsen in an article, "Ancient African Insights about Creation and Nature Which Relate to Modern Physics: Augustine and Dionysius of Alexandria," discusses the writings of these two early North African fathers whose insights on Creation and Nature is insightful. He points out that much attention has been directed to Augustine's input but not to Dionysius' views. Thus, his article focuses on Dionysius' who, by "implication offers very modern-sounding insights about how God created and regulates matter, gets the atoms to function as a circular choir. He speaks of God as impassable, immutable and energetic!" Ellingsen also connects Dionysius' idea of God being energy to the Big Bang Theory, "which posits that the energy from the Big Bang continues expanding." He further suggests that "Dionysius of Alexandria has much to say about Creation and nature that relates to modern Physics."

The final article, "Doctor of Ministry Education: Becoming Transformed in the Middle of the Leadership Journey" by Dr. Marsha Snulligan Haney, continues to highlight the rebooted DMin program that was introduced at ITC in the Fall 2016. It has attracted 43 students who are enthusiastic about their dissertation research projects. The students comprise three cohorts: (1) The Black Church, Social and Environmental Justice; (2) Disconnected Youth and Public Response and (3) Pastoral Professionalism and Spiritual Care.

Temba Mafico
Editor

Botho/Ubuntu:
Community Building and Gender Constructions in Botswana

Musa W. Dube¹

Tirelo Modie-Moroka, Senzokuhle D. Setume, Seratwa Ntloedibe,
Malebogo Kgalemang, Rosinah M. Gabaitse, Tshenolo Madigele, Sana
Mmolai, Elizabeth P. Motswapong, Mmapula Kebaneilwe and Doreen
Sesiro²

Abstract

Botho/Ubuntu is a community-building ethic that urges individuals to define their identity by caring, welcoming, affirming, and respecting the Other. This article investigates how botho/ubuntu ethic was understood and manifested in traditional Botswanan communities. It explores how botho/ubuntu is expressed in the preparation and arrival of a new daughter-in-law, the reception of the mother-in law, and the preparation for the arrival of a new baby. The article analyses these three cases to investigate the possible co-habitation of botho/ubuntu with patriarchy by exploring the practices and rituals surrounding the welcoming of new members by the community and key hosts. The investigation focuses on marriage and the arrival of a new daughter-in-law (ngwetsi); mother-in-law (matsale) as a key host; and the arrival of a new baby, including the care offered to a nursing mother (go baya botsetse). It seeks to examine how botho/ubuntu practices create female spaces and networks while t still co-existing with patriarchy in the Setswana rituals and practices of welcoming the Other. The article will also explore how women are using some of these activities to create female cultures that deconstruct oppressive gender roles.

¹ Musa W. Dube is also a research associate of the University of South Africa.

² Tirelo Modie-Moroka, Elizabeth P. Motswapong, Mmapula Kebaneilwe Senzokuhle D. Setume, Seratwa Ntloedibe, Malebogo Kgalemang, Rosinah M. Gabaitse, Tshenolo Madigele, Sana Mmolai and Doreen Sesiro are all part of the University of Botswana, who are currently carrying out a John Templeton Foundation-sponsored research project on “*Botho/Ubuntu* and Community Building in the Urban Space: An Exploration of Naomi, Laban, Baby and Bridal Showers in Botswana.” This article is part of the larger research project.

Keywords: *Botho/Ubuntu*, patriarchy, gender, marriage, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law and *botsetse*, bridal and baby showers, wedding, Botswana

I. Introduction to *Botho/Ubuntu*: Worldview and Spirituality

In articulating the African understanding of being human and living in community, John Mbiti has popularized the saying, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”³ The saying with its recognition of the individual “I am” emphasizes that one’s humanity is only realized in the context where “we are,” that is, in a communal setting. The second part of the saying focuses on community (the “we are”) yet the we only become a community when each individual’s humanity is fully recognized and considered to be as important as the community. For Batswana, and most Bantu people, *Botho/Ubuntu* is a concept of acceptable relational living, which is measured by one’s relationship to family, community, the environment and the Divine powers (ancestors and God)⁴. This relational perspective is best captured by the popular saying, “*motho ke motho ka batho*,” in Sotho-Tswana languages or “*umuntu ngu muntu nga bantu*” in Nguni languages, both of which mean that a human being is only human through other human beings, that “a person is only human through living in community,” or according to Duménil Mmualefe, that “without others one cannot be.”⁵ This saying articulates what Bantu people believe about “*motho/umuntu*” (a human being) and the act of being a human (*Botho/Ubuntu*) and of living according to that ethic in the community.⁶

Community is widely understood to include the living, the divine powers, and the environmental community in an interconnected fashion. Indeed, most African communities identify themselves with a particular animal—a totemic practice. We have such ethnic groups as Bakwena and Bakgatla, those who identify with the crocodile and the monkey respectively. Different Bantu communities identify with different animals

³ John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophies* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 141.

⁴ Musa W. Dube, *A Theology of Compassion in the HIV & AIDS Era* (Geneva: WCC, 2008), 140. .

⁵ Duménil O. Mmualefe, “Botho and HIV and AIDS: A Theological Reflection” (Master’s Thesis, Eden Theological Seminary, Missouri, 2004), 7.

⁶ Mmualefe, “Botho and HIV and AIDS,” 10.

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or even inanimate members or elements of the earth such as the eland (*khama*), lion (*tau*), elephant (*tlou*), and tshipi (*iron*). The totemic identification underlines that the *botho/ubuntu* understanding of community includes a web of relations that are not necessarily anthropocentric. Rather, the *botho/ubuntu* concept of community includes non-human members of the earth. Consequently, Puleng Lenka Bula underlines that *botho/ubuntu*, a concept that evokes “relationality and respect for humanity is explicit in the understanding that human life cannot be full unless it is lived within a web of interactions of life, which include along with human beings also creation.”⁷ She explains that *botho/ubuntu* is “a concept which attempts to describe the relationship of a person as being-with-others” and that “its core message is about the essence of being human in relation to other people and creation.”⁸

The *botho/ubuntu* understanding of community also includes the ancestors, who are a moral community that re-inforces relations among the living.⁹ The ancestors, though they are departed members of family and community, are believed to continue to show positive interest in the wellbeing of the living by interceding before God for their wellbeing. The ancestors, however, can withdraw their services to the living if the latter do not honor their relationships with one another, the environment, and the divine powers. Symptoms of withdrawn services are characterized by the experience of ill-health, while environmental disruption is characterized by such things as drought, extreme floods, and climate change. In the *botho/ubuntu* worldview, ill-health and environmental disasters are indications that individuals and communities are no longer maintaining healthy relationships within family, community, and environment and consequently with the divine powers.

What passes as “sinful” within *botho/ubuntu* framework is the disruption of relationships, and these then necessitate rituals of reconciliation. Symptoms of disruption are a call for righting relationships. Healing in the African ethical worldview of *botho/ubuntu* is thus preceded

⁷ Lenka B. Puleng, “Beyond Anthropocentricity: *Botho/Ubuntu* and the Quest for Economic and Ecological Justice in Africa,” in *Religion and Theology* 15 (2008): 375, 377.

⁸ Ibid., 379.

⁹ Lesley Le Grange, “*Ubuntu/Botho* as Ecophilosophy and Ecosophy,” in *Journal of Human Ecology* 49/3 (2015): 301-08.

by healing of relationships, prior to medical treatment.¹⁰ In playing this role, ancestors are thus a central moral community in enforcing the continuity of *botho/ubuntu* ethics among the living.¹¹ Mmualefe best captures the theological function of *botho/ubuntu*, holding that “*Botho* is what constitutes God’s image in us, and that...according to the *Botho* worldview, one can never be a Christian or attain salvation *asena Botho* (without *Botho*).”¹²

I.I *Botho/Ubuntu* Ethics and Praxis

How then did the *botho/ubuntu* ethic structure people’s day-to-day lives and build community? *Botho/ubuntu* pervaded all aspects of individual and communal human relations. In governance, for example, *botho/ubuntu* was best described by the saying, “*kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*, namely, that a ruler can only rule in consultation with people, or could only rule through people. Accompanying this ethic of valuing community in governance were the sayings that, “*mafoko a kgotla a mantle otlhe*” and “*mmualebe oabo a bua la gagwe*” or that in the public court/meeting everyone must be free to express their views. It is also held that *kgosi thothobolo e olela matlakala* or that a public leader or king, like a dumping site, should welcome and hear all people. These sayings affirm the dignity of both the individual and community. *Botho/ubuntu* governance thus included welcoming and giving land not only to members of the community but also strangers seeking to settle in the community. The economic practice of *mafisa* highlights this *botho/ubuntu* ethic in action. *Mafisa* was a cattle-based loan practice, whereby poor members of the community would receive cows from the rich, which they would then use for milk and for their draft power, while taking care of the cattle. Yearly, rather than pay the owner interest on the cow, the recipients would be given another cow, with the result that within five years, the recipient would have enough cows to begin their own cattle post. *Mafisa* ensured that underprivileged members of the community could live in dignity and build up wealth, rather than be consigned to a life of poverty.

¹⁰ Musa W. Dube, “Divining Ruth for International Relations,” 67-80, in K.A. Adam, eds., *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

¹¹ Le Grange, *Ubuntu/Botho as Ecophilosophy*.

¹² Mmualefe, *Botho and HIV and AIDS*, 26. .

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The *botho/ubuntu* ethic and its community-building spirit was also particularly evident in individual projects such as building a house, digging a well, ploughing, weeding, and harvesting. For such projects one called for *letsema*, or *molaletsa*. In the latter one cooked food and invited members of the community to come over and spend the day assisting by providing free labor etc. *Letsema*, *molaletsa*, and *mafisa*¹³ were *botho/ubuntu*-inspired community-building activities that ensured that members of the community assisted each other economically and in the provision of labor. The communities had strong ties that were forged largely through totemic kinship, blood, marriage, and shared communal social structures and ethics that were enhanced by geographic and ethnic ties.

One of the most beautiful definitions of *botho/ubuntu* appears in *Vision 2016: The Long Term Vision for Botswana*. It states that it is a “process of earning respect by first giving it, and of gaining empowerment by empowering others”¹⁴ But was it also able to overcome patriarchal constructions and ethics? Does it affirm the full humanity of women and other minorities? In a recent article, Chitando argues that

Sexual and gender-based violence is prompted by the problematic socialisation of the boy children. Brought up to command and dominate, boys regard women and girls as being permanently available to meet their desires. Whereas Ubuntu expresses the notion that, “I am because we are, and we are because I am,” in practice, the personhood in African cultures has been construed and constructed in a hierarchical manner, with men enjoying a fully privileged status. The full membership of women in a community that places emphasis on the solidarity has not been taken as a given. Indeed, as women activists ...have argued, African societies need to accept this simple but profound truth: A woman is a human being!¹⁵

¹³ Joseph B. R. Gaie and Sana Mmolai, *The Concept of Botho and HIV and AIDS in Botswana* (Eldoret: Zapf Chancery Research Consultants and Publishers, 2013).

¹⁴ Botswana Government, *Vision 2016: Towards Prosperity for All* (Gaborone: Government Printers, 1996).

¹⁵ Ezra Chitando, “Do Not Tell a Person Carrying You that S/He Stinks: Reflections on Ubuntu and Masculinities in the Context of Sexual and Gender-

Indeed, the *Gender-Based Violence in Botswana Indicators Study* confirms Chitando's argument. It notes that, "Over two thirds of women in Botswana (67%) have experienced some form of gender violence in their lifetime, including partner and non-partner violence. A smaller, but still high, proportion of men (44%) admit to perpetrating violence against women."¹⁶ How can violence and discrimination of any form exist in communities that subscribe to ubuntu? In fact, most communities subscribe to heterosexual patriarchal values, meaning that men are expected to occupy a higher status than women. In the heterosexual patriarchal perspective, relationships exist in a hierarchical manner and women, children, and other minorities occupy a lower position in this social hierarchy. This hierarchical ordering of relationships contradicts the *botho/ubuntu* ethic which seemingly embodies equality, affirmation, and care for the Other. Molly Manyonganise has provided a critique of *botho/ubuntu* from various perspectives, holding that it accommodates oppression and that the dominance of African male philosophers has not helped. Manyonganise argues that "*ubuntu* is full of the whims and caprices of patriarchy" and needs to be interrogated, using the yardstick of the human dignity for all.¹⁷

Since *botho/ubuntu* recognizes the rights and the responsibilities of all people, whether individual or collective, it should also promote the social and individual well-being and wholeness of all. A woman experiencing violence and discrimination on the basis of gender is denied an experience of *botho/ubuntu* because she does not experience wholeness. A man who violates a woman fails to promote the social well-being of that woman and her family. He violates her rights and thus also the *botho/ubuntu* ethic. Indeed, any form of discrimination devalues the human dignity of both the one discriminated against and the one who discriminates. As the Batswana would say, "*Gase botho*" that is, it is against the ethic of *btho/ubuntu*, which not only bids individuals to define their identity by caring, welcoming, affirming and respecting the Other,

Based Violence and HIV," in Elna Mouton, et al. *Living with Dignity: African Perspectives on Gender Equality* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015), 276.

¹⁶ Gender Links and Women's Affairs Division, *Gender-Based Violence in Botswana Indicators Study*. Gaborone: Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, 2012, 11.

¹⁷ Molly Manonganise, "Oppressive and Liberative: A Zimbabwean Woman's Reflections on *Ubuntu*," *AOSIS Open Journals*, 2015:1-7.

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but also urges us to earn respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others.

In this article, we therefore seek to interrogate how *botho/ubuntu* may co-exist with patriarchy in Botswana by investigating rituals and practices related to welcoming a new daughter-in-law, welcoming a new baby, and the role of mother-in-law. This article seeks to establish, first, how these practices embody *botho/ubuntu*; second, to interrogate how traces of patriarchy persist; and last of all, to ask how these indigenous practices of receiving a daughter-in-law and a new baby may inform the current women-centred social gatherings practiced in urban spaces, namely, the Naomi and the Laban rituals, and bridal and baby showers. This information has been gathered through fieldwork.

I.1.2 Feminist Theories: The Self in Relation Perspective

How do we explain the beautiful ideal of *botho/ubuntu* and its co-existence with patriarchy? The self-in-relation theory propounded by Jean Baker Miller¹⁸⁻¹⁹, Gilligan,²⁰ and Jordan et al.,²¹ is partly helpful here. This theory posits that women organize themselves around relationships and the ethic of responsibility, care, and nurturing others. Prior perspectives shared the premise that separation, autonomy, and differentiation are marks of a healthy adult whereas connection, affiliation, and mutuality were deemed to be childish traits. The self-in-relation perspective was a departure from this standpoint and acknowledged the divergent path that women were taking in the construction and experience of the self. Although all women cannot be put into one box, nonetheless a relational and connected path was perceived by many to be a more healthy path for women's development. This path included affirming the needs of the other, adapting one's needs to those of others, and using one's relational strength to enhance other people's well-being. Women are, therefore,

¹⁹ Jean Baker Miller, *What do we mean by relationships?* (Work in progress No. 22) (Wellesley: Stone Centre, Working Paper Series, 1986).

²⁰ C. Gilligan, *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

²¹ J. V. Jordan, A. Kaplan, J. Baker Miller, I. Stiver and J. Surrey, *Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Centre* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).

involved in other people's lives through empathy, caring, and capacity for intimacy. This continuity of care makes women emotionally explorative and connective. Women may therefore so value connections that they may interpret disruptions in these connections as not only a loss of a relationship, but also as the total loss of self.

Cultural feminists recognize that the capacity for intimacy and relationships with other people should be celebrated and seen as a prerequisite for social equity, peace, and stability. It is in connections that one is enabled to develop meaningful and fruitful lives and to allow others to reach their aspirations and goals as well. The extent to which an ethic of care affects women's well-being has been explored in many studies. Jack²² hypothesizes that because of the way women relate, they learn to censor their needs, thoughts, and emotions to cultivate harmony and satisfaction in their relationships. According to Montemurro, (Naomi), Bridal and (baby) Showers have developed as "rituals of obligation" with "an established structure and scripted activity."²³ Here, we bring these feminist frameworks into conversation with *botho/ubuntu* concepts, activities, and practices in order first, to analyze whether traditional practices of the *botho/ubuntu* ethic in rural areas embrace patriarchy. The second part of the research²⁴ will examine how in various urban spaces showers (namely, Laban, Naomi, bridal, and baby showers) burden, empower, or compromise women's wellbeing.²⁵ We will carry out fieldwork to explore how these urban space showers constitute female networks that construct, reconstruct, and deconstruct gender.

In what follows, this article examines marriage and the arrival of a new daughter-in-law; the mother-in-law as the primary host of the new daughter-in-law and the arrival and reception of a new baby, *go baya botsetse*. These three cases will be addressed in their given order to investigate the ethic of *Botho/Ubuntu* at work and the persistence of patriarchy.

²² D. C. Jack, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

²³ Beth Montemurro, "Add Men, Don't Stir: Reproducing Traditional Gender Roles in Modern Wedding Showers." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 34 (1) (February, 2005): 6-25.

²⁴ To be published in a subsequent paper once fieldwork is complete.

²⁵ This article is therefore the first part of a larger piece of research. It will be followed by fieldwork among urban communities in Gaborone.

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II. *Dikuku di Monate Lenyalo le Boima: A New Daughter-in-Law Arrives Amongst Us*

The institution of marriage with its values and essential rituals is possibly as old as human existence. It is a social, cultural, and religious invention and construction. According to Paul Kyalo, marriage is the “lifelong union of husband and wife.”²⁶ Marriage is (partly) invented for “mutual support and progeny to continue the ancestral line and to promote the welfare of the tribe or clan.”²⁷ Marriage is also a practice of the philosophy of *botho/ubuntu* specifically in its practice of families uniting and continuing a lineage through the union of their children. In the following, we trace the communal practices of preparing for the arrival of *ngwetsi* or daughter-in-law; we will highlight this practice as a *botho/ubuntu* philosophical practice with attention to the significance of gender in the practices.

In the opening of his chapter on Setswana marriages, the British anthropologist Isaac Schapera asserts that “the family among the Tswana is founded upon marriage.”²⁸ Marriage was shaped by various customs and practices, including systems of lineage and descent. James Denbow and Phenyó Thebe²⁹ identify two types of lineage and descent into which the Batswana people were organized: matrilineal and patrilineal, that trace “unilineal descent systems.”³⁰ The matrilineal system traces descent through the “female or uterine lines.”³¹ The patrilineal system traces descent and inheritance through “male or agnatic lines.”³² The descent and inheritance systems had implications for negotiations, descent, and inheritance within marriages. For instance, Denbow and Thebe provide the Herero people of northwestern Botswana as an example that practices both

²⁶ Paul Kyalo, “A reflection on the African Traditional Values of Marriage and Sexuality.” *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 1 (2) (April, 2012): 211.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁸ Isaac Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom: compiled for the Bechuanaland Protectorate Administration*, with an introduction by C. F. Rey, new introduction by Simon Roberts (Hamburg, Lit Verlag, 1994), 125.

²⁹ James Denbow and Phenyó C. Thebe, *Culture and Customs of Botswana* (London: Greenwood Press, 2006).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 135

³¹ *Ibid.*, 136

³² *Ibid.*

systems, what they call “double descent.”³³ A double descent, they assert, “traces relationships and inheritance through both male and female lines, usually with specific goods, obligations, and rights passed down either through the mother’s or the father’s side of the family.”³⁴ This also had implications for the children born within a Herero marriage.

II.1 Setswana Marriages as Examples of *Botho/Ubuntu* Practice.

Botho/ubuntu is, according to Lesley Le Grange, a “philosophical requirement on how we ought to relate to the other or [what] our moral obligation is toward the other.”³⁵ Since marriage always involves uniting two families, the practice and ethics of *botho/ubuntu* were at forefront of this union. Marriage among Batswana was also not an individual affair but reflected how the “communities involved shared their very existence in that reality and how they became one people, one thing.” After all, Africans themselves would say that through their marriage, their families and clans are also united so that what is done to one of their members is done to all. In light of this gesture, marriage also means that the partners’ responsibilities are not limited to themselves alone but have a much wider application. Their own personal identities and identifications are likewise extended.³⁶

Marriage created mutual relationships between families. In Setswana communities, marriage was a system in which families came together and created “through marriage networks of alliance and support on both sides of the family.”³⁷ For patrilineal families within the Tswana culture, the uncle of the bride was the person who played an important role in handling disputes within the family and also in marriage negotiations for his sister’s sons.³⁸ In Setswana societies, everything possible was done to prepare people for marriage and to make them ready for the expectations of marriage. This included teaching that began during the initiation schools of *Bogwera* and *Bojale*.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Le Grange, *Ubuntu/Botho as Ecophilosophy*, 306.

³⁶ Kyalo, *A Reflection on the African*, 213.

³⁷ Ibid. .

³⁸ Denbow & Thebe, *Culture and Customs*, 136.

Community-building and Gender Constructions in Botswana

A discussion of three Setswana marital institutional practices of preparing to receive *ngwetsi* or the daughter-in-law follow. The practices are *Patlo* (a practice of seeking a woman's hand in marriage); *Bogadi* ("bride wealth" or *lobola*), and *Go laya* (a process of premarital ritual advice or counseling).³⁹

II. 2a. *Patlo*

Patlo is a social process of negotiating or seeking the hand of a woman in marriage. Before a *Patlo* could proceed or be initiated, the man intending to marry had to make a choice of a wife. In pre-colonial times, among Setswana-speaking ethnic groups there were some practices and restrictions on the choice of a woman and the family into which a man could marry. He could marry his cousin, or *ntsala*, who happened to be the "daughter of a maternal uncle or a paternal aunt."⁴⁰ *Patlo* involved the negotiations that took place before betrothal was completed. The man's father would informally have a dialogue or conversation with the father of the woman his son intended to marry to establish some kind of relationship between the two families. After the fathers' meeting, a discussion about the possibility of marriage among close relatives would ensue. Maternal uncles (*bomalome*) were instrumental in the negotiations of *Patlo* or 'seeking' the woman from her parents. They approached the girl's parents through the following expression, "*Re tsile go kopa sego sametsi* (we have come to request a calabash [gourd] of water)."⁴¹ The metaphor of '*sego sa metsi*' or a gourd of water referred to the fact that a woman is linked with life-giving flowing water, and thus with fertility. Rhetorically the metaphor also designates her domestic role as one who will carry water from the well for her family. A successful *Patlo* ended with a betrothal. Once the betrothal was completed, Schapera asserts that the bridegroom's family would seal this agreement with a gift to the bride's family of an animal for slaughter. Once the bridegroom's people had sealed the negotiations with an animal gift, the rituals around the *Bogadi* (bride wealth) would proceed.

³⁹ Sibonile E. Ellece, "Agency and Gender in Setswana Marriage Ceremonies: *Patlo* and *Go Laya* Rituals," *NJLC*, 5 (1) (June, 2011): 45.

⁴⁰ Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law*, 126.

⁴¹ Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law*, 131.

II.2b. Bogadi (*bride wealth*)

Bogadi was a practice of giving and accepting gifts before the marriage could be consummated. The major gift was the *bogadi* cattle. The number of cattle differed from one ethnic group to another, but the standard, according to Denbow and Thebe, was “between 8 and 10 cattle.”⁴² *Bogadi* is an important phenomenon in that it completed the marriage union. A marriage was solemnized and found legitimate through a “gift of cattle from the groom’s family to the bride’s family.”⁴³ *Bogadi* was seen as an act of appreciation to the wife’s parents for nurturing their daughter, not as the purchase of a wife as some have insinuated. Most importantly, it created and communicated a “special bond between the two family groups, just as the transfer of the cattle in other situations creates special relationships between chief and subject, or owner and herdsman... it was a practice in which the marriage became ‘legitimate in the eyes of the public.’”⁴⁴ It was also functional, in that it provided for the younger children in the home of the bride. It also laid a solid foundation for the marriage in case “questions later arose about the position of the children within their father’s lineage, their right to inheritance, and the rights to property on the part of the husband or wife if the marriage ended in divorce.”⁴⁵

The practice of *bogadi* highlights the dynamics of power. Power is essential to the maintenance of gender, especially to the patriarchal foundation of the culture of marriage. For example, the power dynamics at play in the *bogadi* practice were in the idea that *bogadi* was paid to place the woman “under the control of her husband, [and it] far more honoured his position in the tribe generally than a woman.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, *bogadi* was key to the transfer of the “reproductive power of a woman from her own to that of her husband.”⁴⁷

II.2c. Go Laya (*Premarital Counseling*)

⁴² Denbow & Thebe, *Culture and Customs*, 137.

⁴³ Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law*, 138-139.

⁴⁴ Denbow & Thebe, *Culture and Customs*, 136-137.

⁴⁵ Denbow & Thebe, *Culture and Customs*, 137.

⁴⁶ Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law*, 128. ⁴⁷ Ibid.

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Go laya is premarital counseling of the woman and man about to be married. It is practiced by the bride or daughter-in-law's aunts, other married female relatives, and clan members. Whereas the groom was also counseled by his uncles and other married relatives, the process of '*go laya*,' according to Sibonile Ellece, was an "advice ritual"⁴⁸ and there was specific language used to "represent brides and grooms."⁴⁹ Ellece further holds that the representation of brides "contributes to unequal power relations in the family."⁵⁰ According to Ellece, the verbal advice brides received was produced and communicated within a patriarchal framework. This patriarchal framework is what Teresa Ebert articulates as "the organising and division of all practices and significations in terms of gender and the prevailing of one gender over the other."⁵¹ These norms are explicitly present as a controlling ideological culture of marriage. They organize the marriage, its values, and other essentials, which will either play solely to the husband's values and/ or to those of the mother-in-law.

Ellece gives an example from Tshego's⁵² wedding in Kanye. As a new bride, Tshego was counseled by her female relatives. In the premarital advice, and in the absence of her husband, she was told to die to herself by becoming a *seso* (fool) a word that has, according to Ellece, "the connotation of death, because it is derived from the verb 'swa' (die)."⁵³ One of the counselors said,

When a man comes home in the evening, he should not find you out, in the night. And you are not supposed to sweep away the feet of your mother-in-law when she has come to see you. Tshego you see me my elder sister's daughter, be a fool like me. Tomorrow we should not hear that you have returned (from your marital home). Be a fool like me. Pula!⁵⁴

In other words, Tshego has to die to her needs, and possibly to her desires, and ignore her troubles. From now on, her desire is to be for her husband and the safe keeping of her marriage. She also has to act "stupid and

⁴⁸ Ellece, *Agency and Gender*, 45.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Teresa Ebert, "The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory," *Cultural Critique* 10 (1988): 19.

⁵² This not the actual name of the woman in our study.

⁵³ Ellece, *Agency and Gender*, 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

passive that she may as well be dead.”⁵⁵ *Go Laya*, or the advice ceremony, communicates information about marriage as “experienced by a woman, as a series of duties that she has to perform and sacrifices she has to make.”⁵⁶

Ellece also explores the practice of ‘*Rutu*’ a ritual chant performed at one of the weddings she attended. It was a gendered, ideological, verbal performance by the “female relatives of the groom.”⁵⁷ *Rutu* is a performance practice of “advice” and it “articulates and places emphasis on the idea that a good wife is one who is accommodating, tolerant and silent... It was a “post-patlo (female version) celebration.”⁵⁸ Chants which were highly gendered included: “*Mosadi ga a balebale!*” (A good wife is not talkative); “*Mosadi ga a tsamaye mo mafelong a di dirinki!*” (A good wife does not visit bars); “*Marutu he nnaka, marutu he nnaka!*” (Calm my younger one, calm my younger one! Calm! Be quiet and at peace).⁵⁹ Therefore, the *Rutu* chant is a practice of social and ideological enculturation in which patriarchal norms and prerogatives are enforced. Passive resistance is promoted as a major weapon by which a married woman can preserve her marriage. According to Ellece, a newly married woman was also strictly advised to cease friendship with the “company of unmarried girls and listening to gossip as this could lead her astray (“do not listen to hearsay about your husband’s activities)”⁶⁰ She was also instructed not to associate with unmarried girls. Thus this performance was done to cement the patriarchal practice of marriage and solely to serve the interests of the husband while the wife remained passive.

II.3 Ngwetsi Bona Matsalaatswale: When Mother-in-law Meets Daughter in Law

In Botswana, like in most sub-Saharan countries, people in rural areas live in some form of extended family. Many of the Tswana traditional wedding songs project clear messages of the expectations of daughters-in-laws as they are introduced to the new family. Among the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁷ Ellece, *Agency and Gender*, 48.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

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Bangwaketse tribe and, many other tribes in Botswana, a daughter-in-law is expected to relieve her mother-in-law of her domestic duties, such as cooking and fetching water. The following traditional Tswana song is normally sung at the wedding ceremonies and it highlights what is expected of the bride, namely, to perform domestic duties and relieve her mother-in-law of those duties. The song goes:

*Heela Matsale (Mother-in-law!)*⁶¹

Heela Matsale, tlogela dipitsa tseo, (Mother-in-law, please leave those pots!)

Mong wa tsone, Keyo o etla. (The owner of the pots has come!)

This song simply asks the mother-in-law to stop cooking as the one who is to cook, the bride, has arrived. In short, the traditional Tswana society expects a daughter-in-law to serve not only her husband but also her mothers-in-law. O. S. Phibion⁶² argues that traditional music such as the above song and others should be included in the current music syllabi for Botswana schools. He reckons that the inclusion of traditional music could help to transmit traditional, social, and cultural teachings of these songs. One of the songs for whose inclusion he advocates for is called, “*Nna matsale o a nthata keya nokeng ka galase.*” This song is found among the Bangwaketse ethnic group of Botswana. It is about a daughter-in-law who is delighted by her loving mother-in-law. The song goes, “My mother-in-law loves me, I go to fetch water with a glass!” The glass metaphor possibly suggests that a loved daughter-in-law is not overworked with carrying heavy water container; rather, she is treated with care and love. Sabalele⁶³ argues that some women have been mentally conditioned to think that being a daughter-in-law amounts to cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and other household chores for the in-laws. According to Sabalele, “failure to do this may lead to divorce or polygamy.”⁶⁴ The songs above highlight what is expected of daughters-in-law in patriarchal contexts of Seyswana cultures. It seems that new daughters-in-law do not

⁶¹ The songs discussed here are oral communal songs.

⁶² O. S. Phibion, “Bangwaketse of Botswana Setapa Traditional Music Practices,” in *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4 (1) (2012): 1-11.

⁶³ S. N. Sabalele, “A traumatic experience faced by the second wife in a polygamous marriage: A challenge to pastoral care,” an interview by Sabalele with Rev. Unazo Uhona (10 November 2015).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

have much authority in deciding how to exist in the new home, since the expectations dictate how they should behave. The songs also allude to the tensions that are to be expected between the daughters-in-law and the mothers-in-law.

The type of family organization that had just been described, as well as the family values associated with it, is subjected to continuous challenges. One of the major challenges as described by J. Livingston⁶⁵ is rural-urban movement. According to Livingston, Botswana, whose economy was largely based on agriculture, experienced massive droughts in the 1980s and the agricultural sector had never recovered. This condition led many, especially the young people, to migrate to cities so as to provide for their families back in the villages. Young women also moved. They would work as domestic workers and would also engage in drought relief duties. Livingston argues that young women were then able to exercise their power over their mothers-in-law because their wages were central to household viability and growth. In short, urban migration and 'cash power' became a source of negotiation between mothers and daughters-in-law. Older women as a result could no longer fully exercise their authority over their daughters-in-law and the whole household.

Livingston also emphasizes that while the young wives are working in urban areas, mothers-in-law would be taking care of the grandchildren in the villages. However, because of urban challenges, wives may lose their jobs. As a result, some women would not want to go home because there is no money. This is problematic, for the children need not only their mother's money but also their mother's presence, love, and warmth. In addition, daughters-in-law also need the moral support of their mothers-in-law during such straining times. Treating oneself as a functional entity in the urban space therefore leads to the neglect of other factors, such as emotions.

As a way of curbing conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, some people advocate for the re-instatement of cousin marriages mentioned above. Rev. Unazo Uhona,⁶⁶ the Evangelical Lutheran Church Minister who belongs to the Herero tribe in Sehithwa village, mentioned that the Herero, Yei, and Mbukushu tribes encourage people not to intermarry, or marry people outside their clan. As a matter

⁶⁵ J. Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2005).

⁶⁶ Sabalele, *An interview with Rev. Unazo Uhona*.

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of fact, they are encouraged to marry their cousins for the simple reason that the daughter-in-law would take care of the mother-in-law as she would her own mother. Uhona emphasized that cousin marriages somehow decrease the conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and bring more stability to the family. Uhona also maintained that cousin marriages benefited women, young and old. Families became even more united because they were not strangers to each other. If a man is married to his cousin, his cousin would naturally and without hesitation take care of the mother-in-law.

Although the cousin marriage practice is specific to some ethnic lines, it is more effective in bringing families together, for it minimizes cultural clashes. Daughters-in-law are expected to render traditional services to their mothers-in-laws because the belief is that there are no biological or cultural boundaries. The traditional African family life thrived on the extended family. This was and still is a good model of family because one could and can at all times count on the family for support when in need. However, today women and men need to combine their efforts to care of their families. Although the culture dictates that *mosadi* (a Setswana word for “the one who stays at home”) is the one to look after the children and household, in today’s context women, educated or not, have careers and more responsibilities. The challenge remains: how can daughters-in-law maintain stability in the family and at the same time continue to satisfy family functions? Perhaps such a question can be answered by investigating urban-based bridal showers and the peer-counseling that occurs—which will be the second part of this research, to be published in a follow-up paper.

III. *Botsetse*: Receiving a New Baby and Caring for the Mother

While there are no equivalent traces of contemporary baby showers among Botswana traditional communities, Botswana have a series of specific taboos to ensure the safety of a pregnancy, all of which promote *botho/ubuntu*. For example, James Amanze observes that: “A pregnant woman is not allowed to have sex with another man except her husband or the person who made her pregnant. The same applies to the man who made her pregnant. He is not expected to go about having sexual intercourse with other women because this will affect the health of the

baby.”⁶⁷ Although this taboo is meant to protect the baby, it also reinforces *botho/ubuntu* by fostering faithfulness and preventing emotional trauma for the pregnant woman. Many of the pregnancy-related taboos reinforce the spirit of *botho/ubuntu*, since they reflect caring attitudes. For example, a pregnant woman’s strenuous chores are reduced considerably to ensure that she rests and to safeguard the baby. Besides ensuring the safety of the baby, such a taboo reflects the spirit of *botho/ubuntu* by considering the physical needs of the pregnant woman. Some of the taboos, such as those forbidding the pregnant woman from eating fat or skin from under the belly of a cow, eating eggs, wearing a belt, crossing the imprint of a snake on the ground, and drinking water whilst standing, amongst others, are mainly for the safety of the mother-to-be and the unborn baby.⁶⁸ Whilst such taboos may seemingly not relate to *botho/ubuntu*, they do all seek to ensure the safety of the baby and the mother.

Preparations for the forthcoming baby thus include caring for the expectant mother, who is treated with care and advised accordingly. As the African saying goes, “it takes a village to raise a child.” Thus the arrival of a baby is marked by community members bringing gifts for the child. The arrival of the baby is also marked by the practice of *go baya botsetse*. In the latter, the nursing mother and new child are closed away in the nursery room in seclusion for three months, where an assisting elderly woman attends them on a twenty-four hour basis. The attendant elderly woman washes and massages the new mother to ease the stress of carrying a baby for nine months; cooks for her; washes the baby, gives it to the mother for feeding, and takes care of the baby when it cries. She also monitors and restricts the entrance into nursery lest the new child is exposed to infections. These processes also make sure that the father does not deprive the new child of quality time with her/his mother. The concept of *botsetse* underlines that the nursing mother must rest and give undivided attention to the baby for a period of three months, before she can resume her normal duties in the public space. The end of *botsetse* after three month period is marked by an outdoor ceremony, in which the name of the child is publicly announced to the community. In urban Botswanan settings, baby showers have become a big movement or social event, which begin to prepare the future mother just before the arrival of the baby. Organizing

⁶⁷ James Amanze, *African Traditional Religions and Culture in Botswana* (Gaborone: Pula Press, 2002), 135.

⁶⁸ Amanze, *African Traditional Religions*.

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members invite participants and contribute an agreed amount of money that is used to buy baby furniture, clothes, blankets, utensils, diapers, gift vouchers, and food in preparation for the forthcoming baby shower. The shower includes praying for the forthcoming baby, public counseling on mothering, as well as sharing wisdom on the joys and challenges of parenting. It would seem that *botho/ubuntu* continues to drive the movement behind baby showers, yet it remains to be established whether they also re-invent the tradition away from patriarchal expectations.

IV. Conclusion

The *botho/ubuntu* ethic and spirituality builds community and seeks to empower all members of the community to live dignified lives. The investigation of marriage preparations and the reception of *ngwetsi*; the hospitality of the *matsale* (mother-in-law), and the welcoming of a new baby and care of the nursing mother (*go baya botsetse*) highlight the *botho/ubuntu* ethic of caring, welcoming, affirming, and respecting the other. The role of women is central to the practices of *botho/ubuntu* spirituality, since it is rooted in welcoming, affirming, and respecting the Other. *Botho/ubuntu* activities and spirituality, therefore, have the potential for providing a feminist space of affirming and caring for human life, as the above examined cases demonstrate. The examined cases, however, indicate that *botho/ubuntu* co-exists with patriarchy, which creates and maintains gender inequalities. While *go laya*, for example, is a good practice of giving the new bride tips on maintaining a good marriage, it also reinforces patriarchal norms, which can be destructive to the well-being of the woman. A question might be asked of how women are using the *botho/ubuntu* ethic and spirituality to create a space of self-empowerment and the empowerment of others in the urban space. Do Botswana women make any attempt to rewrite patriarchal norms in their own spaces? One place to look is the bridal, baby, Naomi, and Laban showers that have become popular in the urban spaces of Botswana. How do the urban-based *botho/ubuntu*-informed activities such as bridal and baby showers construct, reconstruct, and deconstruct gender? Such showers are also largely female-centered movements, which women organize to empower themselves and their communities. Consequently, subsequent fieldwork will be undertaken to investigate how Botswana women use *Botho/Ubuntu* to empower others and themselves, and how they might be rewriting the patriarchal script in the process. The data

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collected will indicate how showers may be used as a space for women's agency and subversion of patriarchy.

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**Refusing to Read:
Precious Ramotswe Meets Rahab for a Cup of Bush Tea**

Musa W. Dube¹

Abstract

In this article, the biblical Rahab and I will pay a visit to Precious Ramotswe for a cup of red bush tea. That is, the narrative of Rahab will provide a reading grid by which to analyse a Botswanan woman character, Precious Ramotswe, created and popularized by Alexander McCall Smith's novel, The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. This postcolonial feminist reading of the novels analyses the characterization of Mma Ramotswe through Rahab's context, highlighting how McCall Smith's narrator serves as a spy who investigates, reports, and translates Botswanan cultures for the Western world by using her as his mouth piece. The article explores how McCall Smith constructs colonialising feminism through the paradigm of saving brown women from brown men. The article highlights that such a strategy depends on a colonial portrait of black men as docile and over-sexed. While The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series has won worldwide popularity, this article highlights its dependence on colonially-cultivated tastes of constructing Africa as the Other and a readership that still yearns for such literature in the Western world. McCall Smith thus indulges in colonial images, metaphors, and narrative designs of the Other and through them sates the reading appetites of millions in the Western world.

KEYWORDS: Rahab's Reading Prism, Africa, Colonial narratives, Ideology, Feminism, Postcolonialism, Decolonizing, Masculinities, Lady detective.

There were two main targets, Mma Ramotswe thought. First, there were fat people, who were now getting quite used to a relentless campaign

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against them; and then there were men. Mma Ramotswe knew that men were far from perfect—that many men were wicked and selfish and lazy and that they had, by and large, made rather bad job of running Africa...but there were plenty of good men about—people like Mr J. L. B. Matekoni, Sir Seretse Khama (first President of Botswana, Statesman, Paramount Chief of the Bamangwato) and Obed Ramotswa, retired miner, expert judge of cattle, and her much-loved Daddy.²

Introduction: Drinking Bush Tea and Stories of Refusing to Read

Red Bush tea appears in the very first paragraph of the first volume of sixteen in the book series *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, written by Alexander McCall Smith.³ Thereafter, it is generously and frequently served in the series. Those who have read this series of books will know that there is endless drinking of Bush teas by Precious Mma Ramotswe and her clients, colleagues, friends, and family. In *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, Bush tea is the beverage that one takes to relax, and to aid in discussing, strategizing, and teasing out all the knotty unresolved issues that a lady detective needs to tackle. So now I invite you, the reader, to a cup of Bush tea (in the company of the biblical character, Rahab, found in Joshua 2 and 6) to investigate McCall Smith's constructions and reconstructions of gender and coloniality.

The book series was first launched in 1998 and today includes sixteen volumes. The books' leading character is Precious Ramotswe, a Motswana woman, who decides to open the first and only detective agency in Botswana after inheriting wealth from her father, who died of lung infection as a result of his mining career in South African mines. The series is set in Botswana and features only black characters save for a few occasions on which it features minor characters from Nigeria, Germany, the USA, and South Africa. The series title, *Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, takes its name from the first novel that appeared in 1998. By 2005, more than five million copies had been sold and the series has now been translated into about forty-two languages. I am sure that these numbers are now much higher. The series has won McCall Smith numerous awards. It

² Alexander McCall Smith, *Tears of the Giraffe*, (London: Polygon Books, 2000), 117.

³ At the time of the writing of this article there were eleven volumes and they had been translated into forty-two languages.

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has now been produced into movie and a TV series—all this within the first decade of its publication. It is not an exaggeration to say the series have become a worldwide phenomenon.

I first heard about the series through word of mouth in the Western world. Every time I was introduced as coming from Botswana, I got a startling response: “You are from Botswana! Aaah this is where *The Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* is set. Tell us what you think about it.” I asked who had written it, and they said a Scottish man, Alexander McCall Smith. Politely, I said “Sorry, I haven’t read it.” I soon realised that in whatever city I landed in the world, the question about Alexander McCall Smith’s novels set in Botswana would come up.

Over time, I realised there are three types of readers of these books. First, there are those who are very eager to meet me and to ask me about the series and they do not waste any time doing so. Among these, the conversation often begins right at the airport. The second group of readers consists of curious, but very cautious readers, who carefully find a discreet way of asking me about *The Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*. The third group consists of almost guilty people, who will only reluctantly ask the question or admit that they have read the books. It is only when braver readers than them ask the question that readers from this third group tend to chip in and voice a question, admitting that they have read the series. Sometimes such readers or followers of the series only admit to doing so after I have known them for a while, a stance that makes me feel that I have been watched and spied on unknowingly. In general, I would say the readers are largely women, although there are also some men who are avid readers of the series. In turn, I have to say, the series has also made me self-conscious. The books make me feel as if I am being watched, detected, so to speak, since the narrative constantly describes Batswanan women’s bodies, perceived through male eyes, in particular Precious Ramotswe’s body, which he describes, politely, as being of a traditional build, but more explicitly, and frequently, as fat and round. Precious Ramotswe wears size 22 and the narrative underlines that she is highly appreciated for it. The position of the narrative concerning Batswanan women’s figures is captured by one of her clients, who, unaware that he was being investigated for unfaithfulness, supposedly, “put his arms around her [Mma Ramotswe’s] waist, and told her that he liked good, fat women,” for “all this business about being thin was nonsense and was

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quite wrong for Africa.”⁴ This statement suggests that there is an ideological support for constructing Batswana women’s bodies as fat or traditionally built, and that thin African women’s bodies would be unacceptable, less than ideal.

Of course, my answer to people’s question of whether I had read the books was always, “No, I have not read the books.” Mostly people would be surprised and fall silent. Then they would ask, “May I know why?” Politely, I would always say, “I haven’t gotten to it.” At this point they would happily say, “They are very good books, you know. They feature this clever woman. She inherits wealth from her father and buys herself a home and she sets up her own ladies’ detective agency and solves people’s mysteries.”

My friend, Kathleen Wicker, asked me about *The Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* series in 2003. As usual, I said I had not read the series. But then I explicitly added that I did not intend to read them for “it is just the same old colonial story of one more white man writing about Africa and getting famous for it while African authored books are ignored. What is unique about that?” After long adopting a position of refusing to read the series, Kathleen Wicker went shopping and bought two of the novels for me. She gave them to me, saying, “I think you must read these novels, Musa, and hear what this white man is saying about Botswana.” I thanked her and took the novels back home with me. I tried to read them, but each time I could not really get beyond the first chapter. I found them downright boring. I could not understand why people were raving about them. After a while, I gave them to my son, who also could not read them. For a number of years now, Kathleen Wicker and I have been talking about McCall Smith’s novels and my refusal or inability to read them.

It should not be an issue that McCall Smith writes about Botswana, for we want to celebrate academic freedom. Yet while academic freedom is welcome, there is something to be said about the fact that when African writers tell their own story, they rarely receive the same attention on the global stage of knowledge production as do those who write about them. Since colonial times, the Western world would still rather hear about Africa from white writers than from Africans themselves. In her recent paper, entitled, “Is it Ethical to Study Africa?” Amina Mama writes that “when it comes to research... on Africa...the same global

⁴ Alexander McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* (London: Polygon Books, 1998), 142.

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inequalities are still evident. Most of what is received as knowledge about Africa is produced in the West.”⁵ She also underlines that African perspectives are often ignored. One could add that most native African readers have often found the Western-produced works difficult to read, because they are often produced from within a colonial framework.⁶ Whether Alexander McCall intended it or not, his series on *The Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* is another in the long history of male colonial writers, along with David Livingstone, Henry Stanley, Joseph Conrad, John Mackenzie, Wilbur Smith, and numerous other missionaries, traders, colonial officers, and adventure travelers who went to Africa and wrote letters, reports, and tales for readers back home. These writers constructed black Africa in a particular manner and created substantial consumers for narratives about the Other. Contemporary Western writing about Africa benefits greatly from a historically established tradition of Western readers who learn about Africa through Western eyes.

The issue, however, is also that to depend on an established literary tradition means one is already tapping into an established literary tradition of stereotypes, themes, and ideology that readers have come to expect. For the portrait of Africa from the Western perspective, this usually includes portraying Africa as the dark continent, a place of misery, of underdevelopment, over-sexed people, childish/immature superstitious savages, and of a land that is empty, undeveloped, and unoccupied, hence available for the taking.

Since most Western writing about Africa is done from within this colonial framework, it is extremely hard reading for African people. Most African readers cringe when they read Western writing about Africa. We do not recognize ourselves in such writing; in fact, it leads us to despise ourselves. But because writing Africa as colonising Africa is a two-centuries old business, its foundations are strong and African writers and their voices are, more often than not, ignored while the perspectives of Western writers are widely welcomed by the well-established readership. This also means that most Africans are forced to read writings about Africa that are not for Africans. Indeed, since colonial times, there has been a tradition that most celebrated writings about Africa are not by African

⁵Amina Mama, “Is it ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom,” *African Studies Review* 50, no. 1 (2007):1-26, here 4.

⁶ Musa W. Dube, “Bible in the Bush: The First ‘Literate’ Batswana Bible,” *Translation Issue* 2 (2013):79-104.

writers and thinkers. This is the question we need to put to *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* narratives—how the series works through and with the established colonial literary tradition.

Like the writers who have gone before him, Alexander McCall Smith openly admits that his writing targets Western readers.⁷ How does McCall Smith manage this tradition? Does he rely on this tradition or supersede it? Is it even possible to supersede a well-established literary tradition? Second, in one of his interviews, McCall Smith openly said he believes that white people who benefitted from the colonization of Africa must give back to the continent, which is what his novels seek to do. Again, giving back to Africa is a statement fraught with colonial ideology. David Livingstone, a celebrated Scotsman, who was buried in Westminster Abbey with British royalty for his work, sought to open up Africa for Western civilization, Christianity, and commerce. His heart is still buried in African soil, but the agenda that he promoted was actual colonialism of the continent, which was not an empowering gift to Africa.⁸ Alexander McCall Smith (another Scotsman) was born in Rhodesia, the current Zimbabwe, where his father worked as a colonial officer. He later went to study in Edinburgh and remained there, adopting British citizenship. Sometime in the 1980s, he came to work at the University of Botswana, department of law, and subsequently returned back to Scotland. This paper seeks to begin detective work on Alexander McCall Smith's narratives, from a postcolonial feminist perspective.

Although I assumed the strategy of refusing to read his stories for a while, I cannot pretend that I did not manage to keep the series away. As I describe above, the series were constantly brought to me and read for me within many metropolitan cities of the West. Finally, in 2008, Botswana entered the debate about the series, when there were preparations afoot to shoot a movie on McCall Smith's books in the country. To avoid a situation where the movie could end up shot in South Africa, the

⁷ Musa W. Dube, "Decolonizing the Darkness: Bible Readers and the Colonial Cultural Archive," 34-37. In F. Lozada and G. Carey, eds. *Soundings in Cultural Criticism*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013). See H.M. Stanley, *In Darkest Africa: Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin Governor of Equitima* (Toronto: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890).

⁸ Musa W. Dube, "The Scramble for Africa as the Biblical Scramble for Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives," 1-28 in M. W. Dube, A. Mbuvi, and D. Mbuwayesango, eds. *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012).

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government was preparing to put up 30million Pula to build the village that was to appear in the film. This debate led to the scrutiny of the contents of McCall Smith's novels. The parliament approved the money needed for the movie village for tourist purposes: they wanted those millions of Western readers to come to Botswana and see Precious Ramotswe's detective agency country home. They wanted some of the money that McCall Smith earned from using Botswanan characters to come back to the country in the form of tourism. Consequently, in 2009, *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* followed me straight into my house. It was playing right in my sitting room as a TV series. I had to watch it. When I saw the TV series, my fears were confirmed. McCall Smith had maintained a colonial mode in which he was reporting the weirdest things about Botswana or Africa to Western readers. The Batswanans he depicted as the exotic other. As the narrative itself states, detective work "was not like being a mechanic; this was like, well being a spy, an informant, a seeker-out of the tawdry secrets of others."⁹ What I saw in the TV series, playing on my TV screen, was that the character of Mma Ramotswe as a detective was created as a perfect lens for the author's colonial purpose. She served as "an informant, a seeker-out of the tawdry secrets of others," that were being reported for and to Western readers and now Western viewers. The TV series featured different cases handled by Precious Ramotswe, and through the detective lens the narrative constructed and presented the exotic other to the Western world. The cases included an African indigenous church baptism at a dam that leads to the drowning of member, who is eaten by a crocodile; a child stolen for purposes of ritual murder; many cheating husbands and frustrated wives; Nigerians twins missing fingers, and so forth. This is how I first got a glance at the contents of the series.

Rahab Meets Mma Ramotswe for a Cup of Tea

I finally decided to read McCall Smith's books to honor Kathleen Wicker's persistent challenge that I needed to read the books. In this article, I seek to read the series using a model that I developed a while ago,

⁹ Alexander McCall Smith, *The Good Husband of Zebra Drive* (London: Polygon Books, 2007), 131.

named Rahab's reading prism.¹⁰ It is a reading model I developed to deal with the African challenges of reading literature that is written *about* them but not *for* them. This literature is written by the Western world from a colonial and colonising perspective, meaning it is both racist and Eurocentric. There is indeed a similarity between the biblical woman Rahab, the Canaanite woman, who appears in Jewish narratives (Joshua 2), and Precious Ramotswe written by McCall Smith, a Scottish man. Both the biblical Rahab and Mma Ramotswe of *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* are women written about and popularized by traveling male writers from powerful and foreign nations. Both women take literary journeys that relocate them from their own nations to the nations of their dominant writers, where they are celebrated and immortalized. Rahab, a story found in Joshua 2 and 6, has been a part of literary history for more than two millennia. In the narrative, Joshua sends two male spies ahead to investigate the targeted land and report back to the invading nation. The spies go, to a woman who supposedly best represents the cradle of information in her land, a sex worker named Rahab. They spend a night at her place, and then return to report to Joshua what supposedly represents the state of Jericho, having gathered their information solely from Rahab. In McCall Smith's novel, a woman who represents the cradle of knowledge about Botswana is herself a lady detective, Precious Ramotswe. But for whom does she do her job? For whom does she spy?

Reading McCall Smith narratives from a postcolonial feminist perspective means investigating how the novels work within the colonial literary tradition of presenting the Other and how that tradition also utilises gender to characterise the Other. This article thus seeks to investigate how McCall works with and through the well-established literary colonial tradition of the portrait of Africa from the Western perspective. Gender is central to McCall Smith's narratives, as attested by the leading character, Precious Ramotswe, the woman who sets up the first and only *Ladies' Detective Agency* in Botswana. The themes of colonial literature about Africa are too numerous to be investigated adequately within this paper. So I focus on only two issues: First how McCall Smith's novels win the hearts of Western readers by constructing a feminist narrative, which in the process portrays Botswanan men as useless and over-sexed. Indeed *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective Agency's* main business is to investigate

¹⁰ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 121.

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unfaithful husbands, and as the narrative explicitly says, “All women in Botswana were victims of the fecklessness of men. There were virtually no men these days who would marry a woman and settle down to look after her children; men like that seemed to be the a thing of the past.”¹¹ Is McCall Smith making an attempt to save brown women from brown men?¹² Such a question is not farfetched given that in the earliest pages of the first volume the narrative flirts with the subaltern question. The leading character says: “And who am I? I am precious Ramotswe, citizen of Botswana, daughter of Obed Ramotswe who died because he was a miner and could no longer breathe. *His life was unrecorded; who is there to write down the lives of ordinary people?*” (Emphasis added). This massive question gave us the sixteen volume series (and still going), featuring a woman lady detective, Precious Ramotswe, who will give us the inside stories of “ordinary people” through the hidden eye behind the detective agency—though this eye is actually none other than that of Alexander McCall Smith, a white Scottish man. As one who speaks for the subaltern, seeking to write their unrecorded lives, McCall Smith adopts a technique that is seemingly feminist and decolonizing. Or is it?

Precious Ramotswe Feminism: Saving Brown Women from Brown Men¹³

Let us start with the construction of Precious Ramotswe as a feminist. I believe this is one aspect of McCall Smith’s novels that has appealed to worldwide readers, especially the women readers. As the title of the series attests, it is *The Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* series. It features a woman as the leading character, Precious Ramotswe. The first volume has made meticulous efforts to construct her character for the role that she must play throughout the sixteen-plus volumes. Mma Ramotswe is the beloved and only daughter of a former South African miner whose lungs have been wrecked by the dust from the mines. He quits mining and returns to Botswana when Precious Ramotswe is three and takes up cattle farming. Unfortunately, Precious Ramotswe’s biological mother is

¹¹ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies’*, 140.

¹² Gayatri C. Spivack, “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” 66-104. In Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 90-104.

tragically run over by a train. A cousin, who has been deserted by a husband for her barrenness, moves in and starts raising her with much love. Precious' father adores his daughter. He wants to start a retail business, but decides that he will continue with cattle farming and leave the whole herd to his daughter to start the business. Indeed, when he passes, he leaves 180 cattle to his daughter advising that she should sell them and start a retail business. Instead, she opts to start a detective agency. Mma Ramotswe is described as a child who is endowed with both beauty and intelligence and blessed with a loving father and cousin dedicated to her well being. Precious Ramotswe is as precious as her name describes her. Her gender does not deny her inheritance of wealth.

Precious Ramotswe's feminist and detective eye is closely associated with the cousin who raised her, after her mother's passing. This cousin had suffered at the hands of patriarchy that measured her humanity by her capacity to bear children. Unfortunately, she was barren. Her husband walked out on her and found another woman. Her husband then wrote a letter to her, informing her that his new wife was pregnant. A year later, she received another letter, this time "with a photograph of his child."¹⁴ The cousin returned to her own mother and grandmother but they treated her with quiet contempt, for they "believed that a woman who was left by her husband would almost have deserved her fate."¹⁵ When Precious Ramotswe's mother dies, the cousin leaves her parents' house and goes to raise Precious Ramotswe. Reflecting on her experience, this cousin was determined that Precious Ramotswe not experience the same oppression that she underwent as a barren and uneducated married woman. As the narrative points out, "the cousin wanted Precious to be clever."¹⁶ Thus "she started teaching Precious to count. They counted goats and cattle. They counted boys playing in the dust. They counted trees, giving each tree a name: crooked one, one with no leaves; one where *mophane* worms like to hide; one where no bird will go...."¹⁷ This cousin, we hear, "made Precious remember lists of things; the names of members of the family, the names of cattle her grandfather owned, the names of chiefs."¹⁸ Due to her diligent work, "by the time Precious went to school at the age

¹⁴ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies*, 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

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of six she knew her alphabets, her numbers up to two hundred and she could recite the entire first chapter of the Book of Genesis in the Setswana translation.”¹⁹ The narrator makes a significant comment here, noting that “she was never wrong, this child who watched everybody and everything with her wide eyes, solemn eye. And slowly without anybody ever intending this, the qualities of curiosity were nurtured in the child’s mind.”²⁰ In short, this training set the foundation of detective work for Precious Ramotswe. Nonetheless, the narrative is meticulous to leave no stone unturned for building an impeccable character through Sunday school and formal schooling. Precious Ramotswe attends Sunday school where she “learned about good and evil.”²¹ At school, Precious Ramotswe continues to build upon the skills imparted by her cousin. The link is directly made. “Precious Ramotswe likes to draw, an activity which the cousin had encouraged from an early age.”²² Through this skill she demonstrates her capacity to observe what is going on around her. Her teachers encouraged Precious and “sketch followed sketch.” She even wins the first prize in a national art competition. Precious Ramotswe becomes the best girl in her school.²³

But at the age of sixteen she decides that she has had enough of school and goes to live with her cousin in the city, who is now happily married to a rich man, who runs buses. Although her father would rather have her continue with her education she realises that “she wanted freedom.” At her cousins’ home, Precious Ramotswe begins to demonstrate her mental skills by working in the office of the bus company, “where she added invoices and checked figures in the drivers’ records.”²⁴ Soon she outperforms the fulltime workers, for “it was easy for Precious with her memory to remember how to do new things and to apply knowledge faultlessly. She did her own checking often unasked, and although everything usually added up, now and then she found a small discrepancy.” But then Precious found more discrepancies. “She found a discrepancy of slightly over two thousand Pula in fuel bills invoices and she drew the attention of her cousins’ husband.”²⁵ In this job she is shown

¹⁹ Ibid., 34.

²⁰ Ibid., 34.

²¹ Ibid., 35.

²² Ibid., 41.

²³ Ibid., 45.

²⁴ Ibid., 47.

²⁵ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies*, 47-48.

to be a diligent worker, who is self-motivated and investigative. Indeed, in this job at the bus office company, Precious Ramotswe is presented as having her apprenticeship for the job of detective, for the section closes by saying, "This was her first case. This was the beginning of the career of Mma Ramotswe."²⁶ By so doing, the narrative has centered Mma Ramotswe's formation as a lady detective around the desires of a cousin who had suffered at the hands of patriarchy.

Given that the McCall Smith narrative holds that, "All women in Botswana were victims of the fecklessness of men,"²⁷ and given that Precious Ramotswe's detective agency is described as consisting of three sets of clients, Precious Ramotswe's training would be incomplete if she had not experienced marriage. I mean bad marriage. This happens very quickly. This girl who has impeccable intelligence, wisdom, power of observation, and analysis meets a certain Note Mokoti, a trumpeter, a musician. The narrative does not mince words in telling us that, "She was frozen, unable to walk away, mesmerised like prey before a snake."²⁸ Whatever gifts she had, ceased to work in front of Note Mokoti. She is a virgin but Mokoti ensures that "now things must change. Right now. Tonight. He hurt her, she asked him to stop, but he put her head back and hit her once across the cheek. But he immediately kissed her where the blow had struck, and said he had not meant to do it....then he hurt her again and struck her back with his belt."²⁹ Thus Mma Ramotswe has her first experience of love making, but she still agrees to marry the man. Her father, who is certain that Note Mokoti is not a good man, tells "her that she would never have to marry anybody she did not want to marry."³⁰ She marries him nonetheless and spends two years in a very violent relationship, which includes being beaten while pregnant and losing her baby. Thereafter, Note Mokoti deserts her and Precious returns to her father's house. Her father dies and leaves all his 180 cattle to Precious Ramotswe, advising her to start a retail business, but she says she prefers to open and run a detective agency. Her father has never worried that he has a daughter and no son. He has never doubted that his daughter fully deserves inheriting his property. While he loved her and wanted the best

²⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁷ Ibid., 140.

²⁸ Ibid., 51.

²⁹ Ibid., 54.

³⁰ Ibid., 54.

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for her and always advised her, Precious Ramotswe was always free to make independent decisions, as attested by her decision to drop out of school and her decision to marry Note Mokoti.

The narrative features other strong supporting women characters. There is Grace Makhutsi, the secretary at the agency. Although Makhutsi's road of life is paved with all sorts of hardships, she is a go-getter. She has scored the highest marks in the secretarial college, 97%. Her score is repeatedly stated. She excels in just about everything, but she is not beautiful, does not know how to dress, and interrupts people. Consequently, she is not hired because offices that are full of men prefer beautiful well-dressed secretaries, the narrative says. So girls whose grades were average get better jobs than her. Mma Ramotswe hires her as her secretary and receptionist. She is impeccable in her delivery. She gets promoted to the position of assistant detective and then associate detective. Mma Makhutsi, who is still insufficiently paid, decides to open her own Kalahari Typing school for men. Through this school Mma Makhutsi finally makes more money and finds romance. But alas, he was a married man, for his wife comes to seek the services of Mma Ramotswe! Another door opens for Mma Makhutsi, since she finally finds an honest and loving man who buys her a wedding ring.

Another woman icon is Mapotokwane, the woman who runs the orphanage with diligence and shrewdness, supplying all that the children need and preserving all that they have. She even gets some of her friends to adopt children.

There are many minor characters who also stand out, such as Happy Bapetsi, who is the No1 sub-accountant, who says, "Now I am the number 1 sub-accountant and I do not think I can go any further because all men are worried that I will make them look stupid."³¹ There is also Mma Mothibi, the Sunday school teacher who has been a significant figure in moulding Mma Ramotswe. When Mma Ramotswe reports a Sunday school boy who wants to show her his penis, Mma Mothibi, a woman pastor, does not hesitate to say, "Boys, men, they are all the same. They think that this thing is something special and they are all proud of it. They do not know how ridiculous it is."³²

With this background Mma Ramotswe begins her Ladies Detective agency, soon after her father's death. Her cousin, who raised

³¹ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 37.

her, has trained her to be an empowered woman. Precious Ramotswe is a very good natured, kind, and polite woman, but she makes very little room for patriarchy. When her legal adviser expresses doubts about the viability of opening a detective agency, she insists that when people see the sign “*No 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*...they will think those ladies will know what is going on,” for women are “the ones who know.” When the lawyer expresses further doubts, Mma Ramotswe seizes the opportunity to inform him that his zip is open and the lawyer has not noticed!³³

Troubled Masculinities and Over-Sexed Men

Against this background of strong women characters, who insist on their liberation, the narrative portrays three particularly troubling masculinities of Batswanan men. The first group consists of the young boys. I have just mentioned the young boy who is constantly trying to show Precious Ramotswe his penis, about which the woman pastor says, “Boys, men...They are all the same.”³⁴ Then we have two teenage boys who are working as apprentices in J.L.B. Matekoni’s garage. They are characterised, repeatedly, as gazing at girls, calling girls, and thinking of nothing else but girls. The younger one finally gets converted to Christianity and becomes better, although he seems to backslide. Charlie, the eldest apprentice, who seems to be more obsessed with girls, finally quits his job to start a cab service and its name is *The Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency Taxi Service*. He says it will specialize in carrying girls and making them feel safe. But given the narrative emphasis and how it underlines his obsession with girls, this is doubtful. The worst amongst the male characters is Note Mokoti, the violent young man that Precious married in her girlhood, whom I mentioned earlier.

Second, we have a group of ‘a very few good men.’ To be precise, I have encountered about five: Precious Mma Ramotswe’s father; Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, her second fiancé; the man who owned the butcher shop; the bus driver who married her barren cousin; and Mma Makhutsi’s fiancé. Unfortunately, the traits of these few good men are somewhat troubling. Precious Ramotswe’s father, although dedicated to his daughter and leaving his wealth to her, seemed to be the kind of man who had lost his life even while he was alive. Indeed, he raised cattle. But by and large he

³³ Ibid., 62.

³⁴ Ibid., 37.

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seemed to be waiting for death, by giving up his dreams and deferring them to his daughter, who is expected to start and run the retail business that he wanted to have. Notably, since his wife died when Precious was about three, he never married again or seemed to seek the company of any woman, nor to pursue his dreams.

Mr J.L.B. Matekoni is the epitome of a good man in the series. He is described as “a good natured and gracious of man,” who never lies. The narrative never ever refers to him with a first name. He is always Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, thus underlining that he is a gentleman. He is by far the most developed male character in the series. Professionally he is a mechanic, who fixes cars. He proposes marriage to Precious Ramotswe and at first she declines, but finally she agrees. We note thereafter that Mr J.L.B. Matekoni seems to be a confused man who needs to be convinced that he needs to buy his fiancée an engagement ring, much as he will be paralyzed about taking the first step towards arranging the wedding. Once convinced, he buys Precious Ramotswe a ring. In an amazing moment, Mrs Potokwane, the woman who was committed to raising orphaned children, forces him to adopt two children before he could formulate his decision and before he could inform his fiancée. Thereafter Mr J.L.B. Matekoni falls into unexplained deep depression. Fortunately he recovers and the doctor instructs that he should not be subjected to stress. Thereafter he again does not speak about the wedding, until Mrs Potokwane once again coaxes him. Consistent with his actions and his confused way of being unable to make key decisions for himself or to know what to do, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni’s IQ is not that high. As the narrative says, “Mr J.L.B. Matekoni was a very good man... He was just easy company. You could sit with Mr J.L.B. Matekoni for hours, during which he might say nothing very important, but what he said was never tedious.”³⁵ When he asks Precious Ramotswe to marry him she agrees, for “she realised that here was a man who was as good as her father, and they would be happy together.”³⁶ In short, the best of the very best are shown to be docile and below average thinkers, a portrayal eloquent in its simplicity.

Mr. Badule, a notable man who likewise falls under the category of a few good men, is the man who owns a butcher’s shop. He is described as a man of great integrity. He suspects that his wife is seeing someone else, using the money set aside to pay their son’s school fees. As it turns

³⁵ McCall Smith, *Tears of the Giraffe*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

out, his wife is indeed seeing someone else, and the son is not even Mr Badule's. This unique case of a cheating wife is used by Mma Ramotswe to underline the failure of husbands. As Mma Makhutsi exclaims, "Poor man. Poor man!" Mma Ramotswe adds a sentence that captures the series characterisation of Batswana men as oversexed by saying that "but remember, that for every cheating wife in Botswana, there are five hundred and fifty cheating husbands."³⁷ When quizzed about the source of her data, "Mma Ramotswe chuckled and said, "I made it up. But that does not stop it from being true."³⁸

Indeed the latter statement leads us to the third group of Batswanan men. As the statement highlights, it is by far the largest. It consists of wayward fathers and husbands. The very first case that Mma Ramotswe addresses concerns a husband and father who disappeared, leaving his wife with four kids. Another man, who possibly knew this story, appears and claims to be the father. The second case concerns Mrs Malatsi, who comes to the agency to report her missing husband. It turned out he was swallowed by a crocodile during a baptism service held at the dam. But surprise surprise! She receives the bad news calmly, commenting "that's much better than knowing he is in the arms of some other woman."³⁹ Of the many women who visit Mma Ramotswe's agency to complain about this and that, it is notable that Mma Ramotswe's first response is always to suspect a cheating husband. Indeed, many times women first seek her out because their husband comes smelling of an unfamiliar perfume; a husband does not ask his wife to fulfil his sexual needs; and other times it is stated that the man has sent his wife to stay in the village so he can see other women in the city. Some women, like Rose, Mma Ramotswe's house keeper, supposedly have four children fathered by four different men.⁴⁰ The story indeed comes close to home when Mma Makhutsi's date, from The Kalahari Typing School, turns out to be a married man. Well, there are many other examples I could name, but I believe I've made my point.

Perhaps, this portrayal of failed masculinities is driven by the desire to reverse roles, for the narrator tells us that "Mma Ramotswe knew that men were far from perfect—that many men were wicked and selfish

³⁷ Ibid., 133.

³⁸ Ibid., 133.

³⁹ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies*, 72.

⁴⁰ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies*, 134.

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and lazy and that they had, by and large, made rather a bad job running Africa...”⁴¹ save, of course, for a few good men, who, as we have already seen, are rather docile and of average if not below average intelligence. Thus the feminism constructed here does subscribe to what Gaytri Spivack has named as the discourse of “saving brown women from brown men,” which hardly succeeds from liberating them.⁴² This could be measured perhaps by asking: If African women were to run the African continent, would that result in liberating Africa from the structures that marginalize the continent from economic and political roles at a global level? The narrative seems less forthcoming, perhaps, for it simply shift the blame to African men. It’s doubtful whether African women who are constructed as fat are spared from the same ideology that informs the narrative characterisation of men. It is notable that the ending of the first volume seem to equate Precious Ramotswe with Africa. This final scene describes her fiancé, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni:

He looked at her in the darkness, at this woman who was everything to him—mother, Africa, wisdom, understanding good things to eat, pumpkins, chicken, the smell of sweet cattle breath, the white sky across the endless, endless bush, and the giraffe that cried, giving tears for women to daub their baskets; O Botswana, my country, my place.⁴³

She becomes Africa. She is the continent.

Yet a more critical response would be to ask: Does Precious Ramotswe offer a viable solution through her *Number 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* that seeks to solve the mysteries of people through peace and reconciliation, without necessarily seeking justice? Well, historically people could point at South Africa in response, as the novel itself does. But that is no comfort zone, for others will argue that the current South African liberation from the apartheid system has not empowered the most underprivileged groups. That is, black people still remain landless.⁴⁴ If

⁴¹ McCall Smith, *Tears of the Giraffe*, 117.

⁴² Gaytri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 90-104.

⁴³ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies’*, 235.

⁴⁴ Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Dealing Lightly with the Wound of my People: TRC Process in Theological Perspective,” *Missionalia* 25/3 (1997): 324-342, has written critically about the South African Peace and Reconciliation process as a

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Precious Ramotswe is Africa, indeed the continent itself, then her model, the ladies' detective agency that solves people's mysteries and reconciles them, still falls short, for the stories do not cease to underline that she is doing a great job but nonetheless is not making much money. Sometimes she does not charge people, sometimes she undercharges them, and at other times there are no customers. But she runs her business, which is more like a calling to unite and reconcile people than to make a profit. In Precious Ramotswe, then, the novel reduces continental troubles to the failings of African men, thereby eliding the colonial, neo-colonial, and globalization structures of exploitation and oppression. And worse, Precious Ramotswe as Africa in *The Number 1 Ladies Detective Agency* is serving the appetites of the Western colonial tastes and offers no liberation for the continent, for she is depicted as a puppet. Between Precious Ramotswe and Mma Makhutsi, her secretary, it would seem the latter offers a better model. She is a bright woman from a poor background, who continues to be sidelined because of her poverty and her color. But her approach brings her to the point where she excels in her own job: that is, she rises to associate detective, becomes an effective manager of J.L.B. Matekoni's garage when he became too depressed to work, and later begins her own profitable Kalahari Typing School for Men.

A major question remains: do McCall Smith's narratives take as hard a look at historical colonialism and its current manifestation as he does at African men, who are lauded with crowns for doing a bad job with Africa? I conclude by giving two pointers to this question. First, McCall Smith's narratives do not abstain from colonial language, its literary themes, nor its ideologies and framework. A good example is the narratives' constant flirtation with Botswana or Africa being an "empty place,"⁴⁵ one that stretches endlessly. Then of course the major literary characterisations of Africa as the Dark Continent, the heart of darkness and place of misery are repeatedly used. In this language one hears echoes of Joseph Conrad's title *The Heart of Darkness* and its contents, where it is said, "when I was growing up Africa was big empty place. I used to point at it and say, I want to go there."⁴⁶ *The Number 1 Ladies' Detective*

model that did not do justice to the black South African masses, who suffered the most from apartheid.

⁴⁵ McCall Smith, *The Number 1 Ladies'*, 123.

⁴⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Bantam Classic Books, 1981. First published in 1902).

Precious Ramotswe Meets Rahab for a Cup of Bush Tea

Agency narratives do not abstain from indulging in colonial ideologies to feed the appetites of its Western readers. I quote just one example of many peppered throughout the series. As Mma Ramotswe follows up on the missing child at a traditional doctor, who is still named according to colonial thinking as a “witch doctor,” and assuming that the boy has been killed she says, “This was evil incarnate, the heart of darkness, and the root of shame!”⁴⁷ Who is speaking here: Precious Ramotswe or McCall Smith through *The Number 1 Ladies Detective Agency*? Or the ghostly voices of colonial othering of the Other resurrected to serve many hungry Western readers? This tea session with Precious Ramotswe highlights that Alexander McCall Smith narratives should be read through Rahab’s prism.⁴⁸

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The African View of the Biblical Covenant

Temba L.J. Mafico¹

Abstract

To explain some obscure ancient biblical religious customs and rituals, western scholars often resort to a comparison of the Israelites and Bedouins who have retained their traditional customs from time immemorial. This being the case, it is amazing that western scholars have not seriously considered Africa's possible contribution to Israel's religio-culture, given the fact that some of the African ethnic groups, who may have been in contact with Israel in ancient times, have maintained their customs and religious traditions to this day. Some biblical texts seem to suggest that Africa impacted the religion of the Israelites during their long stay in Egypt. The references to Africa (Egypt) raises these questions. "What does the biblical text imply by saying that the Israelites multiplied and became a mighty nation while living in Africa? Why does the biblical text say that Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Jacob and Jesus visited or lived in Africa for a long time?" Questions such as these demand a systematic study of the Egyptian ethnic groups during the long Israelite sojourn in Africa. A cursory examination of some biblical texts suggests that Africans, and not only Arabs, occupied Egypt on many occasions. Therefore, a comparison of some of the African religio-cultural practices might disclose the possibility of African influence on the religion and culture of the Israelites.

The Covenant in the Ancient Near East

One aspect of the religion of Israel that eludes scholars' notice is that the Israelites worshiped Yahweh out of obligation because he was their provider, protector and, particularly, because he made a covenant with them. In other words, without the covenant, the Israelites would have

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chosen to worship one of the other gods ('*elohim*) available to them. As an African scholar, I am interested in the covenant idea because its role among the Israelites is similar to the role that covenant played and continues to play among the Ndaus, an African tribe living in both Zimbabwe and Mozambique.² Here, I examine the similarities of the Ndaus' and the Israelite covenants in three stages. First, I summarize the making of a covenant in the ancient Near East, focusing on the Hittite grant texts. Second, I demonstrate that the Abrahamic grant covenant was formulated in accordance with the Hittite grant formula, but with unique features necessitated by the Israelites' faith in Yahweh. Third and finally, I compare the Israelite and Ndaus covenant idea and suggest that the African concept of the covenant might explain the peculiarities of the Israelite grant, a divine covenant conveyed in perpetuity. To substantiate this hypothesis, this article focuses on the covenant idea in ancient Israel and traditional Africa. A more detailed discussion will appear in a forthcoming book tentatively titled: "The Old Testament and African Tradition."

Some of the many documents that have been excavated in Syria-Palestine,³ the land of Hatti (land of the Hittites),⁴ Assyria,⁵ and Babylon,⁶ record the various covenants that were made both between the kings and their subjects (the vassals) and between strong kings who made parity treaties with each other. Among these covenants was a special grant that the king made with a favored subject. It was granted because the subject merited it; but it could also be given to the favored subject gratuitously. For example, the royal grant was a transaction in which a party (hereafter

² The Ndaus people live in Gazaland, a territory that is sliced in half by the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Gazaland was founded by the Zulu people, who migrated from Natal in South Africa.

³ For example, "The grant of Abba-an of Yamhad to Yarimlin of *alalah*": published by D. J. Wiseman, *JCS* 12 (1958), pp. 124ff. I have found a paper by R. E. Friedman, "Treaty and Grant," Jan. 1973, most useful in this section, especially its references and bibliography.

⁴ For example, "The grant of Tudhaliyas IV to Ulmi-Teshub of Dattasa"; in D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), pp. 183ff.

⁵ For example, the grant of Ashurbanipal to Baltia, translated and quoted in part by Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant..." 1961, 15:13-17.

⁶ Portions cited from Weinfeld from L. W. King, *Babylonian Boundary Stones*, 1912.

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called the donor, and normally a suzerain), gave a free gift of property or ruling authority to a weaker party, hereafter called a recipient (and generally a vassal). As a transaction, the royal grant is of particular interest; its nature in some ways explains the Israelite purpose for adopting the Yahwistic religion. The covenant was Israel's means of feeling secure living under the protection of a strong and trusted deity. They needed this protection because they were faced with the world in which, like their neighboring nations, they felt insecure because threatened by deities who were contending with each other and demanding human or national allegiance.⁷ There are other fascinating facets of the covenant idea that deserve our attention, but space allows us to focus only on the divine grant Yahweh gave to Abraham, and its implication for the understanding of the history and religion of Israel. It is this aspect of the covenant that I examine here to show how it shaped the religion of Israel and how it compares with the making of a covenant in African tradition. To achieve our objective, it is important first to outline the steps in the making of a Hittite covenant.

Form of the Covenant in the Ancient Near East

The royal grant that was in use among the Hittites in the second and first millennium in the ancient Near East had six steps: the preamble, the historical prologue, the stipulations, blessings and curses, the depositing of the document in the sanctuary, and the summoning of the witnesses.⁸ Normally, the final act was the sacrificing of an animal and eating it communally.

Preamble

The preamble served as the step in which the donor introduced his name and title. This step is consistent in all covenants, but it is more prominent in the vassal treaty.⁹

⁷ A careful analysis of the *Odyssey* of Homer shows many parallels between the Israelites' choice of Yahweh as their God while the temptation to worship Baal or the other gods of the other nations remained.

⁸ The Israelite (Sinai) covenant is similar to the Abrahamic covenant. The Davidic covenant is also related in the same way as the Abrahamic covenant. Cf. 2 Sam 7:1-16.

⁹ It is difficult to assess the extent to which the preamble was essential because the beginning (and end) part of a tablet is oftentimes broken off. For example, the

Historical Prologue

Based on current evidence, scholars do not have enough information to identify definitively the function of the historical prologue. Amnon Altman suggests, based on available extant texts, that the prologue functioned as the donor's way of presenting legal arguments that justified the imposition of obligations on the other party, usually the vassal.¹⁰ He further shows that the prologue was also found in documents such as "edicts issued by the suzerain to a subordinate party.... It was designed to address the gods that were summoned to serve as witnesses to the treaty and the oaths during the ceremony at the conclusion of the treaty, and who were believed to function in the capacity of supreme tribunal, should the inferior party violate the treaty."¹¹

The example normally cited to support this argument is that of Abba-AN, king of Yamhad, who made a grant to Yarimlin. The prologue here reflects a situation in which the grant of Alalah is made to replace Yarimlin's city of Iriddi, which Abba-AN had recently destroyed in a local rebellion.¹² In this treaty the subject of the prologue is Abba-AN speaking to Yarimlin.

Altman adds that in the historical prologue the donor describes the past relationship between him and the recipient.¹³ The nature of the prologue depended on the purpose for which the royal grant was being

grant attributed to Tudhaliyas IV is missing the opening lines, and the name of the donor is not mentioned in the body of the document. The donor is most likely to have been Hattusilis III.

¹⁰ Amnon Altman in an article "The Role of the Historical Prologue" in the Hittite Vassal Treaties: An Early Experiment in Securing Treaty Compliance," *Journal of the History of International Law* 6:43–64, 2004. Based on the way Yahweh introduced himself in the covenants that he made with the Israelites, our view on the function of the preamble is different as will be shown below.

¹¹ Ibid., 45.

¹² AT 456, lines 13–39. See D.J. Wiseman, "Abban and Alalah", *JCS* 12 (1958), 124–129

¹³ Ibid., 45.

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made. If the grant was merited by the recipient, the historical prologue explained it. Moshe Weinfeld gives an example of this treaty in which the recipient, by his conduct towards the donor, deserved the grant in the form of a conveyance in perpetuity.¹⁴

Stipulations

The content of an ordinary grant given to a vassal and a special grant given to a privileged person was determined by the type of stipulations which would be made in the document. To a privileged recipient, the stipulations were given in the vassal's favor. They had a special feature; namely, conveyance in perpetuity.¹⁵ In this case, the recipient had shown outstanding loyalty through his past actions and the suzerain consequently rewarded him with a tangible show of trust. The donor (suzerain) declared the grant to be a permanent possession of the recipient. A grant that was conveyed in perpetuity was an unconditional covenant that implied that whatever the recipient did after receiving the grant did not matter. Once the grant was given it became irrevocable.¹⁶ The term "conveyance in perpetuity" means that the grant was laid before the recipient to accept or reject, to act in accordance to the stipulations or not; but the donor would not revoke it. Therefore, the privileged recipient had the stipulations written in his favor and not in the donor's favor.¹⁷

A grant to an ordinary recipient, however, came with stipulations, which were typically written solely to benefit the donor. The grant could be forfeited in the event of betrayal by the recipient. A good example, again taken from Abba-AN's stipulations on the grant of Alalah that he made to Yarimlin, stated: "If in days to come Yarimlin sins against Abba-AN, (if) he repeats anything Abba-AN says to him and reveals (it) to

¹⁴ Cited in Moshe Weinfeld's book *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 185.

¹⁵ Yahweh's covenant to David in 2 Sam 7:1-16. Verse 16 states it succinctly: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." This is clearly a covenant granted in perpetuity because it is not conditional on Israel's obedience to Yahweh.

¹⁶ Israel's nationalism in First Isaiah's time was based on the belief that God would always honor his covenant conveyed in perpetuity to David in 2 Sam 7:1-16.

¹⁷ In a sequel to this article, more examples of these types of grants will be given and fully discussed as we continue to do some research on Africa's possibly contribution to the religio-culture of the Israelites.

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another king, if he lets go of the hem of Abba-AN's robe and takes hold of another king's robe, he (shall forfeit) his cities and territories."¹⁸

Grant Deposited in the Sanctuary

The provision for the grant document was that it should be placed in the sanctuary. This step was taken so that the gods who could see everything that the donor and recipient were doing following the acceptance of the grant would monitor the covenant and hold accountable the party that breached the covenant. The Ndaou have a saying: "*Mwari unoon*" (God sees).

Witnesses

Following the grant's deposit in the sanctuary, both divine and human witnesses were called, and typically included cosmic entities like the heavens and the earth.¹⁹

Blessings and Curses

The last step in the making of a covenant was the pronouncement of blessings and curses. These typically took two forms: (a) cursed would be "anyone who takes anything from Ulmi-Teshub or from his descendants, or who violates his borders, (or) breaks this treaty, may the gods of the oaths destroy him and his descendants because of his iniquity;"²⁰ (b) alternatively, the donor might direct the curse at himself in the event of violation of the grant that he himself granted to the recipient. Thus, Abba-AN stated: "(May I be cursed) if I take back what I gave you."²¹ The blessings-and-curses part of the grant was formulated in such a way that it protected the interests of the recipient, both from outside interference and also from betrayal within the grant community.

¹⁸ Altman, Amnon, "The Role of the Historical Prologue" in "*The Hittite Vassal Treaties: An Early Experiment in Securing Treaty Compliance*," *Journal of the History of International Law* 6:43–64, 2004.

¹⁹ Tudhaliyas to Ulmi-Teshub, beginning reading from line 48.

²⁰ See Amnon Altman's article, "The Role of the "Historical Prologue," lines 42-57.

²¹ *Ibid.*, line 44 following Weinfeld's translation.

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The Swearing of an Oath

To finalize the oath, the donor made an oath to uphold the grant. Abba-AN's oath to Yarimlin is a good example. He made an oath to Yarimlin to honor the grant, and as a sign of that oath he cut the neck of a lamb. The donor then specified the granted territories, naming all the boundaries. In another example, Tudhaliyas stated: "The country I have given thee, Ulmi-Teshub, the boundaries I have set for thee, keep them, do not cross them. The boundaries are as follows...."²² Then followed a detailed list of boundaries. To legitimize the grant, the suzerain went further than he would have gone regarding an ordinary grant. In a conveyance-in-perpetuity grant, the donor engaged in an adoption procedure, as was done by Abba-AN who adopted Yarimlin. In like manner, Hattusilis I adopted Labarna, declaring, "Behold, I declared for you the young Labarna: He shall sit on the throne, I the King, called him my son;²³ he is for you the offspring of my Sun."²⁴

Structural Parallels between the Israelite and Hittite Covenants

The Hittite grant structure is very much reflected in the accounts of the Abrahamic covenant, revealing that Israel was well connected politically, socially, and religiously to the ancient world of the second and first millennia. In making the grant with Abraham, God began with a preamble, as is clear in Genesis 15:7 where the J text states: "I am Yahweh..." In Genesis 17:1, the Priestly source writes: "I am El Shaddai...."²⁵ The historical prologue in the Abrahamic covenant makes Abraham the privileged recipient. The text reports Abraham's record of loyalty to God as we read in Gen 15:6: "And he (Abraham) believed the

²² Weinfeld, citing F. Sommer-A. Falkenstein, *Die Lethitischakkadische Bilingure des Hattusili I (Labarna II) Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil. hist. Abt. N.F. 1b, 1938.

²³ Cf. 2 Sam 7:12-15 where Yahweh declares to David that his offspring will be Ywhweh's son and in turn, Yahweh will be his father.

²⁴ Weinfeld, *Ibid.*

²⁵ There are several questions that are sparked by God's name El Shaddai. Is he one of the many gods: *El Elyon*, *El Olam*, *El Bethel*, etc.? If the assumption is that if there was only one God, then there would have been no need for a grant treaty binding Abraham to El Shaddai.

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Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Even though the beginning of the text in verse 7 is a little confusing by implying that the covenant made was ordinary and not privileged, verse 6 counteracts this implication.²⁶ The privileged recipient grant between Tudhaliyas IV to Ulmi-Teshub had a similar prologue and yet it was given to a privileged vassal.

The Priestly account of the divine grant to Abraham in Gen 17 has no historical prologue. It therefore sheds no light about the status of Abraham and why he deserved the grant. We can infer that it was the same type of grant given in Gen 15 because in Gen 26:5 we hear God telling Isaac that the grant of progeny and land was given “because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” Moreover, in Gen 22 God repeated the promise of progeny for Abraham following Abraham’s act of loyalty in obeying Yahweh and not withholding his only son.

By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son,¹⁷ I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies,¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice. Gen 22:16-18

Therefore, Abraham is a privileged grant recipient and the grant is in the form of a conveyance in perpetuity.

The stipulations of the Abrahamic covenant consisted of the Promised Land, but later on the gift of innumerable progeny was added to the gift of the land (v. 18; cf. also v. 7). The grant is guaranteed by an eternal promise as contained in Gen 17:7: “I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.”²⁷ This is

²⁶ Cf. David Noel Freedman, “Divine Commitment and Human Obligation,” *Interpretation*, XVII (1964): 419-431.

²⁷ 2 In Samuel 7:12-15 we read: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14. I will be a

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reaffirmed in v. 19. That the covenant is forever is repeated in Psalm 105:8, 9:

He is mindful of his *covenant forever*,
of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,
⁹ the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
¹⁰ which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as *an everlasting covenant*,
¹¹ saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance.

In the Abrahamic covenant, the witnesses as well as the blessings and curses are missing. The fact that the former are theological documents whereas the latter are political texts explains this difference between the Abrahamic covenant and the ancient Near Eastern grants. In the Abrahamic grant, Yahweh himself is party to the grant. A covenant between God and humans did not need to be deposited in the temple nor did it require to be publicly read. The word of God was to be trusted because God was not accountable to anyone else. For the Hittite covenant, the possession of the document by the recipient was important because it protected the recipient from retraction of the grant after the death of the suzerain. In the divine grant, all this was not necessary because God does not die. In the Israelite covenant, however, the document was unnecessary because the Israelites had already demonstrated their loyalty and their previous actions had proven them to be trustworthy. However, several times Yahweh has established a sign that would remind him of the covenant he had made.²⁸ This need also explains why some covenants Yahweh made with the Israelites called for witnesses.²⁹ In some of the ancient Near Eastern royal grants, the blessings and curses were directed either against the suzerain himself or against those who might interfere

father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. 15. But I will not take my steadfast love from him..."

²⁸ In Genesis 9:14-15, Yahweh made a covenant with Noah and said, "When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will *remember* my covenant that is between me and you..."

²⁹ In Deut 30:10 God calls on heaven and earth to witness against his people, Israel.

with the recipient. But since Yahweh served as the sovereign, it would be ridiculous for him to direct curses and blessings against himself in the form of sanctions. As for interference by a third party, it is pointless to suggest this for the divine power can prevent it from happening.

When we come to the oath, we realize that in the ancient Near Eastern royal grants, it was the suzerain who swore the oath rather than the vassal. We have also noted the special arrangement in the Abba-AN grant whereby the vassal provided a lamb whose neck was cut to finalize the oath ceremony. Similarly, in Gen 15, Abraham provided animals and prepared them. The divine promise was made as the blazing torch passed between the halves of the sacrificed animals. The sacrifices, the holding of the torch, and the association with a furnace or stove are all characteristic elements of oath ceremonies in the Surpu documents.³⁰ In Genesis 15 nothing is said about Yahweh swearing an oath, but this tradition is repeated often in several other sources (Gen 26:11; Deut 1:35; 7:8, 12; 10:11; 11:9; 28:11; 34:4).

In the Abrahamic covenant, we have specifications of granted territories found in Gen 15:18-21 stipulating the extent of the land as stretching “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.” This is followed by a list of various peoples occupying the territory to be given to Abraham’s descendants. Gen 17:8 states in a more general way that Abraham would occupy “all the land of Canaan.”

Now we turn to the greatly discussed covenant between Yahweh and Israel in the light of ancient Near Eastern suzerain treaties.³¹ Since the appearance of Law and Covenant in Israel and the Near East, the discovery of the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon have widened the base of comparison of ancient Near East sources to include Neo-Assyrian documents. This brings the dates of treaty materials down into the first millennium. This late date is important because it justifies the inclusion of the Deuteronomic Covenant of the Plains of Moab in the covenant picture.³²

³⁰ Cf. Weinfeld, citing E. Reiner, “Surpu,” *AFO Beiheft* II (1956). Weinfeld regards this ceremony as containing an element of self-curse; but the possibility of a divine self-curse is extremely difficult to accept in the absence of any clear statement of such in the ceremony.

³¹ G.E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (The Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

³² Cf. Weinfeld (note 36); Mendenhall, *Ibid.*, reading from page 30, for an analysis of the differences between the Hittite and the Neo-Assyrian treaty forms. See also

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The Old Testament and African religio-tradition have many striking similarities as regards holding to tradition, the concepts of land and of marriage, and belief in ancestors, among many others. As I have written about these similarities at length in several other publications³³, in this article I limit myself to the similarities regarding the covenant idea as it relates to the African and the Israelite traditions.

The Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants depict Yahweh making a covenant with humans; that is, the covenants are made between two unequal parties. Whereas in the ancient Near Eastern treaties a vassal might become strong enough to conquer the suzerain, this is not possible with respect to Yahweh in the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. In other words, God grants these covenants based on sheer grace and not as an obligation to Abraham or to the Israelites. The Israelites were aware of Yahweh's gracious act and in Psalm 8 made it plain that as creator of the universe, Yahweh was more than gracious to regard humankind as his most significant creation. Thus, they sang:

O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (*Ps 8:1*)

...

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,

D.J. McCarthy, *Ibid.*, 96-106; he points out that while the two groups of documents are not formally identical, they are basically the same.

³³ Mafico, T. "The Divine Name Yahweh Elohim and Israel's Polytheism," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*, Vol.22/1(1996): 1-18; "God's New Name Yahweh Elohim and the Unification of Israel: A Challenge to African-Americans," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. 23/1(1995): 49-69; "Were the 'Judges' of Israel Like the African Spirit Mediums?" *Text and Experience: Toward a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible*, ed. D. Smith-Christopher (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 330-343. "The Divine Name Yahweh Elohim from an African Perspective," in *Reading From This Place: Social Local and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspectives*, eds. F.S. Segovia & M.A. Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 21-32; "Parallels Between Jewish and African Religio-cultural Lives," *Christian-Jewish Relations in Ecumenical Perspectives*, (WCC, 1978), 36-47. Also, published in French as: "Le Cadre Culturel de la Bible et la Société Africaine," *Service International de Documentation Judeo-Chrétienne*, No. 2 (1978), 9-15.

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mortals^{34a} that you care for them? (*Ps 8:3-4*)

This Psalm, among many similar texts, shows that Yahweh gave a grant to the Israelites whom he created but made just a little less than God. This made the Israelites feel that he had elected or favored them and freely gave them the land, not because they merited it, but simply because he chose to do so. All that the Israelites were expected or required to do was to respond in gratitude to Yahweh, not only for what he promised to do in the future, but for the many things he had already done and was still doing for them. The Exodus event marked the climax of Yahweh's graciousness to the Israelites and this graciousness was based on *hesed*. Yahweh's *hesed* was intended to induce obedience and loyalty on the part of the Israelites. These aspects of the covenant distinguish the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants from those of the ancient Near Eastern nations.

The study of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants shows that the Israelites must have borrowed the idea and structure of the covenant from the nations of the ancient Near East. But is that assumption the end of research on the covenant?

The African Perspective of the Israelite Covenant

While western scholarship assumes that the Israelites borrowed the covenant idea from their northern neighbors, which is hard to deny, it can also be argued that the impact of African culture on Israelite religious and cultural institutions has been overlooked by biblical scholars. While in the past biblical scholars were only aware of the history and religions of the ancient Near East, and compared Israelite religio-cultural practices only on the extant texts of the ancient Near East, the time has come to pay attention to the African contribution to the research. As an African scholar who was born and raised in a rustic environment like that of ancient Israel, my view is that the biblical text gives hints in various ways to how the African tradition has had an impact on the religion of Israel. It could be argued that this contribution made the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants unique as regards the covenants of the ancient nations of the Near East. The major difference between the western and African studies of the covenant that I am proposing is this: whereas westerners analyze original

³⁴ Heb *ben adam*, lit. *son of man*.

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ancient written covenants and compare them to the Israelite covenants, Africans rely on oral tradition and observation of covenant traditions still practiced in rural areas of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Of course, African scholars are now collecting and writing down these oral traditions to make them available to global scholarship.

The Ndaou people practiced covenant ideas although they did not follow any discernible steps. However, research shows that the function of the covenant was the same for the Israelites as it was for the Ndaou religious tradition. It therefore behooves the researchers of the religion and history of Israel to scrutinize the possible contribution of Africa to the Israelites' other religious institutions.

Back when I was researching the Hebrew root *spt* and its cognates for my Ph.D. dissertation, it became clear to me that the Israelites recognized Yahweh as their patron deity who also played the role of an earthly king.³⁵ In that position, the Israelites regarded Yahweh (not to be confused with Elohim) as a human being with human characteristics like theirs. Thus, in Gen 3 we read about Adam and Eve hiding from Yahweh behind the bushes in the Garden of Eden:

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)

The J source is anthropomorphic to underscore the fact that early in their religious beliefs the Israelites regarded Yahweh as the supreme human being living among them. As such, he was limited like humans and did not know that Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit. He did not even hear the conversation between the snake and the women. Yahweh was a deity who not omniscient and omnipresent, although he might have been omnipotent. Thus, like a human being, Yahweh had to seek Adam and Eve because they had hidden from him by calling: "Where are you?" [Adam] said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden..." This conversation clearly relates to humans conversing with one another. Both Yahweh and humans

³⁵ Cf. the Israelites' affirmation in Isaiah 33:22: "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us."

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were limited in their knowledge and had to enquire in order to know.³⁶

There is a similarity between the Israelites and the African view of creation. The Ndaus traditional belief is that their supreme king was and is still the creator of humans. The current king of the Ndaus, who is from a long genealogy, still bears the title *Musikavanhu*, "Creator of Humans." Thus, the idea of God becoming human and living among humans, as we read in John 1:14, is not new to Africans. There are African mythological stories that relate that God lived among humans in the beginning of creation. That the African and Israelite concept of God was similar explains why their early religion as attested in the Bible is similar. Did the Israelites come into contact with the Africans in Egypt prior to the expansion of the Sahara desert? My initial research on this subject suggests that this might be the case although more research remains to be done.

Because of their theological similarities, God's stipulations in the covenant with Abraham are not much different from the African view of their covenantal relationship with God. The Ndaus felt an obligation to *Mwari Musiki* (God the Creator) who was at the head of their tribal circle. He was the god who provided them everything that they needed. Even though there is no record of them making a formal covenant, the Africans were quite aware that *Mwari* expected them to abide by certain rules and regulations to maintain good relationship with him and avoid his wrath and punishment. What was remarkable with Ndaus was that God was regarded as an equal player in a virtual covenant relationship. A human being could challenge God if he felt that God had punished him wrongfully or excessively.³⁷ It could be argued, then, that the Ndaus believed in a sort of parity covenant with God. For creating them and giving them the land, the Africans felt obligated to feed God with sacrifices and shower him with praises. But they also expected that God would, in return, honor his side of the bargain by continuing to protect them against the elements, give them a good harvest, and maintain their health. When rain stopped falling,

³⁶ Cf. Gen 11 where Yahweh, even though he was in heaven, was still limited by his human form. He had to call an entourage to go down and inspect what the people were doing in building the Tower of Babel. The same investigatory behavior is repeated in Gen 18. Yahweh, accompanied by two other human-like divinities visited Abraham, ate food, and then Yahweh disclosed that he was on his way to investigate the severity of the behavior of the people of Sodom. (Gen 18:19-25).

³⁷ Cf. Cain complained to Yahweh saying: "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" (Gen 4:13).

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or when it fell so amply that it flooded the land and destroyed the crops, the Ndaus would ask the *svikiro*, “the medium” who could communicate with God directly, to enquire what “statute” they might have breached.³⁸ Rallying behind their king as a tribe, the Ndaus would endeavor to correct the wrong. This would be followed by offering sacrifices accompanied by singing and dancing to celebrate their reconciliation with God.

It could also be argued that for obvious reasons the Ndaus did not have steps in the making of covenant with God. After all, they knew who *Mwari* was and what he had bound himself to do for them. Intuitively, they also knew their obligation to maintain the covenant relationship with *Mwari*.

There were other covenants that the Ndaus made with one another. When a young man and woman fell in love but did not intend to marry immediately, they made a covenant with each other symbolized by the exchange of some articles, much as westerners do with engagement rings. The woman might give the man her favorite thing like a voile, and the man might give her his handkerchief, pocket knife, or arrow. This gift exchange served as a *chigondiso*, “a covenant of commitment.” Should the relationship be broken unilaterally or mutually, the exchanged articles were to be returned to symbolize the couple’s disengagement from each other, lest either party use the *chigondiso* to harm the other following the breakup.³⁹ A close biblical analogy of the lovers’ covenant is the covenant between David and Jonathan, which we read about in 1 Sam 18:3-4 as follows:

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

Julius Wellhausen found Arabian analogies that seemed to suggest the understanding that the clothes and other personal objects that a person used in everyday living were imbued with the living substance of their

³⁸ Saul went to the medium (*svikiro*) of Endor to call back the spirit of Samuel in the face of a military campaign against the Philistines. The *svikiro* did and this is what she reported: “I see a divine being (or gods) coming up out of the ground.” (1 Sam 28:13).

³⁹ Cf. Execration texts in James Pritchard, *ANET*, 328-329 and Jer 19:10-11.

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owner. Therefore, the personalities of the two of them fused with one another. That is what happened to David and Jonathan.⁴⁰ By accepting the clothes and weapons of Jonathan, David attached his essence to the person of Jonathan and each became like the other (יש נדב).

The non-aggression treaty that Laban and Jacob made with one another (Gen 31:43-54) is analogous to the parity treaty among the kings of the ancient Near East. A brief examination of the text of the treaty between Jacob and Laban reveals several aspects common to various agreements made by the African people. Laban said to Jacob:

Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me.”⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar.⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, “Gather stones,” and they took stones, and made a heap;...Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” ...he said, “The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. ...though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me.” ... May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor”—the God of their father—judge between us.” So, Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac,⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country.

The first aspect common to agreements is the belief that stones could be called upon to act as witnesses represents the African view of natural phenomena. We have already seen that any so-called inanimate thing Africans considered a living “being.” It was living by itself or it was living because it was inhabited or possessed by the divinities. Thus, when one walked a distance of five or six miles, one might pass several places that were sacred: wells, trees, rock formations, hills, mountains, and pools

⁴⁰ J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*² Heft (1927); *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten, Series 3*. Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1887.

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in the river. The belief that the earth was flourishing with the spirits explains why people poured libations on the ground all the while invoking the spirits to partake of the drink, food, conversation, or ceremony. It is this same belief that made Laban call upon the gods of his ancestors to guard the covenant since he and Jacob would be far away from the heap of rocks and from each other. Though the covenant was not written down, it was enacted and solemnized by the invocation of the gods. It was, therefore, deposited in the sanctuary, i.e., the heap of rocks over which the gods watched.

The second concept common to agreements that Africans make, a concept that typically eludes western scholars, is the concept of *pars pro toto*. *Pars pro toto* is a deep belief that a person is more than just the body. Anything about a person such as their name, hair, shadow, blood, tooth, and so on, can stand for the actual person in Nda tradition. Therefore, by touching the stones as they were bringing them and by stepping around the heap of these stones, Jacob, Laban, and their kinsfolk were ever present and united at the site of the covenant. If either Laban or Jacob should try to move against another, as soon as they remembered the heap of stones, not only would they remember the covenant, they would also be seeing themselves in the covenant-witnesses of stones. That realization is also reinforced by the presence of the patron divinities who not only witnessed the establishment of the covenant, but also acted as arbiters with the power to inflict punishment on the offending party.

African agreements were always solemnized over a banquet. An animal was slaughtered and it became the center piece of the big meal. Every person partook of the meal to show solidarity of purpose and of relationship. The same practice was employed at the conclusion of the Laban-David covenant. "Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country." (Gen 31:54)

The covenant had the power to change a bellicose situation into *shalom*, "peace." It turned Laban's hot pursuit of Jacob and the resultant argument with each other into a banquet that apparently lasted all night. A covenant fused two contentious parties into one whole. It was like an exchange of personalities where Jacob became Laban and vice versa.

Conclusion

The discussion on the covenant leads us to this conclusion: The difference between the African and ancient Near Eastern covenants is that the latter were written down and may be studied based on extant ancient texts while the African covenants and cultural norms were and are still being passed on from generation to generation by oral tradition and practice. In the tribal and rural areas of any African country, ancient tradition still holds: very little has changed. Life is still lived according to the happy tradition of and with the ancestors. The discussion on the covenant consolidates the argument that while textual evidence corroborates that the Israelites borrowed the covenant idea from the people who lived to the north of them, western scholarship should now turn its focus on the oral tradition of the African people who lived and still live to the south of Israel and decide how or whether Africa had any impact on Israelite religious beliefs and cultural norms. When researching on ancient Israelite customs, western scholars often refer to Bedouins and certain traditional Arab ethnic groups' customs and compare them with those of the Israelites. In my research, I have not found serious consideration of Africa's role in Israel's religion. We should ponder the question: "What does the biblical text intend to communicate by saying that the Israelites multiplied and became a mighty nation in Africa?" I have not found any systematic study of Egyptian ethnic groups during the long span of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt.

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Ancient African Insights about Creation and Nature which Relate to Modern Physics: Augustine and Dionysius of Alexandria

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Pre-modern insights about the cosmos do not typically have much credibility in the academy, and yet historians are aware that the atomic theory is ancient.¹ Several other modern theories of physics also have ancient precedents, and they may offer us valuable and intellectually attractive insights about the doctrine of Creation and for dealing with our present ecological challenges. The insights of Augustine and Dionysius of Alexandria, two ancient North African thinkers, are, I suggest, particularly pertinent. Of course Augustine's reflections on creation and nature have received much attention, most recently from Rowan Williams, E. P. Meijering, Richard Sorabji, and Jaroslav Pelikan.² But these scholars do not engage this Church Father in dialogue with modern physics and ecological concerns. Likewise, though there has been relatively little attention given to Dionysius, I suggest in this article that there is in fact much to glean from study of his work.

Careful text study of Dionysius' *On Nature, Against Sabellius*, and other epistles as well as a rich mix from the Augustinian corpus including *City of God*, his commentaries on Genesis, and *The Confessions*, reveal that there is more to the thought of these Fathers on Creation than their reliance on Greek philosophy and its dualism. Both offer surprisingly modern-sounding observations about God's relationship to nature. In accord with modern physics, they not only affirm atomic theory, they also suggest what it is that holds the cosmos together. Both identify this reality as God. Both view God as that which binds nature together, and is part of the cosmos and yet transcends it. Dionysius even construes God in this capacity as energy. (Later in this article I consider connections between this line of thinking and both the Big Bang theory and the Higgs boson theory.) For Dionysius as well as for Augustine, creation is rooted in a reality which selflessly gives itself away to all realities of the cosmos for the good of the whole. Both also seem to posit something like the survival of the fittest, again for the good of the whole.

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Given this collective construal of nature and their views of sin, both Augustine and Dionysius have ways of depicting how nature is affected by human wrong-doing, depictions that help us understand what is going wrong with nature today. Dionysius' concept of sin as being oriented towards the belly which clouds reason and Augustine's idea of sin as concupiscence together suggest that our selfishness alters the other-directed symmetry of the created order. Both African Fathers agree that even though creation may have been more than the sum of its parts before the Fall, it was nonetheless not the greatest of all realities. For our sinful quest for self-fulfillment leads to an infatuation with just a part of creation, not with the whole. This idea of sin as disregard for nature's balance and the equal importance of all its elements may be a valuable insight for understanding the dynamics involved in the ecological crisis. Augustine's idea that as a result of the Fall God began to rule by means of ranks and differences among creatures and Dionysius' claim that our sin leaves us ignorant of where the world is heading and subject to evil may also illuminate the consequences of our sinful condition on nature. In addition, in examining the interplay of God's actions and human activity in the thought of Augustine and Dionysius, we gain insight into how they viewed God's role in natural events. And given the convergence of such ideas with those of modern physics, contemporary theologians interested in dialogue with the sciences may yet find value in them. We turn first to the analysis of relevant texts, beginning in chronological order with the more well-known positions of Augustine.

Augustine on Creation and Nature

When engaging in apologetics or dialoguing with the Manichees, Augustine relies on Neo-Platonic conceptions to construe the created order. In *On Free Will* he contends that all created things owe their existence to the form in which they were created. And every corporeal form derives its existence from the supreme form, which is truth, or God.³ Even later in his career, Augustine echoes these Platonic commitments in *City of God*, contending that every corporeal object has a form. Participation in the form entails that the object participates in something that belongs to the ideal world. And the One Who created matter and is supreme in the ideal world is God.⁴ Platonic construals emerge again in Augustine's reflections on Creation in his *Confessions* as he considers the

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need for matter to have forms, though he insists that these forms were themselves created.⁵

Most suggestive of cutting-edge scientific insights are Augustine's reflections on how creation transpired. In the *City of God* he contends that it is silly for critics to imagine time before creation when God was active, for there was no such thing as time before the universe was made. Elsewhere he claims that the universe was not created in time, but with time.⁶

The *Confessions* also include the African Father's reflections on creation's relation to time from God's eternal perspective. He begins that discussion by noting that the heavens and earth must have been made, for they change. And they must have been made by God because God is good, which entails that they are good. Because God is beautiful, the heavens and earth are beautiful (Ps 27:4; Zech 9:17). Compared to God, though, they are not good and beautiful.⁷ Though not coeternal with God, the heavens partake in His eternity, and that is why their creation is not mentioned in the enumeration of the days in Genesis, he contends.⁸

In eternity, he adds, nothing passes, but all is present.⁹ Time and the universe began together, so there was no time when God was not creating, for there was not time before creation.¹⁰ The implication is that God is still creating.

Such insights have implications for how God creates. They mean that before all times God is Creator, for nothing is hidden to eternal knowledge. It is like when a canticle is sung: nothing is unknown to the singer, both what has been sung and what remains to be sung.¹¹ In eternity God is Creator, for He knows all time like a singer who knows a song in its entirety.

Augustine deals with the problem of the length of creation with apologetics in view in his *On Genesis Literally Interpreted*. He claims that since God's creative act is single and simultaneous (in establishing eternal patterns of created realities, rather like Platonic forms), the six days of the Genesis accounts might (but do not necessarily have to) be construed as articulating accurate categories for our mind. Augustine also interprets the light God created as the divine likeness of intellection. Thus, since God illumines us by working through our intelligence, creation was present in that sense as continuous (Ps.104). However, all that can be known (like the Greek universal forms) already exists. Thus, creation is in that sense complete, created all at once simultaneously like a tree is created all at once in its seed. God's creative and illuminating light is both sequential

and simultaneous, much like new days happen on earth (the sun rises), and yet day and night occur simultaneously all over the earth once and for all. In his *City of God*, Augustine makes a related affirmation about God's continuing work in creation through natural means by referring to God as a fountain from which all blessings flow and of His creative energies without which no earthly goods can be generated.¹²

Convergences with Post-Einsteinian Ontology

Many of Augustine's reflections on the topics of creation, time, and eternity have striking similarities to how Einstein and Darwin understood such realities. For example, Augustine claimed that atoms cannot keep themselves together, and that God therefore must bring them together through His Providence.¹³ When we combine this insight with Augustine's claim that God is like an infinite sea and creation, a sponge penetrated by the sea, then similarities to quantum physics (even the Higgs Boson theory) become clear. This theory posits that when particles enter a molasses-like field, the particles stick together and acquire mass. This field is said to be invisible – and so has been referred to as the “God-Particle.”¹⁴ Relevant here is Augustine's image of the sponge that, when thrown into the sea fills with ocean water, much like God's ubiquity.¹⁵ The African Father's claim that God brings the various atoms together entails that God function like the elementary Higgs Boson particle, being *in* them yet transcending them, like water is in the sponge but is infinitely greater than the sponge.

Augustine also offers remarks reminiscent of Einstein's view of time. He contends in his *Confessions* that because the created realities can change from one form to another, they may be put in motion and so experience the vicissitudes of time. Anticipating Einstein's insight, Augustine claims that time is not yet absolute, but only came into existence with creation. Augustine adds to this that all temporal realities must die if the beauty of their temporal sequence is to be preserved.¹⁶ This death does not contradict the goodness of creation. In a comment with rich constructive implications for our post-Darwinian world, Augustine claims that part of the harmonious beauty that God has established in the universe is by means of the principle of “survival of the fittest.”¹⁷

Augustine's observations converge with the theory of relativity insofar as they both presuppose that time is related to motion. His vision of eternity—that in it nothing passes but all is present—is also in line with

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the theory of relativity's idea that at the speed of light there is no time.¹⁸ The African Father's concept of God being ever at rest yet always working is most consistent with his concept of eternity (regarded as the speed of light), a reality in which all events are simultaneous.¹⁹ It is evident how much Augustine's view of Creation and nature converges with core insights of modern quantum physics.

Dionysius on Creation and Nature

Much like his younger episcopal colleague Augustine, Dionysius affirms what we know as atomic theory, but dialogues with it in a critical way. In line with Augustine's thinking, he notes that atomic theory entails no need for a creator. Yet he insists that a creator is mandated, just as a cloak cannot be made without a weaver and as a house does not spontaneously arrange its stones without a builder or architect.²⁰ There is no way to account for the movement of the heavenly bodies without some captain or director, he contends. He regards the universe and its components as a vast circular choir.²¹ Much as individual members of the choir relinquish their autonomy for the good of the whole, so Dionysius posits that the atoms are brought together by God Who is energy. The African Bishop also rebuts those who claim that matter was not created, but merely arranged and regulated by God, insisting that matter is generated (created) by God.²²

By implication Dionysius offers very modern-sounding insights about how God created and regulates matter, or gets the atoms to function as a choir. He speaks of God as impassable, immutable, and energetic.²³

The idea of God as energy is most suggestive of the insights of the Big Bang theory, which posits that the energy from the Big Bang continues to expand. This energy creates magnetic fields. Physicist Peter Higgs has theorized that there is a field in which all the particles that enter acquire mass.²⁴ Energy is what creates or holds together matter as we know it. Dionysius' vision of God as energy seems to reflect this. No less than Augustine, Dionysius of Alexandria has much to say about Creation and nature that relates to modern physics.

Nature Since the Fall: Common Themes and Ecological Implications

Given this collective construal of nature along with common views of sin, both Augustine and Dionysius have ways of depicting how

nature is impacted by human wrong-doing, images to help us understand what is going wrong with nature today. Both Dionysius' concept of sin as being oriented towards the belly which darkens reason and Augustine's idea of sin as concupiscence suggest that our selfishness alters the other-directed symmetry of the created order.²⁵ Both these African Fathers agree that before the Fall, creation may have been more than the sum of its parts, and yet it is still not the greatest of realities. But our sinful quest for self-fulfillment leads to an infatuation with just a part of creation, not with the whole. This idea of sin as disregard for nature's balance and the equal importance of all its elements may be a valuable insight for understanding the dynamics involved in the ecological crisis. Augustine's idea that as a result of the Fall God began to rule by means of ranks and differences among creatures, and Dionysius' claim that our sin leaves us ignorant of where the world is heading and subject to evil, may also illuminate the consequences on nature of our sinful condition.²⁶

Reviewing in closing the interplay of God's actions and human activity in the thought of Augustine and Dionysius helps us understand how these two scholars understood God's role in natural events, an issue which is very important for comprehending ecology and our responsibilities for it. Both men at times assert a strong doctrine of Providence.²⁷ Both also essentially assert that although God causes something to happen, it does not follow that there is no power in the human will. But our will does what God wanted it to do.²⁸ This orientation follows quite logically from their respective efforts to talk about the relationship between God and the cosmos: God is like the ocean that has its way with the sponge and yet it is the sponge that does the floating. Similarly, we can do nothing without energy, though it is we who act on the energy. Given these modern-sounding, fertile perspectives, and in view of these Fathers' convergence with modern quantum physics, these insights may be worth pursuing by contemporary theologians interested in dialogue with the sciences.

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2. Rowan Williams, "Creation," in Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 251-254; Rowan Williams, "'Good For Nothing'? Augustine On Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 9-24; Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1983); E. P. Meijering, *Augustin über Schöpfung, Ewigkeit und Zeit: Das Elfte buch der Bekenntnis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of St. Augustine* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1986). Also worth further consideration is Jared Ortiz, *"You Made Us for Yourself": Creation in St. Augustine's Confessions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, forthcoming).

3. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* (387/388-395), II.xvii.46; II.xviii.49; II.xv.39; II.xiii.36/ *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol.6, ed. J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 164, 166, 159-160, 193.

4. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* (413-426), XI.26/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 220.

5. Augustine, *The Confessions* (399), XII.III.3; XII.XII.15; XII.XV.19; XII.XXIX.40/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.1, 176, 179, 180, 188.

6. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XI.5-6/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 207; cf. *Ibid.*, XII.15/ 235-236; Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* (c.399/415), V.5.12.

7. Augustine, *The Confessions* (399), XI.IV.6; XIII.XX.28/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.1, 165,199.

8. *Ibid.*, XII.IX.9/ 178.

9. *Ibid.*, XI.X.12; XI.XII.14; XI.XIII.16/ 167,168; cf. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of St. John* (c.406/421), XXI.5/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.7, 190.

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10. Augustine, *The Confessions*, X.XIII.15-16; XI.XXX.40/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.1, 167-168,174.

11. Ibid., XI.XXX.40/ 174-175.

12. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXII.24/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.2, 502; Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* (c.399/415), I.17.32-35; IV.27.44ff. (esp.30.47); V.23. 44-45; *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. J. E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990), 1/12:183-184, 267ff., 299-300. See Augustine, *The Confessions*, XII.2.2ff.; XII.12.15/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.1, 176ff., 179, for the point about how Augustine envisages God establishing patterns of created realities, like the forms. Also see Augustine, *On the Trinity* (c.410), III.9/16/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3, 62.

13. Augustine, *Epistles* (410), IV.31/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, 449.

14. Brian Greene, *The Hidden Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 79, 63, 48; cf. Cynthia Crysdale and Neil Ormerod, *Creator God: Evolving World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 67. Modern string theory also posits a reality which transcends our perceived realities, leaving space for God.

15. Augustine, *The Confessions*, VII.V.7; IV.XI.18/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, 104-105,74; Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of St. John* ((c.406/421), II/10/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.716-17.

16. Augustine, *The Confessions*, XII.XII.15/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, 179; *Ibid.*, XI.XXX.40, 174; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XI.6/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 208; Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* (387/388-395), II.xvi.42/ *Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. 6, 196-197; Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* (393/394; 426/27), 3.8/ *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 1/13:117-118; Augustine, *De Genesis adversus Manichaeos* (388/389), 1.2.3./ *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 1/13:40-41; Augustine, *De Genesis*

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ad litteram (c.399/415), V.5.12/ *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 1/13:282; cf. Albert Einstein, "Letter to W. DeSitter," March 25, 1917.

17. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XII.4/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 228.

18. Augustine, *The Confessions*, XI.XI.13/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, 167; cf. Albert Einstein, "Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper," *Analnen der Physik* (1905): 891-921.

19. Augustine, *The Confessions*, XIII.37.52/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, 207; cf. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XII.7/10/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3, 159.

20. Dionysius, *Libris de Natura*, I,IIA,III/ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.6, 85, 87.

21. *Ibid.*, III/ 88.

22. Dionysius, *Libris Adversus Sabellium* (n.d.)/ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, 91.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Greene, 18-19 ,38-41, 48-50, 63-64.

25. Dionysius, *Exegetical Fragments* (n.d.), I.II.14/ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, 113; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XIV.15-16/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 275-276; Augustine, *De perfectione iustitiae hominis* (4150, XIII.31/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 5, 45.

26. Dionysius, *Exegetical Fragments* (n.d.), I.II.14-16/ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, 113; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XIX.11,13-17/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 407, 409-413.

27. Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptism parvulorum* (411), II.32/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series,

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Vol. 5, 57; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, III.4/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 228; cf. Dionysius, *Epistolae* (n.d.), XI.3/ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, 107.

28. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, V.9.10/ *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, 92; cf. Dionysius, *Exegetical Fragments* (n.d.), II48/ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, 117.

Doctor of Ministry Education: Becoming Transformed in the Middle of the Leadership Journey

Marsha Snulligan Haney¹

Introduction

This essay explores two significant expressions of what it means to engage the process of “becoming transformed” in the middle of a theological journey aimed at educating an advanced leader at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. The first expression of such transformation learning occurs at the institutional programmatic level, and the second at the personal level of the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) learner. For persons involved in D.Min. teaching and learning, assessing and planning according to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) standards, the academic journey toward offering and obtaining the D.Min. degree is a challenging one. Advancing the practice of ministry through leadership education at the D.Min. level rather than the more familiar Ph.D. requirements, is but one of the many challenges facing US theological education today. Institutions unable to meet those challenges then fail to produce the leaders necessary to help congregations, denominations, and community agencies thrive.

By calling attention to the metaphor ‘middle of the journey’, this article references two analytical perspectives on the leadership journey in doctor of ministry education at ITC. The first is as an HBCU institution of higher learning that recently celebrated fifty years of existence. The recent anniversary served as a “Sankofa” moment, an occasion not only to look back and reflect on the rich heritage of a unique project of ecumenism, but

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also to give attention to shaping the next fifty years. The second perspective of concern is that of the contemporary D.Min. learner at our institution, whose chronological ages fall between 40 and 58 years of age. These learners are keenly aware both vocationally and epistemologically of where they are situated in life as leaders. In interviews, they often express that the D.Min. educational process occurs in the middle of or at an influential place in their professional journey as religious leaders. As a result of attending to the visions, aspirations, and perspectives of both ITC's institutional stakeholders as well as of students, past and current, we have not only revised the curriculum and restructured the delivery system, but also renewed our interest in learning from persons with expertise in ministry and from faculty who represent ITC's concerns for a rigorous and high quality D.Min. education. By the latter, I mean an education that is vocationally, theologically, and spiritually meaningful, socially relevant, and that is the result of a liberating and transforming spirituality.

What follows is a description of the newly reframed D.Min. program at ITC that will be launched in the fall 2016 semester. The reframed doctor of ministry program is the result of engaging a four pronged methodology: of being attentive to the wisdom shared by many, such as President Wheeler's wisdom in the lead article of this journal issue; of listening to the concerns and needs articulated by the ITC community in general, and by the student and faculty stakeholders in particular; of incorporating the concerns of the ITC faculty for an academically rigorous D.Min. program; and of mining the existing rich resources of the ITC legacy in theological education.

Becoming Transformed: The Institution

The newly revised mission statement reminds us that "ITC is a Christian Africentric ecumenical consortium of seminaries and fellowships that educates students who commit to practicing justice and peace through a liberating and transforming spirituality to become leaders in the church, and local and global communities." Its mission is "to be the preeminent world center for Africentric theological engagement developing leaders to advance God's mission of love, justice and restoration in the world." As the ITC community of students, faculty, deans, staff, and administrators has discovered, the reality of reframing a D.Min. program, one capable of responding positively to the growing challenges of experienced pastoral and busy ministry leaders who seek a

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relevant and accessible theological education is an academically exhilarating and challenging task. The fact that ITC's twenty-year old D.Min. curriculum was antiquated and in need of improvement was most obvious to stakeholders, especially the students, and some faculty who taught in the program. What D.Min. learners desired was an adult-friendly, rigorous, and flexible interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary core curriculum for advanced ministry leaders that was common to all D.Min. students, as well as the space for a specialty curriculum.

In recent years, students have assessed the core D.Min. curriculum as 'good' but out of sync with their needs in terms of course offerings, and not conducive to learning given their growing responsibilities and what is expected of them as ministers. These assessments had to do both with the ordering of courses and with the requirement that students attend monthly courses on campus; the latter caused undue burdens (in terms of transportation costs, time, and energy), especially for those students who were not regional and had to fly in monthly to attend campus based courses. In addition, in a world in which technology enables advanced education online, ITC's D.Min. program had not yet incorporated elements of distance learning, such as the on-line Moodle software, in any significant way. And finally, although the D.Min. program had in place a three-track educational cohort model for (1) chaplaincy, (2) pastoral care specialty, and (3) church and ministry leaders, only the third was viable, dynamic, and attracting students. In 2011, in consultation with the D.Min.committee the director of the program began to articulate the need for change within the curriculum, and the need to broaden the outreach and impact of the program. Alums of the ITC D.Min. program provided valuable input, as did faculty, administrators, denominational deans, and students. A carefully revised job description for a new director of the program was crafted in 2012 by an appointed search committee, which, on the retirement of the existing director, subsequently initiated the search process resulting in the hiring of a new director of the program in 2013. At the end of the fall semester, one of the most significant and fruitful activities was the visit by a consultant expert in D.Min. education who advised administrators, faculty, and members of the D.Min. committee (a governing body) to articulate a new vision for their program, and who

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identified elements of a process that would enable ITC to reframe and revise its current organizational structure and curriculum.²

The processes of assessing and planning that led to ITC's reaffirmation of accreditation (December 2015) enabled the leaders of the D.Min. program to acknowledge not only areas of strengths and future growth possibilities, but also areas where improvement was needed, including better curriculum assessment measures and the means of evaluating them. As a result of engaging in an intentional season of observing and participating, teaching and learning, consulting and researching, reflecting and discerning, in the fall of 2016 we launched our reframed D. Min. program. The fact that this occurred as we observed the 50th anniversary of the ITC speaks to the words of the title of this essay and references the metaphor of "middle of the leadership journey." Three goals emerged as program student learning outcomes (PSLO) for the newly reframed program.

PSLO 1 *Connecting Theology, Education, and Professional Vocation*

Students will enhance existential and theoretical knowledge related to the practices of ministry in order to address significant issues related to their professional vocation.

PSLO 2 *Intrapersonal and Intercultural Leadership*

Students will demonstrate and discuss examples of ministry related to their comprehension and analysis of both intrapersonal and intercultural competencies required to serve as religious leaders in a variety of vocational and professional settings.

PSLO 3 *Integration and Application*

² Dr. J. T. Roberson provided invaluable knowledge and insight as he prepared and presented the ITC faculty and staff with a new vision of possibilities for doctor of ministry education in December 2013. Because several of the ITC faculty had either served as mentoring faculty in the D.Min. program when he served as the dean of the Doctoral Studies at United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, or were graduates of the D. Min program under his leadership, he is acknowledged as a respected administrator and theological educator within D.Min. education. He was assisted by Dr. Constance Chamblee. They both played an important role as educators in the 2014 annual D.Min. conference as well.

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Students will conduct original qualitative and/or quantitative research projects appropriate to their area of concentration and report effectively their professional practice that gives evidence of the both intra-disciplinary and interdisciplinary generativity in the practice of ministry for church, society, and global community.

The entire ITC D.Min. process is organized to prepare students to defend a ‘Replicable Model in Ministry’ dissertation project. The preferred research method is applied research, the development of an action-based research-in-ministry project based on situated learning. Action Research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. The dissertation projects are generative in the sense of promoting dialogue about what constitutes a learning community that seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, the church (local, national, and global) and the world community, including the African Diaspora.

The goal of the D.Min. Program at ITC is to attract, support, educate, and nurture women and men in leadership in Christ’s Church and the world who require professional education beyond the level of the M.Div. and who are capable of fulfilling the mission of the institution. Students who graduate from our D.Min. program will (1) demonstrate a deeper passion for God in relation to the practice of a liberating and transforming spirituality; (2) demonstrate the ability to apply intercultural skills required to serve as a religious leaders in a variety of vocational and profession settings; and (3) will conduct an original dissertation project as a study of action-based research that offers them professional development and results in a publishable article that can instruct others in the church and the academy. Working individually and in cohorts (learning communities) with faculty, mentors, peers, and community leaders, students will be provided with a supportive and caring community, a time for spiritual renewal, and an opportunity to study and learn globally within a specific context of the African Diaspora.

In an effort to improve the overall D.Min. program it was determined that we should suspend the admission of students during the 2015-2016 academic year. This gave us concentrated time to transform the D.Min. program’s structure and curriculum, and to develop a high quality attractive academic professional program for busy working church and

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community leaders. At the May 2015 retreat, faculty identified aspects of teaching and student formation that they desired to be addressed within the revised D.Min. program. These suggestions were analyzed and discussed during the following months by the D.Min. committee and other stakeholders. At the January 2016 D.Min. committee meeting, ideas and suggestions received from all stakeholders were discussed and insight provided, including the recommendation to reduce the number of Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLO). Since then, monthly meetings with the new fall 2016 mentoring faculty members continue to aid in refining the curriculum and programmatic processes.

While many impactful discussions were held, one of the most insightful discussions occurred around the concept of “re-disciplining”—meaning the ability (and willingness) of seasoned faculty members to “re-discipline” or re-organize and re-communicate one’s discipline to demonstrate it as a vibrant, coherent, and interesting field of study that is capable of shaping a response to the kinds of questions, assumptions, and research that are relevant to the practice of ministry. We have discovered the need to provide contextual opportunities for religious and community leaders to engage one another as leaders, to focus on specific skills sets within the cohorts as intentional learning communities, and the need to retain artifacts in e-folios. As we continue the assessment and planning process, we are discerning how best to energize and equip students as change agents, catalyst who are able to move outside the bounds of their immediate needs and job descriptions in order to make a lasting impact in the community and the world. Strategically, in addition to attracting pastors, church and educational ministry leaders, denominational executives, and military chaplains, we desire to broaden our marketing and recruitment efforts in order to attract leaders involved in social justice and peace-making vocations. Internally, we recognize the need for more collaboration and communication with every office within the institution. Externally, we want to help the public/ church to understand the skills that D.Min. graduates can expect to obtain and therefore our confidence in the ability of our ITC graduates to successfully implement projects of transformation, projects that will bring about deep change at both the personal and organizational or systems levels.

Becoming Transformed: The D.Min. Learner

Becoming Transformed in the Middle of the Leadership Journey

As previously mentioned, the title of this essay, “Becoming Transformed in the Middle of the Leadership Journey” refers not only to the transformational journey of a theological education program, but also to the transformational journey of the subjects of Doctor of Ministry education, that is the students, the D.Min. learners. Contrary to the popular myth that D.Min. applicants are only interested in obtaining the title of “Dr.” for self-aggrandizement purposes, at ITC we have found that the overwhelming majority of applicants are intentional about engaging in academic studies again (a reference to the first M.Div. degree required for admission into D.Min. program), and look forward to the intellectual challenge. Because of the D.Min. admissions requirement of “proven ministry experience,” rarely is the motivation to obtain the degree prompted by ecclesiological purposes related to ordination, or increase in salary. Instead, D.Min. learners tend to be self-motivated individuals and are primarily interested in developing a ministry (congregational, denominational or non-profit) strategy; assessing a community need; or researching a new ministry approach. In other case, the motivation is personal, sometimes the result of being in a difficult place in the practice of ministry and wishing to learn or enhance a particular ministry skill in one’s own situation. By choosing to advance their education at ITC, whether African American or not, D.Min. learners recognize and appreciate the Christian values and beliefs that place the African American worldview, experience, and practice of ministry at the core and not at the periphery of theological education and academic study.

Today’s theological leaders that apply to ITC’s D.Min. program tend to be older, second- and sometimes third-career persons. Psychologically these students are different from the previous generation in that they are smarter, but also more impatient. They can multi-task, have various levels of computer literacy, but have a shorter attention spans. They know what they want, and they want to choose the kind of D.Min. education they can buy. Not all were brought up in the church, but all have had a significant religious or spiritual experience. Financially, the younger D.Min. learners are better off than their parent’s generation, and they tend to have more debt, especially in the form of student loans. With a few exceptions, the older applicants to the D.Min. program are at a good place economically and psychologically. Family oriented, many find themselves responsible not only for their children (and/or grandchildren), but also for aging parents. As the enrollment of women in our program continues to increase, so too does our knowledge of how these women impact and are

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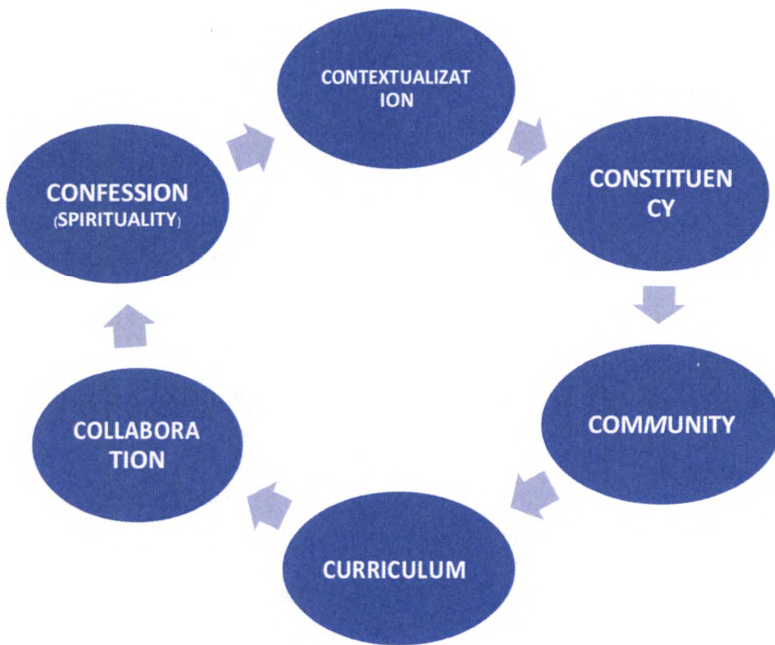
impacted by leadership both within and beyond traditional church practices. They all articulate the desire to become more proficient in the ministries in which they are currently involved.

When asked about their expectations or vision of D.Min. education, what applicants most often articulate is this: they want to belong to a teaching institution that respects them as adults, acknowledges multiple forms of intelligence, and broadens and deepens their current leadership skills. Related to the internal life of the church, applicants want to learn how to address systemic changes, transform conflict, deal with congregational diversity, and create healthy congregations. Related to the external life of the church, they want to know how to organize neighborhoods for change; to address community issues as a public leader; and how to work with diverse cultures. As D.Min. learners, students want to utilize technology to enhance and make education flexible; and they want faculty that will support their learning with resources, persons, and tools based on best practices. According to the students currently enrolled in ITC's D.Min. program, these are the processes and precepts that are necessary in order to "become transformed while they are in the middle of their leadership journey."

Reframing D.Min. Theological Education at ITC

The revised D.Min. program implemented in the fall 2016 academic year is the outcome and by-product of the intentional guided and critical thinking and re-shaping of program learning outcomes, a restructuring of the academic semester, and a forensic examination of the curriculum. Stakeholders, represented by various focus groups, contributed to an understanding of six important considerations necessary to revising or reframing an educational program.

Figure 1: Significant Components of Urban Theological Education



As the only SACOC and ATS accredited theological institution actually located in urban Atlanta, we identified six important factors that have proved to be beneficial to assess and evaluate the D. Min. academic theological program.³

³ See *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry*, by Eldin Villafane, Bruce Jackson, Robert Evans, and Alice Frazier Evans. Although this work was originally presented as categories utilized in the academic sub-

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Over a four year period, the D.Min.staff and committee discerned best instructional practices, strategies, and a structure to provide D.Min. students with the understanding, knowledge, and skills that will enable them to provide meaningful public leadership to predominantly African American churches, social agencies, and community-based institutions that are facing complex challenges in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious neighborhoods, as well as in the global community. The incorporation into the program of intercultural competence was originally developed in an effort to bring balance to the current emphasis on intracultural competence. However, in light of the growing need and the number of societal issues that impact or influence ministry practice, issues such as hate crimes and racism, terrorism, immigration, homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, cultural appropriation, and others, we recognize that intercultural competence, specifically focused on the ability to improve effective and appropriate communications with people of other cultures and religions, has emerged as an important skill to develop, not only within US urban communities, but throughout the world. The practice of listening enabled us to hear these crucial ten concerns:

That we

- (1) Include experts (pastors, educators, community leaders, and others) as mentors to work with faculty to empower learners by providing the tools to understand the D.Min. experiences, and to improve and document effective practices
- (2) Become andragogy-centered, willing to explore who D.Min. advanced learners are, what they know, and what they still need to know in order to become proficient in ministry. It is the role of the mentoring faculty to connect important information to the content of the curriculum and best ministry practices and thus pass it along to students⁴

discipline of urban missiology, because of its commitment to people, the categories speak to key phenomena impacting both intercultural and interfaith competences.

⁴ *Facilitating Learning with the Adult Brain in Mind* by Kathleen Taylor and Catherine Marienau (2016) affirms ITC's current curricula emphasis on narratives, story-telling and story-sharing. The authors challenge long-held assumptions that logical, rational thought is the preeminent approach to knowing by showing that feelings and emotions are essential for meaningful learning to occur in the embodied brain.

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- (3) Develop and broaden educational opportunities to collaborate with local, public, and global partners, organizations, and educational institutions that are important to learning
- (4) Design new cohorts based on the needs of advanced learners in conjunction with denominational and societal needs
- (5) Develop a high quality and distinctive D.Min. instructional faculty that supports the curriculum. These efforts will allow us to better support the current students, attract new students, and mature with them for the years to come as their professional needs change
- (6) Intentionally seek the active support and participation of the current denominational deans and the ecumenical fellowship coordinator, and new ecclesiological partners (such as the Lutheran Center, the Seventh Day Adventist Church) in meaningful ways and at various levels
- (7) Design the directed studies course as either the opportunity to complete a portion of the intellectual work necessary for their dissertation project, to engage a body of literature, to conceptualize an idea, or to place a practice of ministry in conversation with an academic discipline. In addition, develop a culture that encourages D.Min. students to serve as teaching and/or administrative assistants
- (8) Incorporate ‘Situated Learning,’ a general theory of knowledge acquisition applied to contextually-based learning activities focused on problem-solving skills^s
- (9) Teach mixed research methodologies as necessary knowledge. Because leadership is complex, often it is better to use several research and analysis methods including narrative inquiry, ethnography, case studies, surveys, and other participatory methodologies

The insight gained from attending to the six dynamic concerns of urban theological education described above helped to increase our listening

^s Considered as types of applied research, both Situated Learning and ‘Action-based Research’, are valued as a process of inquiry that prove most insightful when utilized *by* and *for* those taking the action. Learners will examine problem solving approaches in collaboration with the mentoring faculty, peer cohorts, and other leaders, learners as they seek to address effectively and holistically research questions.

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ability, and to broaden the understanding and value not only of the program but of the future D.Min. graduate. As listeners entrusted to make a difference, we clarified the role of the staff, committee, and curriculum members in helping to equip the D.Min. learner to become a leader who is able to impact the whole human and the whole human community (persons, systems, and organizations) for transformation.

Confession (Spirituality)

Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry identifies confession (spirituality) as one of six significant factors shaping urban theological education. Given the uniqueness of ITC, it is important to give attention to spirituality and how it impacts the D.Min. program. Spirituality is often described as a universal human experience related to the search for meaning in life and that includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves. Christina Puchalski, M.D., Director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health, contends that "spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred."⁶

At the ITC, Black theology, womanist theology, and Africentric expressions such as Sankofa⁷ are all helpful in understanding the Christian spirituality that undergirds the formation of the D. Min. program. Because spirituality speaks to the personal, communal, and social dimensions of a religious journey, the following are writings by former presidents of the ITC which provide invaluable insight into ITC's spirituality as viewed through an Africentric Christian perspective.: *Walk Together Children: The Story of the Birth and Growth of the Interdenominational Theological Center* (Harry V. Richardson); *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (J. Deotis Roberts); and *Africentric Approaches to Christian Ministry: Strengthening Urban Communities* (editors, Ronald E.

⁶ Pulchaski, C., Ferrell, B., Virani, R., Otis-Green, S., et al. (2009) Improving the quality of spiritual care as a dimension of palliative care: The report of the consensus conference. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 12:886-904.

⁷ As the Sankofian wisdom helps to address the issue of the hermeneutical dilemma, the QEP office at ITC has encouraged the development of a D.Min. dissertation project indicator that identifies this distinction.

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Peters and Marsha Snulligan Haney). Among the significant writings by past and current faculty that help inform this perspective on Africentric spirituality are *Black Biblical Studies* (Charles Copher), *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Jacqueline Grant); *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith through an Africentric Lens* (Gayraud Wilmore); and *Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary US Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation* (Randall Bailey). In addition, the ancestral spirits of former D.Min. faculty members who have taught and helped shape the D. Min. program in the past, such as the late Dr. Ndugu T'Ofori-Atta and Dr. Michael Dash, are not forgotten and continue to nurture staff. Retired elders, such as Dr. Steve Rasor and Dr. Love Henry Whelchel, continue to influence the program through their presence and readings. Current faculty continues to speak life into the program by nurturing a spirituality that affirms the *imago Dei*, the image of God within the African American or Black experience.

Yet the spirituality that undergirds the D.Min. program is perhaps best summarized in the following affirmations of Christian belief, practice, and lifestyle.

- ▶ D.Min. education at ITC is a prophetic voice concerned about the well-being of the entire community, male and female, adults and children
- ▶ D.Min. methodologies at ITC attempt to help faith communities see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the community
- ▶ ITC's D.Min. educational goal is to challenges all oppressive forces impeding the struggle for survival and for the development of a positive and productive quality of life conducive to personal and communal freedom and well-being
- ▶ ITC's D.Min. theology opposes all oppression based on ethnicity [race], sex, class, sexual preference, physical ability, age, religion, and immigration status.

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These unique affirmations are at the core of womanist theology and are adopted from it.⁸ They are evident throughout the D.Min. program in various forms, and ultimately celebrate and affirm the rich distinctives of ITC's theological and ecclesiastical history. Christian womanists, theologians, and scholars reminded us: of the centrality of the Incarnation; of the sacredness of the ministry context as the subject, not object; to value relations (personal, congregational, community, denominational, academic and public) and partnerships; to respect the image of God in each person and to form moral character; the importance of sacred space; and the sinfulness both of intellectual imperialism and of the failure to recognize the limits of knowledge.⁹ In terms of the Bible, womanist methodologies and approaches embrace biblical exegesis that both reclaim and critically evaluate; that are multi-dialogical, relational, liturgical, didactic; and that are use reason, imagery, and metaphorical language. Within the D.Min. program, spirituality takes place not only during the appointed worship hours, but is reflected creatively within each cohort as a learning community, and even within the development of original scholarship that identifies indispensable knowledge related to the learner's practice of ministry, and that links the past, and the present, and the future.

⁸ The roots of modern theological Womanism grew out of the theology of James Hal Cone, Katie G. Cannon, Jacquelyn Grant, and Delores Williams. Cone developed black theology, which sought to make sense out of theology through black experience in America. In his book *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone argued that "God is Black" in an effort to demonstrate that God identifies with oppressed black Americans. Subsequently Grant, a first generation womanist theologian, argued that Cone did not attend to the fullness of black experience – specifically that of black women. In 1982 Grant wrote, "Black theology cannot continue to treat Black women as if they were invisible creatures who are on the outside looking into the Black experience, the Black church, and the Black theological enterprise. It will have to deal with women as integral parts of the whole community." Her identification of these two realities, that Black male theology and white feminist theology have ignored the realities of Black women's lives, resounded with the life experiences of women of the African diaspora and others worldwide.

⁹ *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society (Religion, Race, and Ethnicity)* by Stacey Floyd-Thomas (NYU Press, 2006) speaks to issues such as the sacredness of ministry contexts, the value of relationships, and respect for humanity. Notions such as intellectual imperialism inspire institutional reflection and advocacy.

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The Revised D.Min. Academic Delivery System

The revised two-year D.Min. degree curriculum consists of a total of thirty credit hours that can be earned by active participation in required seminars and related monthly cohort online discussions and resources offered each semester; one required core course titled *The Black Church, and Ethical Teachings*; an intercultural leadership dialogue practicum; a directed study elective, and a year-long dissertation writing course. For church and ministry leaders who desire an alternative academic experience, a one-year professional leadership certificate program is offered that consists primarily of the same first year course offerings of the D.Min. degree program without the second year devoted to researching and writing the dissertation project.

According to *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*,¹⁰ the challenge of educating ordained religious leaders (Jewish, and Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians) consists of attending to (1) pedagogies of interpretation of sacred scripture; (2) pedagogies of formation, that help students in the formation of their personal identity, dispositions, and values;; (3) pedagogies of contextualization, that help to provide understanding of the complex social, political, personal, religious, and cultural conditions that surround and impact them and their ministry; and (4) pedagogies of performance, that help students to acquire the skills of preacher, counselor, worship leader, community advocate, and other roles through which they exercise their pastoral and ministerial responsibilities. Throughout our curriculum, we seek to attend to these functions, identifying andragogy as a transactional process of adult learning, and have made four key observations. The process is challenging us to make sure the encounter between mentoring faculty, adult learner, the content or subject matter, and the ministry context an active, challenging, collaborative, critically reflective, and transforming one. Our curriculum is concerned with learning with and from ministry leaders and practices in various cultural, religious, and worldwide contexts. It is undergirded by an educational philosophy that emphasizes epistemological assumptions, an adult

¹⁰ A good resource for understanding the distinct challenges of educating priest, pastors and rabbis, communal and classroom pedagogies are discussed in detail. *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, by Charles R. Foster and others (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

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education model, problem based learning, collaborative peer support, and does so in ways that are clearly connected to ITC's mission statement.

The cohort learning communities identified to initiate the newly reframed D.Min. program in fall 2016 are three. The first cohort is titled *Leadership of the Church, Disconnected Youth and Public Response*. Cohort members will explore and critically examine the nature, purposes, and challenges of ministry with Black youth and young adults in light of developmental stage theory, differences between the millennial and post-millennial generations, ethnic-cultural and religious realities, climates of relational dissonance, and young people's increasing disconnection from organized religion. Analysis and dialogical interaction will build on outcomes of studies on disconnected young people in general and disconnected Black youth and young adults in particular and what these data suggest for ministry. Cohort members will be expected to assess as well as propose ministry models and pedagogical practices that address real life stories and issues of young people appearing in research and in their congregations/communities. Attention will also be given to storytelling and story-linking around cohort members' own experiences of adolescence and young adulthood compared with today's young people as a basis for assessing their own attitudes, interests, and preparation for engagement and ministry with and on behalf of young people. Participant observations at selected ministry sites will provide experiential bases for course deliberations.

A second D.Min. cohort will study *The Black Church: Social and Environmental Justice and Public Policy*. It is designed to help contemporary church leaders hone their professional skills (cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual) for leading the church in addressing social justice issues in a postmodern world. In no age can a Christian in good conscience avoid the following three classical Niebuhrian ethical questions when facing a social justice crisis: a) "What is going on?" b) "What is God doing in response to what is going on?" and c) "What ought to be my response?" Given the complex realities facing Christian leaders today, Black leaders in particular by virtue of their experiences collectively and individually must hear these questions anew as they forge prophetic and liturgical responses to structures of injustice. We expect these questions to help D.Min. learners as they frame and respond faithfully to current social justice issues concerning race, class, gender, environmentalism, and immigration. How the following ethical resources and methods can be utilized to engaged social injustice in an effort to

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respond to current challenges will also be investigated: a) the Bible-centered ethical resource tradition, both Old and New Testament teachings; b) the civil religion-centered ethical resource tradition, primarily encompassing the nation's founding documents of social and political justice; and c) the black American ethical resource tradition, primarily embracing both black folkloric and non-folkloric Christian and humanistic sources.

The third cohort, that concerned with *Pastoral Professionalism and Spiritual Care*, is designed for persons who aspire to professional competency in pastoral, parish, institutional, and/or non-traditional ministry. Faculty will facilitate students' reflection upon sustaining modalities of pastoral presence and self-care and will help them identify and develop inter-/intrapersonal tools, resources, and equipment needed by caring professionals. With such training, we expect that students as caregivers, whose practices are informed by holistic, growth-oriented, theo-psycho-social theory and pastoral care skills that facilitate relational healing, under the consultation of professionals in the field will be better equipped to help care-seekers.

The Revised D.Min. Academic Structure

To improve program and student learning outcomes, the D.Min. academic structure was also revised. Central is now the Intensive Week of instruction, which begins each semester and is followed by monthly online teaching and learning sessions. The model, introduced at the 2016 Annual Doctor of Ministry Conference in March, embodies ITC's commitment to a "liberating and transforming spirituality" from a holistic and global perspective, and was well received as creative, relevant, and informative.

Because of the unique words, terms, and phrases used to describe the primary curricular and co-curricular experiences, I provide a brief glossary.

1. **"Reasoning."** In contemporary Caribbean folk culture, the term "reasoning" is used to describe any form of *intellectual interaction*. Reasoning sessions provide a space for reflection, formation, and sharing of best practices, through concrete examples of how we can enhance our ability to become better agents of God's transforming presence in the world for justice and

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peace. These sessions are facilitated by various D.Min. mentoring faculty and guests lecturers, depending on the curriculum.

2. "Mbongi." *Mbongi* (pronounced Bone-gee) is a Congolese word that means "the learning circle." "At the end of the day...people would come to discuss, to make music, to confront problems, and to touch the world of spirit. This creates community. *Mbongi* tends to reduce social strata, promote unguarded interaction, and inspire respect and joy." The goal is to create learning circles (student cohorts) that function as "*learning circles*."¹¹
3. "Balm yard." Throughout the African Diaspora (and especially in Jamaica), the "*Balm yard*" is a location where healing rituals are practiced to retain humanity. In the context of the D.Min. program, it refers to scheduled and intentional worship experiences that include worship with the ITC community, within individual cohorts, personally, and as the D.Min. program community.
4. "Yeonguja ui cham-yeo" (연구자 의 참여). "*Yeonguja ui cham-yeo*" in the Korean language means "*Engagement of the Researcher*." We offer various workshops focused on the student as researcher and writer, in order to help them improve their research and writing skills.
5. "The Provost's Hour: Rivers, Roads, Railroads, Rhythms and Rhetoric." Within the African American historical journey in the United States, these eclectic images are dynamic reminders of the various ways in which people have sought "liberating and transforming lives." This session, facilitated by the Provost of ITC, is dedicated to promoting lively learning and creative and

¹¹ See "Mbongi" by Christopher Hedge and Titos Sompá at <http://www.christopherhedge.com/mbongi/> While this reference is taken from there, the academic discussion is best presented in K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *Mbongi: An African Traditional Political Institution* (Berlin: Afrikan Djeli, 2007).

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artistic dialogues with “elders.” Elders in this context are persons of any age with wisdom to share, through storytelling and story linking dedicated to the African American experience.

6. “The ITC’s President’s Hour of Power.” During each Intensive Week (Thursday evening, 7:00-9:00 pm) we have an informal time of conversation and wisdom sharing. Dedicated to encouraging discourse and dialogue, the D.Min.learners and the general public will grow in their understanding of the role of the public theologian and will experience academic hospitality.
7. “Agentes de restauração da comunidade.” In Portuguese, this term refers to community healers. Community healers in the context of our D.Min. program are all stakeholders (faculty, students, alums, and staff) who voluntarily gather at the end of each Intensive Week to assist with evaluation and assessment.¹²
8. “*Harambee.*” Swahili is a Pan-African language and is chosen to reflect African Americans' commitment to the whole of Africa. The Swahili term “*Harambee*” means “Let’s Pull Together”, and is a call for unity and collective work and struggle of the [in our case, D.Min.] family. It refers to scheduled time for the D.Min. learners to become familiar with the official policies and procedures related to the D. Min. program and the responsibilities of the professional student.
9. “*Jambo.*” In Swahili, *Jambo* is a friendly way of greeting a peer that means “hello.” (*Habari* is used when speaking to older people.) This is an informal opportunity for all D.Min. students to become acquainted with one another and to begin networking with one another.

Now that theological education has a global and universal view of the world, it is crucial that church and ministry leaders are provided with the knowledge, skills, and perspective that will teach them how to function in

¹² According to Dr. Reginaldo Braga, associate professor of Christian Education at ITC, “In this way, healing is restoration and the stakeholders are agents of it.”

it in as purposeful and meaningful public leaders. The use of these unique words, terms, and phrases we think describe the primary curricular and co-curricular experiences necessary to promote both personal and communal transformation at the worldview level.

Conclusion

Because it is the mandate of theological institutions to teach and educate Christian clergy and ministry leaders who seek the reign of God and desire to minister effectively in the rapidly changing and diverse communities, D.Min. programs across the nation face many intellectual, social, and cultural challenges as they educate women and men. In this article, guided by the metaphor ‘middle of the journey,’ I sought to describe perspectives and procedures related first, to the institutional aspects of the D.Min. program at ITC, and second to the D.Min. learner. To capture and build upon the dynamism suggested of the motif of journey, I gave special attention to the spirituality undergirding the reframed D.Min. program, as well as the revised academic delivery system and structure. I described our insights about the general processes of assessment and evaluation, but also about our growing awareness of how those of us connected with the D.Min. program might continue to rethink its institutional and educational goals. As ATS has stated, “Among the educational goals of theological learning, teaching, and research are theological, ethical, and critical responses to global realities and concerns—*Global interconnectedness*.”¹³

Together, these influences enable the institution and learners to function effectively as transformed and active persons on a continuing journey. By suggesting a particular curriculum and a methodological paradigm, I gave attention to both the D.Min. educational process and the D.Min. learner as a competent graduate student and as co-contributors to a relevant theological institutional journey that we hope contributes the transformation of all.

¹³ See the *Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization in Commission Schools*, ATS, Standard 3. This quotation is from 3.2.4.1 of the *Self-Study Handbook*. Accessed at <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/self-study-handbook-chapter-6.pdf> on June 29, 2016.

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