

# Thoughts on the compulsory teaching of history – Tendai Chitsike



**A monthly column that reflects on living in the Kingdom of God.**

With the announcement by South Africa's Education Minister that the teaching of history will become a compulsory subject up to and including Matriculants, history is in the news again.

This move has been on the cards for some time. In a 2014 article in the *Saturday Star*, the paper records that the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) intensified the call for history to be made a compulsory subject in the school curriculum, "the goal of which is to produce patriotic young South Africans, who can appreciate the 'road we've travelled as a nation' and who are willing to contribute to building the 'developmental state we envisage'."

Informed by Biblical worldview, we should ask: should such teaching history be made compulsory and Afro-centric? What could the motive behind this initiative be, and why should history matter at all in the first place?

Before we delve into the content issue, we should ask: What is our primary identity? The way we answer this will have radical implications on what follows. If we are primarily defined by

our ethnicity and nationality, then we will ultimately be seen as a tool of a particular state, ethnicity or continent.

From this standpoint, it is not difficult to see how the teaching of history will be used to promote these narrow interests, showing a particular group in a good light and those not from that group in a bad light.

This is my first red flag, before any content is even debated. It is a red light because I have seen how history has been manipulated by governments to dehumanise individuals into tools of the state.

This has sadly occurred regardless of whether the governments were Communist, Fascist or simply nationalist. It all began with devaluing the individual and exchanging their primary identity from being a unique creation made in the image of God, to a tool for the state.

The Biblical truth concerning identity is radically different and radically freeing for the learning of history and learning as a whole. Being made in the image of God, and given the world in which to bring the Kingdom of God, we are not limited by, or tools, of any ethnicity, nation or even continent.

Now onto content. I am all for being relevant to South Africa and Africa. Nevertheless, to be centred on any ethnicity or continent will be impoverishing at best, and disastrous at worst.

Why? Because to study history we must embark on a study of truth and human flourishing wherever it leads us. If a particular product exists exclusively in a remote corner of Canada, and it could be used here in South Africa to save lives, would we reject it because it is not African in origin? Of course not!

Why? Because the use of the product will result in greater human flourishing, regardless of its origin. The life-saving

lessons of history should be no different. As the saying goes: those who forget the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.

Our quest, therefore, should be to discover truths from history that are of cardinal importance for human flourishing, regardless of where they come from. If they come from South Africa and Africa, great, but what if they don't?

If we sacrifice precious truths at the altar of ethnic or nationalistic insecurity, current and future generations will suffer. By all means, let's contextualise. But let us never abandon timeless lessons because they did not happen on our battlefields or in our parliaments.

### **Which lens should we use?**

It seems clear from the comments of government sources that the new proposed direction of the curriculum is an attempt to depose Eurocentrism with Afrocentrism. Such an attempt is reminiscent of *Animal Farm's* revolution that maintained domination of the animals while simply exchanging one form of authoritarian leader with another.

As Claire Lehmann, editor of *Quillette* magazine recently tweeted: When people talk about "neo-Marxist post-modernism" they mean this: the inability to see anything except through the lens of one group oppressing another. Marxist superstructures applied to gender/race/sexuality/etc.

This is the current zeitgeist form of seeing the world, and it may well be the lens used in reshaping the curriculum. But what if we used a different lens – that of pursuing truth and ideas that lead to human flourishing?

What if human nature is not defined on the basis of class, ethnicity or gender? In Jesus' day, the established norm was that Jews were the good guys and everyone else were the bad guys. Yet Jesus taught us something radically different.

Notice how He often gave the most inconvenient heroes the lead role despite them not being Jewish, from the good Samaritan to the Roman centurion who had more faith than everyone else in Israel.

Jesus was teaching us through these examples that the lens of truth transcends class, ethnicity and gender. This is so messy, yet so necessary.

Messy because it messed with the good guys/ bad guys narrative of His day, and necessary because it points everyone to a new world: a world that is not what we thought, a world where some bad guys look like us and some good guys don't: pointing us to another underlying rationale for how to determine who is good or bad, and what is good or bad, that transcends the human constructs we have built our lives on.

This lens is so desperately needed in our day because these constructs are defining society, and therefore the study of history. Yet Jesus teaches us that they are at best incomplete, and at worst deceptive and destructive.

### **Applying a different lens to the slave trade**

Let's look at the slave trade. I spoke more about this in a previous article that [you can read here](#). On my last search, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was an important feature on the South African school curriculum. Good, and there are many lessons that can be learned from this.

But what we don't see at all, is the East African and Arab-Islamic slave trade, which occurred for longer, took more slaves and was in many ways even more dehumanising. When we take this approach we miss out on many inconvenient but necessary truths: that this open sore of the world was highlighted by a white missionary by the name of David Livingstone, meaning that but for his intervention and giving it worldwide attention, this evil practice would have continued.

We miss out on the fact that this was (and in some cases still is) a practice that saw North Africans, Middle East Arabs and even southern Africans benefit at the expense of fellow Africans. Lessons like this are absolutely vital. They reveal the truth of human nature, and they point us away from the erroneous narrative that human flourishing is ethnocentrically derived.

A Moore wrote the following in a 2014 publication of the *Atlanta Black Star*: "Some historians estimate that between AD 650 and 1900, 10 to 20 million people were enslaved by Arab slave traders.

"Others believe over 20 million enslaved Africans alone had been delivered through the trans-Saharan route alone to the Islamic world...Dr John Alembellah Azumah in his 2001 book, *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa* estimates that over 80 million black people died en route..."The Arab slave trade typically dealt in the sale of castrated male slaves...to prevent them from reproducing. About six of every 10 boys bled to death during the procedure, according to some sources, but the high price brought by eunuchs on the market made the practice profitable...The Arab slave trade was the longest yet least discussed of the two major slave trades. It began in seventh century as Arabs and other Asians poured into northern and eastern Africa under the banner of Islam."The Arab trade of blacks in Southeast Africa predates the European transatlantic slave trade by 700 years. Some scholars say the Arab slave trade continued in one form or another up until the 1960s, however, slavery in Mauritania was criminalised as recently as August 2007."

It doesn't end there. Black Africans also played a role. Benin's President Kerekou, who in recent years had made his own commitment to Christ, invited political and church leaders to his nation so his tribal leaders could seek reconciliation with African Americans.

Brian Johnson, an African-American organizer, said the realisation that Blacks sold other Blacks into slavery has been difficult for many African Americans to handle. "This made it difficult to hold the White man responsible," he explained as we spoke.

"This creates some problems in our own psyche. We have to deal with another angle to this... It's not merely a Black-White thing." The problem is in human hearts, Johnson believes. "All have sinned," he claims, quoting the *New Testament*. "All of us need to confess our wrong and appeal to [God] for forgiveness."

### **The example of colonial and post-colonial Africa**

Or how about a more recent example. No doubt there will be studies on those who played a role in ending apartheid and other evils perpetrated in the colonial era. Good. But will the curriculum delve into the unsavoury aspects of Africa's post-colonial experience as well?

As historian Paul Johnson points out: "By January 1968 Africa had experienced sixty-four military coups, attempted coups and mutinies, and by 1975 twenty of the forty-one states were ruled by military or military-civil juntas. Out of forty-five African countries only four leaders were democratically chosen and only six out of 150 had ever voluntarily relinquished power, by 1991." Messy indeed.

### **What this lens teaches about history and life**

Where would all of this lead us? Hopefully to a greater search for truth and ideas that lead to human flourishing, wherever in the world they come from.

Hopefully to a study of how Jesus Christ has been the most profound and positive influence on virtually every area of human endeavour in history.

Hopefully to the truth conveyed by CS Lewis that "All that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war,

prostitution, classes, empires, slavery – [is] the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.”

Hopefully to the truth conveyed by Soviet prison camp survivor Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn that the battle line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man.

If you are thinking: who then can stand, then you are on the road to seeing the value of a Biblical view of history. Here, God affirms the value of people from every tribe and tongue.

Secondly, the Bible and therefore Christianity is unique in that it gives a record not only of the successes of its heroes and heroines, but also the failures.

It is self-critiquing and can display the failings of its adherents because its security is not in what people have done; but in God’s redemption. Without this, we are hopelessly insecure, and we will use history to justify all our actions and vilify all those of the “other”.

In doing so, we are bound to never learn from history, regardless of whether we approach the subject from Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, or any other such lens.

As an aside, can someone please do a sociological study of the correlation between the eventual suppression of thought and countries that insist on compulsory teaching of history/and or politics? I may be wrong, but I have a hunch that it may bring up some interesting results.

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# Is Christianity a white man's religion?

**THE WHOLE CHICKEN**  
by: Tendai Chitsike

**A monthly column that reflects on living in the Kingdom of God.**

A popular claim that is increasingly made insists that Christianity is essentially a white man's religion. The assertion is often made for personal, academic or contemporary reasons, and it is therefore vital to find out why this claim is believed before giving an appropriate answer.

As an example, a factual response on its own would probably not overcome the obstacles that exist due to a negative personal experience. Furthermore, many may have confused Western culture with the gospel, and as a result may have a partly or completely erroneous view of what Christianity is in the first place.

Whatever the reasons may be, it is vital to hear people out before launching an apologetic. After the listening part, what else would be helpful to know or say?

Perhaps most frequently spoken about is the church's association with suppression of people during the colonial era generally, and the apartheid era in particular. At the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, church leaders across many denominational lines admitted as much.

In addition, the lack of contextualisation and the cultural



baggage that went along with this is another frequently cited failing. As a result, the following quote is often mentioned, leaving no room for debate: "When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land." This speaks of a sinister plot to use religion as a Trojan horse for a takeover. Was and is Christianity a deliberate tool to oppress, deceive and control?

### **Importance of Church history**

If all I had learnt about the missionary movement in Africa was from my history class at a secular university, I may well have reached that conclusion. This is why it is so vital for each successive generation to learn Church history. Without it, they are at the mercy of an often militant atheism that is determined to apportion the blame for the world's ills squarely at the foot of religion, and Christianity in particular.

What I didn't learn in my history class, but only later in Church history, was the incredible price paid to bring the gospel to Africa and other parts of the world. Consider the death toll of early missionaries. Malaria, in particular, made Africa the missionaries' graveyard and in many instances whole families died as a result of exposure to this disease.

The average life expectancy of a missionary to Africa was eight years, and to West Africa, two years. This is illustrated in the following note written by a CMS Missionary to Uganda, Alexander Mackay, to his home committee: "I want to remind the committee that within six months they will probably hear that one of us is dead. But...when that news comes, do not be cast down, but send someone else immediately to take the vacant place."

The truth of Mackay's statement is evidenced in the results that followed: "Within three months one missionary was

murdered, two had given up, another had contracted fever. Within a year two more had been killed. Within two years Mackay was the only one of the eight missionaries left alive in Uganda. He actually survived 12 years, dying of malaria at the age of 40.”

Andreas Riis similarly said: “Let us press on. All Africa must be won for Christ. Though a thousand missionaries die, send more.” Such self-sacrifice was not only commonplace among pioneer missionaries. Preachers sent out by John G Lake in the early part of last century pursued a missionary call into Africa’s interior despite running out of money and food, with many perishing as a result. Far from the self-serving and controlling narrative, the lives and deaths of many missionaries were in fact the polar opposite.

### **Roots of liberal democracy**

A brief look at history would also challenge the idea. Sociologist Robert Woodberry was intrigued by the apparent connection between democracy and Protestantism. In a wide ranging dissertation that broadened into an extensive research project, Woodberry arrived at the following startling conclusion: “Areas where Protestant missionaries had a significant presence in the past are on average more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, higher educational attainment (especially for women), and more robust membership in nongovernmental associations.” A summation of his 14 years of research—published in 2012 in the *American Political Science Review*, the discipline’s top journal – has won four major awards... Its startling title: *The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy*.

“We don’t have to deny that there were and are racist missionaries,” says Woodberry. “We don’t have to deny there were and are missionaries who do self-centered things. But if that were the average effect, we would expect the places where

missionaries had influence to be worse than places where missionaries weren't allowed or were restricted in action.

"We find exactly the opposite on all kinds of outcomes. Even in places where few people converted, [missionaries] had a profound economic and political impact."

There is one important nuance to all this: The positive effect of missionaries on democracy applies only to "conversionary Protestants."

Protestant clergy financed by the state, as well as Catholic missionaries prior to the 1960s, had no comparable effect in the areas where they worked. Independence from state control made a big difference.

### **Colonialism claims**

"One of the main stereotypes about missions is that they were closely connected to colonialism," says Woodberry. "But Protestant missionaries not funded by the state were regularly very critical of colonialism."

Woodberry therefore highlights Alice and John Harris, who photographed the abuses in Belgian Congo and made it known to the world. In Botswana, John Mackenzie was instrumental in helping to create a land protection agreement. In South Africa, Trevor Huddleston published *Naught for your Comfort* – a devastating critique on apartheid, which highlighted this unjust system to the world.

The coming of Christianity to Africa is frequently viewed as taking place from the 19th Century as the colonial expansion began. While the first missionaries to much of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa were almost always white Europeans, West and especially North Africa tell a different story. West African missionary endeavour was carried out both through European missionaries as well as former slaves returning to Africa from the Americas, as they resettled in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

North Africa however turns this claim on its head. Here, we see churches that were birthed from as early as Acts 8 (before the gospel had been taken to Europe) through the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, as well as the church in Egypt shortly thereafter.

Church historian Peter Hammond summarises the state of the church in North Africa until the advancement of Islam in the 7th century: "At the time of Mohammed's birth, Christianity had covered all of the Roman provinces of Asia, across the Caucasus to the Caspian Sea, Syria, the Holy Land and all of North Africa across to the Atlantic Ocean. Most of the Christians in the world lived in Asia and Africa...Some of the most famous early Church fathers were from North Africa: Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian of Carthage, Tertullian of Carthage, Augustine of Hippo, and Origen of Alexandria...All of these areas were conquered by the sword of Islam."

### **Biblical evidence**

Then there is the Bible itself. Far from being a man-made, Eurocentric document, Howard professor Cain Felder asserts that there are over 1 500 references to places in Africa in the Old Testament alone. Psalm 68:31 is a powerful prophetic declaration that African nations will turn to the God of the Bible: *Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush [8] will submit herself to God.*

Within the Bible, the gospel message powerfully overturns the exclusivist notion put forward. In Acts 17: 16-31, Paul preaches the gospel to Athenians who had never heard of Jesus Christ. In preaching to them, he gives us some valuable insights into the gospel. As he looked around the city, he became greatly distressed due to the idolatry in Athens. Before the gospel transferred our allegiance, idolatry was the norm, not only in the global South, but here in Acts 17 in Europe as well.

Nevertheless, there are seeds of the gospel that God has

hidden in cultures across the world, as Paul discovered through the Greek philosophers he quotes here. What many missionaries discover is that God has been at work in the nations of the world long before they set foot there.

Thirdly, Paul's gospel message implicitly gives the only true basis for establishing equality and destroying racism and every other ism – the truth that we are all made in the image of God and trace our beginning to one man.

### **Call to repentance**

Finally, in view of Jesus' atoning death, resurrection and return as coming Judge, Paul preached that all men everywhere must repent. The gospel therefore is a call to worldwide repentance for all people and all cultures. Every culture has to change to align itself with the gospel.

Both African ancestralism and Western narcissism are idols that must be dethroned. Even the Jewish culture of the day had to undergo radical change as the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile was broken.

Having said this, we must distinguish between western culture and the gospel. The two are not the same. A non westerner does not have to become a Westerner to become a Christian. In fact, with the global shift that has occurred in the last century, most of the world's Christians are not Westerners, but Africans, Asians and South Americans.

In addition, historically-receiving nations are increasingly becoming sending nations. It is true that pictures of a blue-eyed blonde Jesus are not only inaccurate, but unhelpful for the cause of global Christianity. However, this is not merely a white to non-white problem. Several African churches for example insist that new members must adopt dress codes that the Bible does not, and Jewish believers in the early church would also insist on Gentiles taking on not only the gospel, but Jewish customs as well.

Perhaps the best summation of the global appeal of the gospel comes from an African chief who heard the gospel from David Livingstone. He replied: “All my forefathers have passed away into darkness without knowing anything of what was to befall them; how is it that your forefathers knowing all these things, did not send word to my forefathers sooner?”

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## **Will we pass the faith on to our kids? – Tendai Chitsike**

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Perhaps my reason for writing this is the realisation that my oldest child is approaching adolescence. As a result, my wife and I are looking at what lies around the corner and how we can best prepare her (and ourselves) for the changes that lie up ahead. As part of this, I have read a helpful book by Bible teacher Craig Hill, where he speaks into how we as parents can bless and release our children into the next phase of life. A helpful article on youth ministry has also grabbed my attention, and my wife and I have had a discussion where we mentioned the proliferation of school and other sporting

events on Sundays and over the upcoming Easter weekend. I bring up all this to ask the question: With the challenges they face, will we pass on the faith to our kids?

One such challenge is that of consumerism. A tweet caught my attention today. It read: Perhaps the greatest threat to the Church today isn't falling for doctrinal heresy but implicitly adopting the consumerist, self-centered assumptions of our Western culture. Most young families today are busy with two careers they are trying to advance simultaneously. The thought of being a stay-at-home mother or pressing the pause or slow motion button on the career is rarely entertained. On the subject of entertainment, a large television often has pride of place in our living rooms. Then there is Sunday morning. No longer does the worship of Jesus have the unrivalled market share of this time. It competes with school events, birthday parties, shopping and just putting your feet up on the couch after living Monday to Saturday at a frenetic pace. The subtle and dangerous thing about consumerism is that it is so innocuous, and therefore passes under the radar of "sin" undetected. The issue in many of these instances is not whether or not we have the big tv, or whether we attend every Sunday service. Nevertheless, we should still ask: with my time and money, what am I communicating to my kids? Where does God fit in all of this?

### **What is the solution?**

So then, is the solution to just get them to Sunday church and Friday night youth? If only it was so easy. The consensus is that it is increasingly difficult to live for Christ, and the next generation faces a significant challenge. In their well received book *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World*, John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle write: "In our lifetimes, we have never seen the pressure on Christian conviction greater than it is right now. We try to avoid alarmism, but standing for Christ in our culture is getting harder and harder." One of the reasons for

this is that our societies are seeing multiple assumptions previously held on sexuality, identity politics, family, society and ideas, being overturned and replaced by almost anything else except a Christian worldview. By way of example, while reading for my law degree, family law was a core course. Today, 15 years later, law students have not heard of family law. Instead, they study the law of partnerships. It is therefore absolutely vital that we teach the next generation how to live for Christ in this generation. Sadly, we are often silent or stumped when it comes to this as the Church, preferring the safe space of entertainment-based youth groups with a devotional tacked on the side. Thankfully, books such as *A Practical Guide* are providing helpful resources in equipping parents and pastors in this much-needed challenge.

We can give our kids the right answers and take them to weekend church services, and yet still leave them with a shell of the faith. We are called to something much deeper than that. We are called to revel in God and the gospel, and take them on a journey of following, trusting and obeying Jesus aka the gospel in the everyday issues of life. It is precisely here – in the issues of life – that they can get to see a life that savours God as the highest good, in the mundane, testing, inconvenient and seemingly insignificant parts of daily life, including those that require my apology to them. With all our weaknesses, who is equal to such a task?

### **The wonder of Easter**

All of this brings us to Easter, where we remember and celebrate the most life-changing events of Christianity and of all human history. One merciful consequence of this is that the faith of my kids does not start and end with me. May we, like the Roman centurion, take a moment to see how Jesus lived and died for us and come away exclaiming, “Surely he was the Son of God!” As we are freshly recaptured with his amazing grace, may that shape every aspect of our lives, and may the next generation be the recipient of a faith on fire.



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# The state capture I fear the most – Tendai Chitsike



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In his first address as President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa responded to the various commendations given him by various opposition party leaders.

He mentioned the fact that he studied at what is now Limpopo University at the same time as ACDP president Kenneth Meshoe, and that he (the president), was at one time the leader of the Student Christian Organisation there, with Mr Meshoe serving under his leadership.

Upon hearing this, I began to wonder: How many prominent leaders in politics, business, entertainment, academia and other fields were once zealous Christ followers in their youth, but are no longer today? I have no idea how many, and while it is encouraging to see those who are still standing strong, I can't help but ask why it is that so many are nowhere near where they once were? And why is it that at the height of their influence, their light seems dimmest?

No doubt, there are several possible reasons for this. Some are personal, others are corporate. Of all the reasons

however, the one that I fear the most is what could be described as state capture of a different sort.

The idea behind state capture in the current South African context is that a family from India became well-connected to the previous administration, and from that vantage point they largely and effectively determined who could be put in key cabinet and state enterprise positions, thereby effectively pulling the strings of government for their personal benefit.

### **A more compelling cause**

In a similar way, we too can be captured for an agenda that is in opposition to Christ's kingdom, while remaining Christian in name. This can easily happen when we are drawn to a cause that becomes more compelling than what Christianity offers, while still apparently waving the same flag.

How does this happen? Subtly, at least most of the time. The first sign is when our hearts and minds are no longer captivated by Christ. When this slow puncture occurs, it is not long before we are seduced by what we think is a greater cause.

In a ministry that tries to reach and disciple millennial students in a consumerist culture, this is an ever-present danger. However, it is not only the responsibility of the "receiver".

It is also vital for leaders to cast a compelling picture of the cause of Christ and the role the "layman" can play in whatever sphere God has called them to.

This is precisely what Wesley was able to do with Wilberforce. If we do not give them an over-arching and compelling vision of the kingdom of God, someone else will, and with the added allure of money, power and political correctness, the offer may soon prove irresistible to a cold heart and an unrenewed mind.

At the time of Christian apologist's C S Lewis' writing, the causes of the day included those of pacifism or supporting the war-effort of Britain. In his *Screwtape Letters*, CS Lewis masterfully describes the temptation of a greater cause faced by the Christian: "Whichever he adopts, your main task will be the same. Let him begin by treating the Patriotism or the Pacifism as a part of his religion. Then let him, under the influence of partisan spirit, come to regard it as the most important part. Then quietly and gradually nurse him on to the stage at which the religion becomes merely part of the "cause", in which Christianity is valued chiefly because of the excellent arguments it can produce in favour of the British war-effort or of Pacifism. The attitude which you want to guard against is that in which temporal affairs are treated primarily as material for obedience. Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing. Provided that meetings, pamphlets, policies, movements, causes, and crusades, matter more to him than prayers and sacraments and charity, he is ours – and the more "religious" (on those terms) the more securely ours. I could show you a pretty cageful down here, Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape."

It would be very naive to think that those of us employed in the church world are not immune from such capture. On the contrary, a greater level of deception can occur under the guise of doing "ministry", as we build our own sandcastle kingdoms with the pretense of doing it for God.

It is partly for this I reason that the life of Billy Graham was so widely celebrated: that he resisted the capture of his mind through secularism, his heart through inflating his successes, and his body through moral failure. Regardless of human recognition, rejection or overlooking, may we do likewise in whatever sphere God has called us.

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# Personal evangelism or social concern: Which is primary? – Tendai Chitsike



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Popular pastor and author Timothy Keller was in Twitter wars recently. It appeared that he made some comments that a lot of people found very controversial, so much so that it generated significant debate.

Here was his comment that generated 445 replies, 1 336 retweets and 5 038 likes: “Jesus didn’t come primarily to solve the economic, political, and social problems of the world. He came to forgive our sins.”

As responses started to come thick and fast, it prompted Keller to make a clarifying response, which said the following: “Folks, key word is ‘primarily’. Of course, he addresses economic, political, and social issues. See my book *Generous Justice*. Please don’t make a tweet of mine indicative of my entire theology.”

While I thought this would help and settle the issue, it did not appear to stop the tweets of disagreement coming his way.

What I found interesting was that none of the disagreements I read (not that I read them all) attempted to point people back to the New Testament and the gospels in particular.

Thinking about the tweet myself, I don't know how you could argue against it, if we just read the gospels and the New Testament. There are several times when Jesus appears to ignore the economic, political and social problems of Israel at the time. He harboured no political ambition and rejected the demands to make him king. He didn't advocate for an overthrow of the economic system of the day. He maintained that the people should pay taxes to Caesar. He made no recorded mention of certain social problems of his day.

Then, after His death and resurrection, when the disciples thought the time was apt to restore the kingdom to Israel, He talked instead about becoming a witness of His life to spread his message from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

### **Forgiving our sins**

At every key moment of Jesus' life, from His birth, the launch of His ministry, the miracles He performed, the new covenant He made, His words on the cross and his commission to his disciples thereafter, we see Him speaking about or being spoken of as the one who came to forgive our sins. Why then the controversy?

Here's my guess. The Church is at war with itself. You have the progressives on the one hand, many of whom are young millennials, engaging in a world that speaks a lot about social justice (which may mean different things to different people) and how much the church is not doing in this regard, and how this is hypocritical behavior.

On the other side of the spectrum, you have conservative evangelicals, many of whom are older.

Many progressives, looking at this tweet through the contemporary lens of social awareness, are thus of the opinion

that Keller's tweet is simply another cover-up for the Church that is disinterested in the economic, social and political problems of the world, and are simply hiding behind personal spirituality of forgiveness of sins and the John 3:16 message.

That may often be the case, and there are several scriptures that warn us of this very danger. John's first epistle in particular repeatedly makes a case that a genuine love for God is seen in how we treat people around us. To put it differently, Christianity does not remain in a spiritual cloister, no. True, authentic Christianity impacts the people and society within which we live in practical ways. On that note, I'll be the first to admit that I have often not modeled this standard as much as I should.

Yet the story does not end there. While much of the Church can do a lot more in practical ways, we are in deeper water when we try to remove or alter the primary reason Jesus came: to forgive our sins and therefore reconcile us to the Father.

When this is removed from its primary place, a lot more happens. We turn our backs on billions of unreached people, effectively demonstrating that a hell-bound eternity is not so bad after all. When this gospel message is undermined, we effectively minimise the Church to becoming one of the many NGOs, pressure groups or political parties, something an atheist by the name of Matthew Parris was encouraging us NOT to do on the African continent. (You can read this fascinating article at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/as-an-atheist-i-truly-believe-africa-needs-god-3xj9bm80h8m>)

Without that clear call to preach the gospel and bring people to Christ, we soon question whether we should preach on vast chunks of the Bible. On this slippery slope, the very infallible claim of the Bible is under grave threat, and it is a matter of time before it is no longer received as God's revelation to sinful, fallen mankind. This slippery slope is

not a mere academic postulation: it is the story of several churches and individuals over the last 200 years in particular.

So then, there is an even bigger danger for those emphasising social justice as the primary thing: the danger of hypocritical behavior that may be politically correct, but completely untrue to one's primary loyalty to God.

### **Missionary or imposter**

As the preacher Charles Spurgeon challenged the Church: "Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor."

This hypocrisy is not difficult to perform. After all, in the multi-culturalist world we are living in, what could be more offensive than to share with someone that there is a way, a truth and a life for them that they are not currently following, without which they cannot attain eternity or the life they were called to live on earth?

This danger is probably most pertinent on the university campus, and yet conversely, the university presents itself as one the greatest mission fields for the globe. For this and other reasons, I join with students at this time of year in reaching the next generation with the message of Christ.

Going back to the Tim Keller episode, one of Keller's points was that the two causes of evangelism and social concern are not antagonistic. Rather, once someone has received and believed the gospel, a by-product of this is a new, God-filled heart with a new motive to practically serve the world.

Someone may say that this new motive of social concern is largely unseen in large numbers of evangelicals. True or not, the correct course of action is to drive them deeper into the gospel, not away from it.

When the apostle Peter and others were guilty of hypocrisy by distancing themselves from Gentile believers in the presence

of fellow Jews, the apostle Paul discerned that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. (Gal 2:14).

Similarly, when there arises an issue of social concern, rather than jumping on the politically correct bandwagon, if we want to truly change the situation for good, we should address the issue, but only by bringing it in line with the truth of the gospel.

That way, we remain grounded in truth as we act in line with the grace we have received.

For Paul, this situation at Antioch wasn't an opportunity to present on neo-Marxist or postmodern equality studies; it was a moment to re-emphasise the gospel.

### **Going deeper**

The same should apply when we look at racism, poverty, or any other social issues we face today. Social ills are not an opportunity for a new man-centred gospel; they are an opportunity for the gospel to go deeper.

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# **Smacking, schooling and screening: What's the big idea and why should I care?**

**THE WHOLE CHICKEN**  
by: Tendai Chitsike



## **A monthly column that reflects on living in the Kingdom of God.**

The recent dramatic events in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the world at various times beg the question: What is at the core of freedom? The well known story of the Exodus deals with just this issue.

Here, Moses is repeatedly given the same message to take to Pharaoh, exemplified in Exodus 8:1 which reads: Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.

My modern retelling of this would go something like this: "I am commanding you Moses, to go to the Head of State of Egypt, and tell him that THE Ultimate Authority says you must let HIS people go (as in they are not your slaves, they are mine), and they must be set free so that they can worship me.

Freedom therefore is not the mere removal of external constraints and the emancipation from forced labour; true freedom comes when we have the liberty to come under God's rule in everything, for the purpose of living all of life under God.

The Apostle Paul therefore writes in writes 2 Cor 3:17 (TPT): Now, the "Lord" I'm referring to is the Holy Spirit, and wherever he is Lord, there is freedom.

We could therefore say that where He is Lord over the State, the family, the church and our hearts, there you will find freedom.

Slavery and tyranny in Exodus came where Pharaoh began not only to physically enslave the people, but more importantly to dictate and override God's Word (His authority) and the people's conscience.

In Exo 5:1-2 God's authority is undermined: Afterward Moses

and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'"<sup>2</sup> Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."

Then in Exo 1:15-17 he goes against the conscience of the people: 15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 16 "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live."<sup>17</sup> The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.

Essentially therefore, bondage and tyranny come when institutions such as the state, church and even the family begin to override God's word and the conscience of people.

How does this relate to freedom in South Africa? Very pertinently, and here are a few examples:

1. The CRL, a government commission, is attempting to put into law a legal requirement that effectively directs that pastors must have a licence from the state in order to preach and lead a congregation.

2. The High Court has recently ruled that the defence of reasonable chastisement by parents towards their children is no longer valid. Therefore, as things stand it is now legally unjustifiable to spank your child.

3. The Department of Higher Education has proposed a Basic Laws Amendment Bill (BELA) that will give much less authority to functioning SGBs and effectively prevent homeschoolers from writing any other examinations (and therefore studying any other curriculum) other than matric and state education.

You may say: None of these affect me, or that you think that the government should prevent so-called pastors from

manipulating people, that spanking children promotes violence, and what is wrong with the exclusive state education anyway for those who cannot afford private schools?

For the record, the Bible does show that the church must obey God and preach even when banned by governing authorities (Acts 5:29). It does say that reasonable chastisement is part of God's life-saving instruction to parents on disciplining children (Pro 23:13-14). Lastly, the Bible gives the responsibility for the training and educating of children to parents, not to the state (Prov 22:6).

But even if you disagree with me and the directives from the Scriptures, there is something bigger that is at stake here.

Let me take you to the very words of Justice Keightley, who in the landmark "smacking" case of YG v State declared: "This is a case where I am satisfied that it is permissible to require religious parents who believe in corporal punishment to be expected to obey the secular laws."

Read that again, slowly. If that doesn't help, my rephrasing may help. Here goes: "I have the conviction that we can override the religious beliefs of parents and get them to obey laws that contradict their beliefs, based on the assumption that our interpretation of secular law is the ultimate authority, not the God of the Bible. Therefore, we can tell you parents how to raise your kids and you must obey." Can you see the wider issue?!

Now compare this to Martin Luther's famous statement as he opposed the error and ultimate claims of the church of his day: "Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments since I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am conquered by the

Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God: I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me!"

What a helpful picture of what freedom should be like: our lives submitted to the Scriptures, our conscience following God's Word alone as the ultimate authority, and any departure from this being unsafe and dangerous. Unfortunately, it is towards this dangerous and unsafe territory that the above mentioned attempts by the state are taking us.

How then can we live in freedom? Of primary importance must be our devotion to live by God's Word alone.

As Horace Greeley declared: "It is impossible to enslave, mentally or socially, a Bible-reading people. The principles of the Bible are the groundwork of human freedom."

Secondly, we ought to pray for our nation and leaders, and vote for politicians and parties that will promote and not destroy freedom.

This assumes that we understand their worldview and agenda, and if we don't know, we must go beyond rhetoric to their manifesto and party policy.

Thirdly, we must stand up and honourably speak truth to power. This can be done by presenting written submissions to proposed legislation such as the BELA Bill.

Importantly, we can support Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR SA). This organisation made up of respected church leaders is doing a tremendous work in honourably speaking up for religious freedom in state institutions and making Christians aware of the developments in this regard.

One can donate to FORSA, sign up for their newsletter found at [www.forsa.org.za](http://www.forsa.org.za), or stay connected via social media.

In a country such as ours blessed by God with the freedoms we have, we dare not be complacent in this hour. Rather, let us look at the bigger picture, and do we all we can to see current and future generations flourishing in the very essence of freedom: the freedom to worship God in all areas of life.

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# How should we relate to mainstream media? – Tendai Chitsike

**THE WHOLE CHICKEN**  
by: Tendai Chitsike

**A monthly column that reflects on living in the Kingdom of God.**

I recently heard some very encouraging reports from a Member of Parliament who is also an outspoken Christian.

While he did not hesitate to speak of the major scandals we are increasingly aware of, he also shared some very encouraging stories that have never made it to our headlines or television screens.

It would be fair to say that I was pleasantly shocked. That became the springboard for me to think more broadly about the news we passively and daily imbibe, prompting the following questions: who decides what is important and newsworthy? Why

should we trust them? Do they have a consistent worldview that they are advancing, and am I unthinkingly taking all this in, even if it is detrimental?

Imagine with me, that one million people gathered together for an event of any description, ranging from politics to tiddlywinks. Would it be fair to say that this is a noteworthy event? I believe so. It was, but very little coverage was given when a million Christians from different provinces, ethnicities, churches and ages gathered to pray in Bloemfontein this year. Why?

Living in a small university town, we are not often grabbing national headlines. However, fees must fall and other student protests of 2016 provided a notable exception.

I heard firsthand from students, lecturers and wardens and witnessed a few events myself. When I compared what I heard and saw with what I read in the press, I found that the politically incorrect narratives were simply not spoken about in mainstream media, so much so that I felt compelled to provide this first-hand information to friends reading the news overseas.

It was an eye-opening experience. Similarly, I remember seeing the obituary of Charles Colson (a man I greatly admired) in TIME magazine in 2012. I thought to myself: I'm sure I will read about the incredible work he has done in over 30 years of ministry with Prison Fellowship, or his Templeton award, or his autobiography of God transforming his life.

How naïve I was. All I read about was his infamous role in the Watergate scandal of US President Nixon and a dubious and convenient conversion to Christianity (never mind the fact that Colson went against the advice of his lawyer and admitted his guilt, which is what resulted in his conviction, or the incredible work that Prison Fellowship has done for prisoners and their returning communities).

If all I knew about Charles Colson was from this obituary, I would have a totally different opinion of him from what I do have. Honestly, I would think he was a crook trying to disguise himself in sheep's clothing. How is this so? Not by lying outright, but by deliberately majoring on one event and conveniently ignoring the past 30 years of his life.

How then do I engage with the world where the mainstream media plays such an influential role?

First and foremost would be to let the Bible inform your approach to all of life, especially the media.

Someone wise once said: Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.

The book of Proverbs speaks about discerning the voice of wisdom above the loud and arrogant claims of others in the marketplace. How true this is today.

Secondly, we ought to engage in critical thinking from a godly perspective. When Jesus was presented with situations and questions designed to trap him, he challenged the very assumptions behind them and left people astounded. We should do the same.

For example, if I was to look at the spectrum of news stories from the BBC that speak about preachers, I would think that they are all jet-setting multi-millionaires who frequently dupe their flock into parting with their income while engaging in the weirdest acts known to man.

Instead of just taking this all in, I should also question the overall emphasis, asking: Is this an accurate reflection of reality, and if not, what is the overriding agenda driving this narrative?

Thirdly, we should avoid the temptation to reach a conclusion

without looking into the whole story. Twitter is abuzz with the latest allegations of racism leveled against a Dove ad. How many people arrived at this conclusion just by looking at the picture, and how many actually read what Lola Ogunyemi, the woman at the centre of the allegations, said about it?

As Proverbs 18:17 declares: The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him. Of all the lessons I learnt in law school, this was one of the most important. Its relevance is not only for law, but for the way we view media and the way we treat each other.

I am by no means anti-media. There are numerous accounts of how journalists have brought issues to light that have been of tremendous benefit to nations around the world.

Looking at our beloved African continent, more of such reporting can be a tremendous tool for good, bringing liberty and transparency where it is often sorely lacking. What is sorely needed therefore is media that that are passionate about truth, informed by a Biblical worldview, and recipients that have the same.

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## **What does Acts 17 say regarding decolonisation?**

**THE WHOLE CHICKEN**  
by: Tendai Chitsike



## **A monthly column that reflects on living in the Kingdom of God.**

In Acts chapter 17, verses 17 to 34 highlight the apostle Paul visiting and preaching the gospel in Athens. What would that have to do with contemporary discussions in South Africa and the global South on the topic of decolonisation?

While there are probably several more, I will venture to share four principles from this text that speak into a contemporary issue.

As a preamble, the very fact that I would ask the question raises an assumption that Acts 17 does indeed speak into the topic.

I ask the question deliberately, because even among many Christians, the assumption is that the Bible is reserved for “spiritual” things, but silent and dare I say irrelevant on subjects such as these.

We are living in an age where it is an achievement for a sincere believer of Christ to merely think that the Bible has such relevance. Onto four principles I can glean.

### **1. First things first: who occupies the centre?**

Paul was greatly distressed to see the city of Athens was full of idols. Pagan idolatry was very much part of the culture.

Nevertheless, he did not sit back and think this was just the way it is. He was distressed because he knew the truth about the one true God, and longed for others to see the truth about Jesus Christ and the deception of all other gods.

We should ask ourselves: Do we see and interpret the culture through Scripture or do we interpret Scripture through our culture, whether that be Athenian or African?

As Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako writes in the Africa Bible commentary: "When light passes through a prism, a rainbow of colours is revealed. Similarly, when our cultures pass through the prism of Scripture, we see them in a new way...We are no longer being defined by our traditions, but are allowing Scripture to interpret those traditions."

This is vital as we address the topic of decolonisation. Decolonisation has been broadly defined as the act of getting rid of colonisation, or freeing a country from being dependent on another country.

More specifically, a local academic has offered this definition in the context of university curricula: "And what is decolonisation? When it comes to university curricula, this seems to involve replacing works from Europe or the global North with local theorists and African authors. This is meant to prevent African universities from becoming mere extensions of former colonisers."

The line of reasoning is that as former colonies, we should no longer be "enslaved" and "indoctrinated" mentally by Eurocentric ideas, but we should be independent and liberated not only politically, but mentally. As a result, we should be Afro-centric in worldview, creating Afro-centric universities and institutions.

Decolonisation has become the *Zeitgeist* of our age on the university campus. This German word in its literal sense means "Spirit of the Age."

Every age has these ideas that clamour for centre stage, and in every age we should begin by questioning whether these ideas should have such pride of place in the first place.

The apostle Paul challenges us in Col 2:8 ESV saying: See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits<sup>[1]</sup> of the world, and not according to

Christ.

In other words, as believers, we are called to only hold on to the philosophy that is according to Christ, not anything else, no matter how urgent, appealing or politically correct it sounds.

Applying this to decolonisation, our primary pursuit as Christians should never be “our culture dispelling theirs”, but rather truth dispelling lies.

Without questioning the validity of decolonisation in the first place, several faculties within institutions have thus begun the decolonisation project in earnest, with some students insisting that: The current curriculum dehumanises black students, that “We study all these dead white men who presided over our oppression, and we are made to use their thinking as a standard and as a point of departure,” and that “Eurocentrism does not serve our interests culturally, socially, economically. It does not resolve the issues of Africa.”

While many students may feel this way because of past or present prejudice, we still need to think about what is being said. What are the consequences of creating a new hegemony of ideas based on feelings of prejudice?

Does an idea lose its value or validity because the proponent was Eurocentric? Who lives like this in the real world?

If it is all about the overthrow of Eurocentrism, why is it that even a founding philosopher of African decolonisation is a lecturer at a university in California and has his ideas primarily expressed in English?

The answer is simple, though politically incorrect: because we have all been positively impacted by ideas that are extrinsic to our nations, many of which are in the West, even if there has been a history of prejudice. (If you are unsure as to why

the West has produced many of these ideas, I recommend studying church history.

It had nothing to do with skin colour, but a lot to do with events sparked in 1517 and beyond. But that is for another article).

It stands to reason therefore, that if we and the world over have been positively impacted by these ideas, that they remain worthy of study, even if some or many theorists harboured prejudice.

With all these demands and more, we must ask ourselves what our central point of departure is: Should we be Afrocentric or Eurocentric?

What Acts 17 and the Bible as a whole reveals is neither. We should be Christo-centric and apply that into our context, be it Athenian or African.

Our first question is not is it African, but rather is it Biblical? Is it true?

Secondly, does it lead to human flourishing, regardless of its human agency? Michael Goheen, professor of theology at Trinity Western University aptly reminds those of us who want to change the world what our goal should be, writing: "Social engagement is not first of all to change society—that may happen but it is not the goal. Rather, it is to witness to the Lordship of Christ over all areas of public life and to love our neighbour as we struggle against dehumanizing idolatry."

From that basis, we can then go on to look for, promote and encourage the flourishing of truth within our context.

## **2. Learning from our own poets**

As Paul is preaching the gospel to the Athenians, he does something that he never did in the synagogues: he quotes from Athens' own philosophers and poets in bringing them the truth

of the gospel.

To do so, Paul would have had to study their philosophy and culture and deem it worthy of his time.

However, it was through the lens of Scripture in following with Colossians 2:8.

There is something redemptive in every culture, and in whatever sphere, we are to 'exegete' or study the culture and find that which is redemptive and good .

We do a disservice when we do not listen to, learn from and highlight the philosophers and poets who are trafficking truth in a particular culture.

Dr Tony Evans, was one of the first black graduates of Dallas Theological Seminary. What pained Dr Evans during his studies was how he learnt all about the truths of Scripture but only with examples exclusively taken from white church leaders, knowing full well that there were black church leaders in his experience who were saying and doing similar things, yet were never cited as authorities on the subject.

Nevertheless, having experienced this, fellow pastor John Piper said the following about Tony Evans in an interview about race and the Bible: "'Dr. Evans put the Bible as the plumb line not racial preferences as the plumb line in all of our activity with regard to race and ethnicity. So he said things like, quote: Jesus is not calling white to be black or black to be white, but both to be biblical. He said: Biblical truth overrides cultural difference. He said: Adjust your humanity to you faith, not your faith to your humanity. He said, quote: Black is beautiful only when it is biblical. White is right only when it agrees with holy writ."

As far as possible, we ought to draw from poets and philosophers within that culture, but always on the basis on Scriptural truth and the wider Biblical worldview. Sometimes

however, there may not be sources of truth from a particular culture.

What then? In this instance, we ought to revert back to the primary issue: what is truth and what will lead to human flourishing. Surely that is worth our attention, regardless of the ethnicity of the theorist or the culture from which they came.

This calls for tough minds and tender hearts, and is especially difficult to do when we live in a culture that thinks with its feelings.

But the issue of sources doesn't end there. There is also an assumption that drawing from 'African' sources will result in the same decolonised worldview.

What if those non-Western sources disagree with the predominant decolonial narrative being pushed? Will they still be celebrated and promoted?

Will economics departments use the work of Ghanaian economist George Ayittey who details the economic and political descent of most of Africa since gaining independence?

Will they refer to African-American economist Thomas Sowell who attributes the socio-economic crises in Black America to a culture of dependency brought about by state intervention?

Will sociology and theology departments use the work of Afrika Mhlophe in looking at negative aspects of African traditional religion and culture?

As I discovered during my Bachelor of Arts degree, something tells me they won't.

Similarly, commentators have pointed out the lack of conservative Black American presence at the recently opened Smithsonian National Museum of African-American History and Culture.

Noticeably absent is US Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, renowned economist Thomas Sowell, and several other conservative leaders.

Decolonisation is therefore not merely a geographic and ethnic issue, but a worldview issue that is not bound ultimately by geography or ethnicity, but rather by ideas at its very core.

### **3. The basis of our worth: we are made in his image**

Paul conveys another vital truth in Acts 17:26, declaring that: From one man he made every nation of men.

Often, because of the sense of inferiority that many have felt through the colonial experience, we are tempted to prove that we are better than the stereotypical portrayal we see.

There is a place for celebrating pioneers within a previously colonial setting. However, we fall into a trap when we try to prove or validate our existence through achievement past or present.

This was the same trap the Devil laid before Jesus in the wilderness: to do something miraculous to prove He was the son of God.

Here in Acts, Paul in passing conveys a very important truth: that the basis of our worth is all the same, and it comes from the fact that He made us, we are all from one man, and He made every nation.

Our worth therefore comes from being made in His image, not the fact that we are now world class. This frees us to present ourselves authentically, with our strengths and weaknesses. It also frees us to accept ideas from outside our ethnicity, because our identity is not based on achievement, but being made in the image of God.

### **4. The gospel: a mandate for loving global cultural imperialism!**

In Acts 17:30 Paul issues a powerful, disturbing and politically incorrect challenge to the Athenians and the rest of the world, preaching that: In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

In other words, the one true God, since the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, now commands worldwide repentance from every ethnicity.

This entails turning from everything in our cultures that is against the teachings of Christ. This is truly imperialistic, but it is not ethnocentric colonialism. It is the empire or Kingdom of God laying claim to defining the culture of every human heart and every society.

It is based on love, not force of arms or annihilation of culture, and it is exemplified by the "emperor" himself dying for us before we are converted.

Nevertheless, it is the Kingdom of God taking over and bringing change to every culture.

Ancestralism in Africa has to change, abortion of Down's Syndrome babies in Iceland has to change, materialism the world over has to change! Even Jewish culture had to change to conform with the gospel, exemplified by Peter's vision and God's reply to initiate fellowship with Gentiles as fellow believers: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

When God's Kingdom comes it leads to repentance but that doesn't lead to cultural annihilationism, it leads to Kingdom values while still celebrating the uniqueness and value of each culture.



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# When did things go wrong in South Africa? A biblical view of history

**THE WHOLE CHICKEN**  
by: Tendai Chitsike

**A monthly column that reflects on living in the Kingdom of God.**

Recently, I was having one of those conversations about our history in South Africa.

A few days later, I stumbled upon a video shared on Facebook. The video is entitled *A lesson on South African history by President Jacob Zuma*. The history lesson could have been shared by many people (including some of my past history lecturers) who would not in any way support the president.

The view is one that is widely-held locally, continentally and globally in many quarters. Before expounding on the various phases of discrimination and injustice suffered by black South Africans, the president began with a statement that was met with significant applause in parliament, but is in need of serious questioning.

His opening statement referred to an original statement made earlier, which would therefore require him giving a history lesson. The president stated the following: "History is

history...When I said 'when Jan van Riebeeck landed in the Western Cape, our problems began', it is a historical fact."

I did not have any qualms with his statements concerning apartheid, the creation of the Union of South Africa or the Anglo-Boer/South African war. It was the prior foundational statement that I wrestled with, and it is this statement that makes a massive difference, not only for our nation, but for the world over.

What the president (and many others) did, was to pin the origin of our problems upon the arrival of white settlers in 1652. This begs a larger question: When did things really go wrong? Another way of asking this, though we may not think so at first, is this: what is a biblical view of history, and why does it matter?

### **Worldviews**

It is vital to ask the question: "Where did things go wrong?" for an obvious reason: to help us to try put things right. In Africa and the rest of the developing world, the question is particularly pertinent. Yet the answer may not be so simple as merely uncovering the facts. Prior to 'the facts', our worldview will inform us as to the primary cause and therefore the primary solution. Worldviews answer the following four questions, often in very different ways:

Creation: Where we did we come from?

Fall: Where did things go wrong?

Redemption: What will make things right?

Glorification: When will everything be made right?

A popular and politically correct way of looking at the crises we face in South Africa, Africa and the developing world, is the idea that ethnic-based colonialism is the primary reason for our malaise, resulting in poverty.

What the President said has resonance with many across the so-called global South. In many circles, this has become largely

unquestioned, with numerous examples cited in favour, including apartheid, slavery, human rights abuses, forced removals and the colonial project.

Yes, all of these happened. Yet If this statement about Jan van Riebeeck (or Christopher Columbus in the Americas or Captain James Cook in the Pacific) is true, it follows therefore that the dismantling of colonialism (and neo-colonialism) will make things right and bring an end to poverty. Diagnosis, prescription, cure...voila!



However, if this is the primary reason, this still leaves us with some unanswered questions: How is it that nations that were never colonised, such as Ethiopia – are still struggling with poverty? How is it that the nations that experienced the greater (not lesser) degrees of colonialism in Africa – notably South Africa – are comparatively much better off than countries that experienced much lesser degrees, such as Niger?

### **How is it that...?**

How is it that other countries that only recently gained independence, such as Singapore in 1967 – are no longer impoverished, while other countries such as Liberia – independent from 1847, are in dire poverty? How is it that immigrants can come to South Africa with nothing, often unable to speak a local language and with little to no prospects of a formal well-paying job, and still make something of their life despite the challenges they face?

Apartheid and colonialism have had many serious consequences. Nevertheless, a Christian worldview of history begs us to dig deeper to the root. Coming back to a biblical view of history, the Bible clearly teaches us that things went wrong when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden.

We sometimes grasp this for individual lives, but because of our secular acceptance of education, we almost never apply this to our national lives. Let's do that for a moment and question the statement through a biblical lens.

In the grand story of history, the Bible teaches us that things began to go wrong in Africa, Asia, South America, Australasia and the rest of the world, not when white explorers landed on their shores, but when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. The manifestation of this may differ from person to person and region to region, but the root is the same. To summarise: our problems didn't begin with Jan, they began with Adam. We don't have a skin problem, we have a sin problem.

### **Sin not skin**

Looking through this biblical lens we will see the wrongs that president mentioned, but we will also see a lot more that he did not. What a biblical lens will do will take us from watching a movie on a bottom-of-the-range laptop, to watching on IMAX. This will not deny the traditional white on black abuses of history, but it will show us that there are a lot more that do not fit into this category. (Like I said, if we go back to Adam, we see we have a sin problem not just a skin one.)

If we have the courage to face some uncomfortable realities and swim upstream, we will find ample evidence of tribal warfare, slavery, genocide, forced removals, rape, torture, cannibalism, conquests and more in all of these regions prior to colonialism.

The accounts of Afro-phile missionary David Livingstone speak of the horrors of inter-tribal and Afro-Arab slavery in Central Africa, prior to white colonialism. Ironically, this is part of the reason Livingstone issued a worldwide call for foreigners to come to Africa, pleading for anyone to come and help heal this "open wound of the world" with these famous

words: "All I can say in my solitude is, May Heaven's rich blessing come down on every one – American, English, Turk – who will help to heal this open sore of the world."

Staying with slavery, you will find our school curriculum dealing with the subject exclusively under the heading: "the Transatlantic Slave Trade". The vast majority of students therefore end up knowing a lot about this slave trade, but nothing about intra-African slavery or the Arab slave trade that existed for longer and resulted in greater casualties than its oft talked about Atlantic counterpart.

In *What If The Bible Had Never Been Written*, authors D James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe write the following: The Spanish conquistadores who explored the Americas were guilty of many heinous crimes, as in the region of Peru where the conquistadores forced the Indians to mine gold. Thousands died in the process. (however,) the mistake the politically correct crowd makes is to present the Europeans (Christians) always as the bad guys – exploitative, oppressive – and to present the native Americans always as the good guys – peace-loving, in harmony with nature.

Historian John Eidsmoe describes what Hernando Cortez and his men found when they entered the Aztec temples in Mexico: As they entered the temples they discovered that everything Diaz and Gomara have described in other parts of Mexico was here in the city: ...idols complete with basins in which to place sacrificed human hearts, the walls and steps coated with blood and human gore, the enormous piles of skulls and bones, and there was more.

Gomara described an ossuary or theatre made of skulls and mortar: "Andreas de Tapia, who described it to me, and Gonzalo de Umbria counted them one day and found them to number 136 000 skulls, including those on the poles and steps. Those in the towers could not be numbered."

## **Julius Nyerere**

The same could be said in the post-colonial era. Speaking out against the atrocities committed by Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in the 1970's, Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere said: "Since Amin usurped power he has murdered more people than Smith in Rhodesia, more than Vorster in South Africa. But there is this tendency in Africa that it does not matter if an African kills other Africans...Being black is now becoming a certificate to kill fellow Africans."

This is the terrible consequence of seeing history solely through the lens of ethnic colonialism: genocides, dictatorship and a whole host of other wrongs simply go under the radar.



Jesus powerfully reveals this in Matt 7:4-5, declaring: *4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

The reality therefore, is that without applying the great equalizer of the cross to our lives, we cannot see the world clearly.

## **Conclusion**

Author Darrow Miller provides a fitting conclusion as he compares how other worldviews wrongly identify the primary cause of poverty: "Each of these three systems (of evolutionary secularism, revolutionary secularism and animism – ancestralism in our context) have an element of truth.

“For the sake of profit and ‘tolerance,’ multinational corporations do turn a blind eye toward terrible crimes against humanity. Brutal, tyrannical regimes exist. Unjust landowners don’t allow their tenant farmers enough land to feed their families. I know corruption. I know greed. These things are real and have an impact on people’s lives.

“Colonialism has had an impact. Neocolonialism has had an impact. There really are spirits that affect our lives. These facts are evident. But each of the three views we’ve briefly examined is fundamentally flawed in its assessments. It doesn’t look deep enough because of its assumptions. When we look at the same problem through the story of the Bible, our biblical worldview leads us to a much broader and deeper analysis and to radically different solutions.”

If we truly want to get to the root of our problems, let us challenge political correctness and look broader and deeper than ethnicity and colonialism: let’s begin with sin in all its manifestations.

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## **The prophetic power of the arts – Tendai Chitsike**

**THE WHOLE CHICKEN**  
by: Tendai Chitsike



## **A monthly column that reflects on living in the Kingdom of God.**

2 Samuel 12 records an unusual story. King David had just done the unthinkable: he had taken another man's wife, slept with her and ensured her husband Uriah was killed on the battlefield.

This was David's shocking fall from grace, but also a picture of the depravity that lies within us all. It is one thing to confront a man who is hardened and unrepentant after adultery and murder. It is another thing all together when the man in question is the king, a man who up until this moment had led extremely well.

God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David, so as to bring about repentance. Even for a prophet of Nathan's stature, this is no small endeavour. How does he do it? He does so in a most unusual way to some of us. He does it with a story.

The story is so well told and paralleled to David's situation that it arouses within the king a righteous indignation that allows Nathan to reveal to David that the villain in the story is in fact himself. This, then begins the process of David's repentance, a repentance that arrested a situation that would have only gotten more destructive.

I am in Grahamstown, and it is that time of year when we are in the news, not because of students, but because of hosting the National Arts Festival.

What does 2 Samuel have to do with the arts? Everything.

We live in a world hardened by sin's deceitfulness, hell-bent on turning from God and centred on doing whatever it takes to secure personal pleasure and advancement.

As God has done with both Nathan and Himself, prophets are desperately needed to bring us back to our senses through the



power of story – the arts if you like.

This in turn can provide a platform for THE Story: what we call the gospel: from creation, fall and all the way to redemption.

The arts – and the story it brings, has a powerful way of arresting our attention and awakening our senses, for good or for evil.

In this regard, the arts can be used in a similar way to how God uses suffering: as his “megaphone to rouse a deaf world” as CS Lewis wrote.

Getting back to 2 Sam 12, the story was so provocative that David, upon hearing of the rich man’s greed declared: ‘That man deserves to die.’”

When we get such a picture of ourselves, then we are truly ready for the gospel, and that is what this story, and the arts as a medium, can powerfully accomplish.

The sad reality is that in the last century, the arts have often been a forerunner to changing the culture for the worse in the Western world.

Movies and other media have powerfully transformed the way the culture views sexual ethics. We would never have been where we are today as a culture without the preceding media that began to stir our emotions and present us with new anti-God heroes we sympathised with.

Once we had done that, it was only a matter of time before the acceptable norms of society follow suit.

What we have witnessed is not merely a change of norms; it has gone far deeper than that.

As Moses witnessed and heard as he descended from Mt Sinai, we have embraced a change of gods, and you tell can from the

music.

Regarding the way the arts have been virtually kidnapped by a worldview in opposition to the true Artist, apologist Ravi Zacharias poignantly wrote in his book *Can Man Live Without God*: “Truth has been relegated to subjectivity; beauty has been subjugated to the beholder; and as millions are idiotised night after night, a global commune has been constructed with the arts enjoying a totalitarian rule.”

The problem of course is not with the medium of the arts, but rather with the predominant worldview that shapes much of modern art, and with it the hearts and minds of billions.

It is therefore encouraging to see artists, “Nathans” if you like, employing their skill to prophetically declare that God is not dead and we should turn back to him.

Two exhibitions that are boldly pursuing this endeavour at this year’s Arts festival are the Solo exhibition “Stand” by Jonathan Griffiths and “40 stones in the Wall” by a number of artists.

Both exhibitions powerfully portray the biblical view of creation, fall and redemption in our contemporary world, urging us to come to our senses and turn to God, whether it is various pieces revealing our lostness in “Stand”, or the prophetic picture of *Jacob’s descent* in “40 Stones” that highlights President Jacob Zuma’s (and our) lostness and need for the transforming power of God.

CS Lewis declared the following in the context of Christians engaging in the world of philosophy and apologetics: “If all the world were Christian it might not matter if all the world were uneducated. But a cultural life will exist outside the Church whether it exists inside or not. To be ignorant and simple now – not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground – would be to throw down our weapons, and betray our uneducated brethren who have no defense but us against

intellectual attacks of the heathen.”

Similarly, we could also say that for us to neglect the arts and godly artists would be to throw down our weapons and leave millions in the grip of a worldview opposed to God.

May we therefore do whatever is in our power to realise the God-given gift that art is, and support those who are prophetically pursuing this noble endeavour.