

THE AFRICAN LEADERSHIP LETTER

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WHY WESLEYAN THEOLOGY MATTERS

Christianity is a faith that upholds the fundamental belief that God's redemptive plan was fulfilled through Jesus who came and died for humanity. It believes that salvation is derived through Christ alone (1 Tim 2:5). This implies that Christianity denies any other form of achieving salvation. Christianity has a range of teachings of what it believes and practices. This can be summarized as follows:

- Doctrine of the Final Authority: the source of authority of the Christian faith (Scripture)
- Doctrine of God and creation which includes the essential nature of God, his names, attributes, creation, trinity and providence.
- Doctrine of man which include the original state of man, his sinful state and the covenant of grace.
- Doctrine of Christ which includes the names and nature, his office, the atonement through his sacrificial death, resurrection and subsequent ascension.
- Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the application of redemption: the common application of the Holy Spirit in grace, calling, regeneration, conversion, repentance, justification, sanctification etc.
- The Doctrine of the Church: its nature, government and power and the sacraments administered such as Baptism, Lord's Supper, etc.
- The doctrine of the Last Things: physical death and intermediate state, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, the last judgment and the final state.

The Wesleyan Church like other Christian religious organizations shares the same basic and fundamental Christian doctrines or the knowledge about the being of God. As a Church we believe in the articles of faith as contained in the Wesleyan Discipline:

- The holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- The Sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption and judgment.
- The divine inspiration and trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures.
- The universal sinfulness and guilt of human nature.
- The salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of Jesus by faith apart from works and regeneration of the Holy Spirit.
- In the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Sanctification: initial, progressive, and entire sanctification.
- In the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- In the resurrection of the dead of both saved and the lost. The saved will rise to everlasting life and the lost to eternal punishment.
- In the Christian church as the complete body of believers in Jesus Christ who is the

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founder and head of the Church. (Wesleyan Discipline, 2002, p 15-22)

We are a church reaching out to the world with a heart driven by love and compassion for humanity. To achieve this end, we are committed to the truth of the undiluted Word of God as the basis of our faith; the discipline of prayer as the source of strength in our service; the efficiency and integrity in our service for our church ministries; the proper use of the resources God has entrusted to us as stewards; the promotion of human dignity through good leadership; the good relationships through partnership based on honesty and respect, and values for continuous learning and the ministry of compassion through social ministry.

Why Does Wesleyan Theology Matter?

The Wesleyan Church is sensitive to the values and practice of Christianity. It is for this reason that premium is placed on sound theological training for pastors wishing to serve in the Church. Congregants are received into membership in the Church only after they have been subjected to the appropriate doctrinal teachings of the Church. Wesleyan theology matters for the following reasons:

- The Church recognizes the fact that man by nature has an idea of God and that they can better understand the nature of God through the systematic teaching of doctrine as contained in the Wesleyan theology. The church is aware that man has an innate

knowledge about God which needs to be tapped and sustained.

- From Wesleyan theology congregants of the Wesleyan Church are able to discover God's plan for their salvation through Christ our Lord. The Church has adequate teachings about Christianity as evident in the article of faith. In addition to the article of faith there are also special directions on what we Wesleyans believe as contained in the teachings about drinking, smoking, secret societies etc. In all of these teaching members of the Church have the opportunity to learn about God's plan for them.
- Wesleyan theology enhances members of the Church to know truth from falsehood. This is the reason why the teaching and preaching of the word is emphasized at all times. The result of this is clear in that Wesleyans are able to stand firm in what they believe in the midst of false teachings all over the world.

The study of God is the foundation of true Christianity. Christians will come to know God, love him, and defend the truth only when we are grounded in the knowledge of God through a systematic study of the being of God. The Wesleyan Church is no different from this thought. We believe that the basis of our spirituality is the knowledge of God as found in scripture. The church has made and is making every effort to ensure that people are firm in the knowledge of God.



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# CORRECTING FALSE TEACHING IN THE CHURCH: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

## Introduction

*False Teaching* in the Church of Jesus Christ is an age-old experience; it occurred amongst Old and New Testament congregations. The Early, post-New Testament Church (during the times of the Church Fathers) dealt with heretical groups of various kinds and forms (e.g. Nestorianism<sup>1</sup>, Docetism<sup>2</sup>, Arianism<sup>3</sup>, etc.). I would classify *false teaching* as a *sine qua non* to the “Gates Hadēs,” i.e. the schemes of Satan and his angels.<sup>4</sup> Satan has used people, events, ideas, and things to **mar** the Conservative, Evangelical teaching of Scripture; he has masqueraded himself as its true teacher throughout the history of the congregations of Israel and the Church. The Apostle Peter says, “But there were also *false prophets*<sup>5</sup> in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you...” (1 Peter 2:1, NIV, italics added). This declaration urges and challenges true, credible

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<sup>1</sup> This heresy denied and rejected Jesus Christ being a single person who is truly God and man, with His two natures fusing in their union within one person.

<sup>2</sup> This heresy denied Jesus Christ having a real physical body, and taught that His suffering, crucifixion and resurrection were mere illusion.

<sup>3</sup> This heresy denied the full divinity/deity of Jesus Christ; i.e. that He is not eternal as God the Father but was created by the Father before the foundation of the world.

<sup>4</sup> The RSV translates this as “The powers of death,” which, according to some Commentators, “...is not a question of Satanic powers, but of death...” (cf. *Bible Knowledge Commentary*; Cf. *New International Bible Commentary*, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*), so that the Church “shall never perish” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*). Whilst these translations are support the Jewish understanding of “hades” (Sheol), I would agree with Dr. Adam Clarke’s view of “Gates of Hades” being “...the plots, stratagems...strength of Satan and his angels (being able) so far...as to destroy the sacred truths...”

<sup>5</sup> “Lying prophets,” says *THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language*.

teachers of the Scripture to rise and correct said teaching.

## Transporters of *False Teaching* in the Church Today

Africans know that *malaria* is “the number one killer disease” on our Continent. It is transported by *mosquitoes* — little, apparently harmless, flying insects. They enter our homes (and within mosquito nets at night) notwithstanding necessary preventive measures. Transporters of *false teaching* in the Church are *False Teachers*. Like mosquitoes, they take advantage of the slightest opportunity (i.e. lack of biblically trained teachers in the Church, biblically illiterate congregation, physical and financial needs, etc.) and infiltrate the Church to spread their *false teaching*. The Apostle Peter speaks of them as *secret* introducers of destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1). The NT word for “Secret” is best understood as, “to cleverly smuggle.” The word Peter uses here (*pareisagō*) is “to bring in something that becomes an addition to something...to introduce (i.e. a new thing), rather than to hide oneself to do something (this would be “*kruptō*”; see John 19:38) (p. Danker 2000:774). They are not known members of other religions or Christian cults. No! Instead, they are amongst us; they appear

*Transporters of false teaching in the Church are . . . like mosquitoes, they take advantage of the slightest opportunity . . . and infiltrate the Church to spread their false teaching.*

like true, “born again” Christians. In fact, many of them are learned individuals who become “covenant members” of denominations / local congregations, and because they appear like normal, credible teachers, are assigned to teach / preach!<sup>6</sup>

The context of 2 Peter (2:20-22) suggests that these teachers had “escaped the corruption of the world by *knowing* our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...*have known* the way of righteousness....” They too were bought by Jesus (v.1). Paul speaks of them to the Church of Galatia as “...some *brothers* had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ and to make us slaves” (Galatians 2:4).

Peter uses the Predictive Future (“...there **will be** false teachers among you...”) to assure the visible presence and works of these so-called teachers within the Church (Acts 20:29; Galatians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). They have infiltrated or will do so in two primarily subtle ways: (1) They enter the Church as **sheep** (Matthew 7:15), thus portraying themselves to be innocent and harmless; (2) They enter the Church as “**servants of righteousness**” (2 Corinthians 11:15), thus believed to be teachers of God /Jesus Christ. Jesus and Paul best describe them as **savage, ferocious wolves** who “will not spare the flock” (cf. Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29).

### Types of False Teaching in the Church Today

The *false* teachers / prophets of the Scripture were recognized by certain teachings; contemporary *false* teachers / prophets have the same or similar trait, so that we are able to recognize them as well. Let us consider at least seven main ones:

1. Their Promise of Compulsory Physical Healing Through Jesus’ Stripes (1 Peter 2:24; cf. 2 Peter 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:3;

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<sup>6</sup> Some of them are even pastors of large congregations!

Jeremiah 14:13-18). They teach their congregations to pray for and **claim** their physical healing, because it is their privilege, guaranteed by Jesus’ stripes (1 Peter 2:24).<sup>7</sup> The truth is, whilst the word that Peter uses (*iaomai*) is used of physical healing in some passages (e.g. Matthew 8:8, 13; 15:28; Luke 6:18; 7:7; 8:47; 9:11, 42; 14:4; 17:15; John 5:13; Acts 9:34; 10:38; 28:8; James 5:16), it refers to spiritual healing in many, including 1 Peter 2:24 (cf. Matthew 13:15; John 12:40; Acts 28:27 [Isaiah 6:10]; Hebrews 12:13 [Isaiah 35:3]). You would observe that 1 Peter 2:24 quotes Isaiah 53:5, which speaks of spiritual healing by the Suffering Servant of Yahweh! (See vv. 1-6). Additionally, the context of the entire book of 1 Peter does support a spiritual rather than a physical healing (e.g. 1:1-2:23, 25; 3:8-4:8). Acts (20:7-10) and 2 Corinthians (12:7-10) reveal that the Lord refused to heal Paul, the healer and dead- raiser.

2. Their Promise of Economic Prosperity — they use 2 Corinthians 8:9. Paul speaks here about Christ emptying Himself of “all His divine prerogatives,” at His incarnation, so that sinners might become spiritually rich through His sacrificial death on the cross. Those who accept His sacrifice on their behalf and receive Him into their lives as

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<sup>7</sup> Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave write, in Foundations of Pentecostal Theology ((Duffield and Van Cleave 2002:391, italics and emphases mine).<sup>7</sup> These learned theologians say, “All of (Christ’s) bodily sufferings were in order that we might be healed. Peter bears this out when he quotes Isaiah 53:5: ‘Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were **healed**.’ Lest it might be thought that Peter was referring to spiritual healing, it is noted that the word ‘**healed**’ is the Greek *iaomai*, a verb that **always** speaks of physical healing in the New Testament, and **always in connection with healing of physical ailments**” (emphasis added).

Savior and Lord, receive several “riches,” including *salvation, forgiveness, peace with Himself, the Father and themselves, joy, glory, honor, majesty, heirs of God and co-heirs with Jesus Himself* (Romans 5:1-2; 8:17; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:4-5; 1 Peter 1:3-4). It is interesting to note that the immediate (passage) context of 2 Corinthians 8:9 speaks of the Macedonian Churches as being “extremely poor” (v. 2).

3. Their Performance of “Signs and Wonders” (Matthew 7:22; 24:24). They use Jesus’ name during their performances to deceive their audiences— true Christians who are seeking for some kind of “breakthrough” in their situations; they themselves are not disciples of Jesus. Actually, they are magicians who use satanic powers to accomplish their goals. These preachers visit Nigeria and Mozambique, for example, for their “powers” (I know Liberians and Swazis who have done this!).
4. Their Pretense of Being True Teachers /Preachers (2 Peter 2:3, 18; 2 Timothy 4:3; Jeremiah 5:30, 31)
5. Their Perversion of the Gospel via Persuasive Words (Galatians 1:6-8; Ephesians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:3; 1 John 4:5; Jeremiah 14:16-18)
6. Their Promotion of Materials that Emit the Powers of Jesus /the Holy Spirit (i.e. selling of “anointing oil,” “holy water,” “holy sand,” holy dust,” “anointed clothing,” etc. , (2Peter 2:1).
7. Their Preaching of Non-Association with Poor Persons. The basis of this teaching is that “Jesus only associated with rich women for His support.” Of course, this contradicts with Jesus’ dependence upon these women for His support! Paul was not rich (Acts 20:33-35; Philippians 4:10-18; 1 Thessalonians 2:9)

We must brace ourselves to correct false teaching in our Church, or we will indicate that we are unqualified to do so. And the Lord will be angry with us and punish us as He threatened to do with the shepherds and leaders of Israel (Zechariah 10:2-3).

### Effects of False Teaching in the Church

There are a couple of effects of *false teaching* in the Church:

1. The biblically illiterate have left their churches and followed after the false teachers.
2. The deceived seekers of physical/ economic prosperity have experienced worst states. As the result, many have turned to traditional witchdoctors for answers instead of the Lord.
3. The deceived audiences have classified even true pastors/preachers as deceivers.

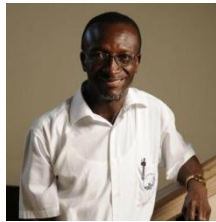
### Means of Correcting False Teaching in the Church

I wish to propose the following practical ways to correct false teaching in our Church (credible teachers must be trained [Zech. 10:2b]):

1. Let Us Teach Our Congregations the Truth (via regular exegetical, expositional Bible preaching and teaching).
2. Let Us Teach Our Congregations to Read, Understand and Interpret the Scriptures (via the Inductive Bible Study Method and Hermeneutics)—I started doing this from 1992. At these seminars, Wesleyans and non-Wesleyans have attended! Many of my lay-students are reliable pastors and teachers of our large, growing churches today. Two of the occasional preachers at the First Wesleyan Church in Monrovia (Liberia) are a professional nurse and an electronic engineer respectively!

3. Let Us Train Our Pastors / Teachers at credible, evangelical colleges and seminaries.
4. Let Us Throw the False Teachers/Preachers out of the Church. Heretical groups and their advocates are condemned by the canonical law; they were excommunicated from the Early Church. The Church should do likewise today. cf. Numbers 14:36-37; cf. 13. Quite recently, I worked with an

Evangelical Christian Fellowship to dismiss pastor whom they had had for about two years. He was a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” who started well; however, after the elders and congregation had reposed confidence in him, he began to cleverly introduce false doctrines in his teaching and preaching. The Wesleyan Church should be vigilant and ready to act as this church did.



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## Is that Teaching Biblical?

It’s not always easy to identify false prophets in the church. They look and sound very much like the real preachers of the truth. That’s why Jesus called them “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” When they preach and teach they can sound very convincing and authoritative and might even be highly educated. They quote and refer to the Scriptures regularly in their speaking to the extent that mature believers might even be led astray. This is what Jesus warned us of in Matthew 24:24 when he said “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

As Wesleyan leaders we have a responsibility to equip our members with the skills to evaluate the preaching/teaching of anyone who claims to proclaim God’s word. May Wesleyans become known to be like the Berean Jews who, “were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message

with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Acts 17:11)

How can African Wesleyans determine whether or not a doctrine being proclaimed is truly biblical or not? What follows are a number of suggestions to consider:

1. The best way to be able to recognize error is to be well acquainted with the truth. It is reported that in the United States when FBI

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agents are taught how to recognize counterfeit money they begin by spending several weeks working with and handling genuine bank notes so that when they eventually do encounter counterfeit money they instinctively know it doesn't feel right. If Wesleyans are regularly taught the truth of the Scriptures so that they become familiar with the truth, they will instinctively feel uncomfortable with error when they hear it preached, knowing that something is not quite right, even if they can't immediately identify exactly where the error is.

2. Sound doctrine is based on the Scripture as a whole and not on an isolated verse or two. It is a basic principle of biblical interpretation that Scripture does not contradict itself, so if a teaching based on a verse/passage of Scripture appears to contradict the clear teaching of Scripture as a whole, then one should question whether the verse/passage is being interpreted correctly.
3. Sound doctrine should be based on the clear teaching passages of the Scripture rather than from the stories found throughout the Scriptures. The stories of Scripture do illustrate important truth, but can lead to error if they are the basis of our teaching. For example, a number of cults have used the story of Jesus telling the rich young ruler that he should sell everything and give to the poor (Mark 10) as justification for their teaching that their members should give all their material possessions over to the church.
4. False teachers will often claim to have discovered a "new" truth in Scripture that has been missed by the church for the past two thousand years. Any teaching that conflicts with the historic teachings of the church as reflected in the creeds and the

long-standing doctrinal statements of the church should be rejected.

5. Deuteronomy 18:22 states that "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed." Many of today's false teachers claim to give prophecies, but often those prophecies do not come true. In such cases one should not trust anything that such a "prophet" has to say. . . . For example, last year prior to elections in Zambia a prominent "prophet" from Nigeria prophesied that the election would be followed by a bloodbath and wide spread violence. That has not taken place, so why is it that thousands of Christians still flock to listen to such a man who has been proven by Scripture to be a false prophet?
6. If a person who is preaching/teaching lives a life that is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, then one should be wary of the teaching that he/she is giving. Speaking of false teachers, Jude 11 says, "They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion." That is to say, false teachers can often be recognized by their sins of pride (as with Cain's rejection of God's plan), greed (as in Balaam's prophesying for money), and rebellion (as in the case of Korah's rebellion against Moses).

Addressing the elders of the church at Ephesus the apostle Paul warns them, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to

draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:28-31a)

Paul's warning and instruction is relevant for the Wesleyan Church in Africa today. We have a responsibility to our people to not only proclaim the truth, but also to warn them

about the false prophets who would lead them astray. May God help us to proclaim the truth and to refute the errors and false teaching that abounds throughout African Christianity.



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