

Creative Ways of Promoting “Africa Matters” -- Part II

2017 Report of the Africa Region to the Orbis Books Advisory Committee Meeting

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NOTE: This *2017 Report* presupposes the comments and suggestions made in previous reports.

On our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website (www.smallchristiancommunities.org) we have a Poll that states: “The best part of my Small Christian Community is:” followed by five choices. The top vote getter this month is the choice: “Reaches out to the marginated and those on the periphery of society.” This leads into an inspiring story in one of the new Orbis Books *James Martin: Essential Writings*. In the “Introduction” James Keane described Martin’s ministry with refugees in Eastern Africa and how he wrote in *America Magazine* about one particular refugee named Benjamin:

When I think of Benjamin, and of the Christian life, I think that whenever I get to heaven, God will not ask how many articles or books I’ve written, how many degrees I’ve received or how many times I appeared on television. I think the first thing God will ask is, “How is my friend Benjamin?”

Africans like to send greetings. A number of African authors send greetings to our meeting. Teresa Hinga writes: “I thank Orbis and the Maryknoll community for what I have referred to elsewhere as their gift of accompaniment that allows African writers to have a place at the table.” Janice McLaughlin writes: “I always appreciated the Orbis Books meetings when I was on the board. They were always very stimulating and full of good discussion and new insights.” Blessings, Janice.”

1. Update on the Present African Context:

A key to understanding Africa today is the influence of “The Tribal Chief Syndrome:” that is, the African tradition that there is only one chief (leader) and that he dies in office. Also, the chief likes to hand over power to his children especially his sons. This can apply to local traditional leadership, modern governments and the Catholic Church in Africa.

This syndrome has its positive aspects. Traditionally, the chief looked after the welfare of all the people including the poor and unfortunate. Research shows that ordinary people in Africa

will support the “benevolent strong man President” (from one political party) if he maintains peacefulness and security in the country. The New York Times comments that elections in multiparty democracies in Africa are “messy and unpredictable.”

Now we see various African countries and leaders pushing for constitutional changes to increase one, the Presidential Term Limits, two, the length of a Presidential Term and three, the maximum age of a presidential candidate. Classic Case Study of Zimbabwe: 93-year-old Robert Mugabe. Gucci Grace. Military intervention. See Janice McLaughlin’s fine article in *The Tablet*. http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/11743/he-could-have-been-a-hero-?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=25%20November%202017&utm_content=25%20November%202017+CID_e4b16f9e8a94c18e63ebf31cbe975eb&utm_source=virtueMail%20marketing%20software&utm_term=by%20Janice%20McLaughlin

There are not two chiefs. Coalition Governments (Governments of National Unity) don’t seem to work well in Africa. On the difficulties of sharing power there are two similar African proverbs: *Two bulls can't stay in the same kraal* (Tswana, Botswana). *Two bulls do not live in the same cowshed* (Swahili, East and Central Africa).

In general, Catholic African Archbishops have not worked well with their auxiliaries. There is only one chief. In some of our SCCs when a leader finished two terms he or she likes to hand over the position of chairperson/give the power to someone else in the family (nepotism).

New twists on our two biggest diseases in Kenya: Corruption and tribalism. They are like twins. They support each other and feed off each other.

2. Focused Marketing.

Our research shows that books on Africa sell very slowly. For many Americans and African Americans, Africa still “does not matter.”

From Bernadette Price’s research, books by individual/single African authors such as Orobator (*Theology Brewed in An African Pot* that has an unusually high Ebook sale of 312) and Magesa (*What Is Not Sacred?*) do better than edited collections such as:

Orobator, Agbonkhianmeghe E. (ed.), *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016. Orbis Edition in 6th Printing. --- 556 paperback copies and 16 Ebooks sold as of 7 December, 2016.

Azetsop, Jacquineau (ed.), *HIV & AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016. In process: African Editions in both English and French. Orbis Edition in 2nd Printing. 455 paperback copies and 2 Ebooks sold as of 7 December, 2016.

These Ebook sales are poor, given that 10% of Orbis Books’ present sales are Ebooks.

Why? To use the marketing metaphor, after our very focused (and expensive!) “Book Events,” these last two books “have not had legs.”

Research shows that social media is a very good way of promoting these books.

Comment from Teresia Hinga: “I would urge efforts to enhance the marketability of edited volumes rather than abandon publishing these collaborative works and joint authorship. I urge support of this kind of publishing because as I have argued elsewhere (see “Acknowledgments” pages of my book *African, Christian, Feminist*), such collaboration arises out of methodological imperatives in Africa. Instead of competition and publishing for individual enhancement, an emerging, and in my view most commendable, trend is towards collaborative research, writing and publishing on “Matters that Matter in Africa.” Writing in community, and for the enrichment of community (for the Common Good), is an idea perhaps well captured by the notion of *palaver* as I explain in my book.

And so, rather than hesitating to publish works produced by communities of scholars using the *Palaver* Model, I would urge support, even extra support, for these kinds of books for several reasons:

1. This collaborative model does not supplant individual publication; rather it complements it since would-be authors of individual manuscripts can learn useful skills from and with each other when they participate in such communal *palavers* for publication.
2. Moreover, ideologically and from an African theo-ethical perspective, collaboration rather than competition is the more morally viable path in many contexts and not just in book writing.
3. The *palaver* model and the resulting anthologies also allow “multiple voices” to emerge and to be heard -- another added benefit of writing collaboratively rather than competitively.

One practical solution is “Focused Marketing,” that is, marketing directly to potential readers. An example: one Kenyan priest and one Kenyan layman are presently studying at Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. They are trying to promote Orbis Books on Africa. Recently, they ordered a total of 60 copies of different books on Africa.

Comment from Peter Knox, SJ: “Wilfred Sumani will launch his new book *Mothers of Faith: Motherhood in the Christian Tradition* on 11 January, 2018 piggy-backing on a public lecture at Hekima College in Nairobi. [NOTE: As a first, we are arranging with Montfort Media in Balaka, Malawi to print an African Edition]. We have to use whatever opportunities present themselves to continue to promote our books. One of the reasons foreign-printed books don't sell very well in Africa is because of their high price. Co-publishing with a local publishing house is sometimes a solution. But not very helpful if the local publisher does not have a distribution network.”

Comment from Teresia Hinga: “We need to persevere. Let’s continue to highlight in our writing and scholarship that ‘Africa Matters’ to, fro and beyond. Perhaps we should even envisage an ongoing Africa Matters’ Series at Orbis Books and encourage new voices to contribute.” The outcome is of true value as commentary (often with practical suggestions) on

how to address the issues that challenge the African continent. Maybe several “veteran” authors with Orbis could undertake the administration of the series in collaboration with, and the support of, Orbis and Maryknoll.”

Comment from John Sivalon: “Only one caution to not let marketing solely determine what should be published. As you know there are things that need to be published even if people don't want to hear what the author has to say.”

Comment from Janice McLaughlin: “Many thanks for your desire to share its spiritual riches with the rest of the world. I think there is a problem in trying to reach two very diverse audiences with the same book -- an African audience and a USA or European audience. The longer that I live on this continent of Africa the more I realize how little I know and how my thinking differs from that of local people who see things so differently from me. When I wrote my reflections on animals (*Ostriches, Dung Beetles and Other Spiritual Masters*), I was writing for my friends and relatives in the States who I wanted to understand what I love about the African continent. I would have written it very differently if I was aiming at a Zimbabwean or a Kenyan audience. I think that a book about US issues from an African viewpoint would sell in the States whereas a book about African issues might not.”

Comment from Jesse Mugambi: “Books are only one ‘medium’ of ‘publication.’ Publication through books is extremely demanding, and requires many specialized inputs. Radio, TV, Internet and mobile telephony are other mediums in the Third Millennium. But literary communication is indispensable in this Third Millennium! While publication of books for sale helps to recoup some of the costs and plough them back for more titles, the business motivation cannot, in the long term sustain a publishing initiative whose purpose is not commercial. The challenge for all of us, is to find and strengthen ways and means to facilitate publications by African scholars within Africa, and also to make those publications conveniently available in Europe and North America.”

We are all looking forward to the Third International Conference of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina from 26-29 July 2018. The theme is: “A Critical Time for Bridge-Building: Catholic Theological Ethics Today.” We are happy that Orbis will have a Display Table coordinated by Alban Books. Several Africans who are Orbis authors will be at the conference and will be happy to help Jill O’Brien promote Orbis Books on Africa.

3. Print on Demand (POD)¹

¹ **Print-on-demand (POD)** is a [printing](#) technology and business process in which book copies (or other documents) are not printed until the company receives an order, allowing prints of singular or small quantities. While other industries established the [build to order](#) business model, "print-on-demand" could only develop after the beginning of [digital printing](#), because it was not economical to print single copies using traditional printing technology such as [letterpress](#) and [offset printing](#).

Print on Demand (POD) is revolutionizing marketing and distribution. It used to be that for a person in the USA to buy a book published by an African Publishing House in Nairobi, Kenya, you would have to pay the shipping cost that could be three times the cost of the book itself, the book could take weeks if not months to come and you couldn't be sure that it would even arrive. Now through Amazon the book can be ordered as a POD book and arrive to three days (one day for Express Shipping). It can also be bought as an Ebook. Example:

Chimombo, Emmanuel, Joseph G. Healey, Rita Ishengoma, Rose Musimba, Febian P. Mulenga and Alphonse C. L. Omolo, (eds.), *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators*, Nairobi: AMECEA Pastoral Department and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2017. Two editions of the paperback. Ebook available through Paulines Publications Africa on Android Platforms only (smartphones, tablets, etc.) – not on Apple or Microsoft. Paperback (POD) and Ebook available on Amazon. Go to: https://www.amazon.com/.../197.../ref=oh_aui_detailpage_o00_s00...

Orbis Books has always encouraged African Publishers. Now if an African Publisher publishes a book by a Orobator or Magesa, a buyer can order through Amazon and get a Print on Demand (POD) copy immediately anywhere in the world.

This process works both ways: Africa to USA and USA to Africa. We are researching what companies, especially in Kenya and South Africa, can provide Print on Demand (POD) copies of Orbis Books that do not have an Africa Edition. We are starting with Teresia Hinga's *African, Christian, Feminist*.

This is the most exciting development in my 10 years on the Orbis Books Advisory Committee.

4. Audiobooks

After my Orbis Books Report to the January, 2017 Africa Regional Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, during the question and answer period there was one concrete suggestion, namely, that Orbis Books explore having a section of Audiobooks that are increasingly popular these days (more research needed). Two examples in Africa:

a. Johannesburg Archdiocese in South Africa has for many years promoted an Annual Lenten Campaign and distributes a printed educational booklet that is also available online. In Lent, 2017 the archdiocese put the same teaching material in a free audiobook that is available

Many traditional [small presses](#) have replaced their traditional printing equipment with POD equipment or contract their printing to POD service providers. Many [academic publishers](#), including [university presses](#), use POD services to maintain large [backlists](#) (lists of older publications); some use POD for all of their publications. Larger publishers may use POD in special circumstances, such as reprinting older, out of print titles or for test marketing.

on the archdiocesan website. It was very popular and reached a new audience (more research needed).

b. In five cities of South Africa in June, 2012, Laurenti Magesa gave a series of lectures in the yearly Winter Living Theology Program sponsored by the Jesuit Institute of South Africa on the theme: “The African Church and Contemporary African Reality -- reflections on the post-Vatican II African Catholic Church.” He edited the lectures into a book: Laurenti Magesa, *The Post-Conciliar Church in Africa: No Turning Back the Clock*, Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2016. The “Select Bibliography” has 13 Orbis Books. An edited version will be published in North America by Wipf and Stock Publishers in 2018. The Jesuit Institute of South Africa in Johannesburg produced an Audiobook consisting of a set of CDs of the lectures. So, folks who could not attend his lectures in person listen to them at their own pace. This Audiobook has had slow but steady sales (more research needed).

The Feature “Audible Audiobooks” on Amazon now has 180,000 audiobooks.

Hopefully Orbis will explore this option further with solid research. Here is some anecdotal comments. Some Orbis readers say Audiobooks would be a distraction rather than an engagement. Some Orbis readers say they would not like to listen to theology. Some Orbis readers say that they would like Audiobooks on spirituality and on the *Bible*.

Comment from Tom Scott: “My sons find the time for ‘reading’ with audiobooks and podcasts as they drive to and from work. One is in Atlanta and one in Louisville. They may spend an hour or more each way getting to work each day. I would really like to see more books on spirituality available for both people their age as well as for my older friends. My retired sister and her husband take at least one long driving vacation each year to visit family in Texas or California. They always download several library audiobooks to their flash drive and listen to them on the radio to and from their family visits. They read a lot of books at home but really enjoy the audiobooks when they are on vacation. It makes the trips so much quicker. I download talks on spirituality from the Sunday morning public radio program “Humankind” to play to my prayer group which meets every Tuesday morning. They are always looking for good audio and video presentations. I hope you will encourage your friends at Orbis Books to try this approach to marketing their many excellent materials.”

5. Multi-media Digital Package

At our December, 2016 meeting both Robert and Ray encouraged new multimedia initiatives and online educational materials using selections from Orbis books. Here is the design of one multimedia digital package on “Climate Control/Environment/Ecology in Africa.” It could be used in a course or workshop or conference (classroom or online) on “Ecology in Africa.” This could be in the Theology Department of a college or university, in an African Studies Program or in an African Studies Center.

- a. Short Video on “The Challenges of Climate Control/Environment/Ecology in Africa.”
- b. Podcast by Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana.

- c. Peter Knox's Chapter "*Laudato Si'*, Planetary Boundaries and Africa" in Part III of *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (Orbis, 2016).
- d. Section from Pope Francis' "*Laudato Si.*'

Comment from Dick Baker: "Maryknoll has a huge collection of photos, videos, and other types of media that could possibly be linked to texts in Ereader Orbis books with the consent of the author. It would be a mixed media presentation within the confines of a title and text."

6. Orbis and Young People

We hope 2018 will be an exciting and productive year for Orbis and young people:

24 April, 2018: Publication of the Orbis book *Pope Francis: The Courage to Be Happy: The Pope Speaks to the Youth of the World*. We hope to market this book widely at young people events in Africa.

May, 2018: Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA) Convention at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Minneapolis --St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. Theme: "Called 2018: That Your Joy Be Complete." Maryknoll, Orbis Books and African young people representatives will participate.

October, 2018: Publication of the Orbis book that has the working title of *God's Quad or On Campus and Beyond: Small Faith Communities in Action* (five chapters related to Africa). Our plan is to have a Book Event and a Young People's Conference in Rome the week before the Synod of Bishops General Assembly on "Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment." We hope to market this book on college campuses and in Youth Ministry/Young Adult Ministry Programs in parishes and dioceses.

7. Other Observations

- a. Many thanks to Robert, Jim Keane (for the last five years) and others who have generously read and evaluated manuscripts from African authors.
- b. \$1,000 grants to libraries, theological colleges and formation houses in Africa continue.
- c. Suggestions for new books:

1. **Comment from Dick Albertine:** "One suggestion. To help USA readers to know more about Africa we need a book that can serve as a "Church Primer on Africa."

2. Question for Orbis Books: As we "read the signs of the contemporary times," should we consider a book on the present debate about the dramatic shortage of priests around the world and the proposal of ordaining mature married men of proven leadership skills (*viri*

probat in Latin). This topic of married priests has been proposed for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region that will take place in Rome in October, 2019. Some see this as a pastoral solution to the Eucharistic Famine in Africa. Due to the lack of priests, on any given Sunday most Catholics in Africa (up to 80% in some surveys) participate in a “Sunday Service Without a Priest” especially in rural areas where there is usually no Holy Communion rather than participate in a regular mass. See Fritz Lobinger, *The Empty Altar: An Illustrated Book to Help Talk about the Lack of Parish Priests*, Crossroad Publishing Company, originally copywritten in 2010, released on Amazon on 15 September, 2017.

Another possible book would be on “Reconfiguring/Repositioning/Redefining Ministry in the Catholic Church” that would also treat the sensitive topic of “Women Priests.”

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