

4 CORNERS

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Teaching the Bible in Kenya

There are a few remote parts of the country where there are still no churches at all, but in Kenya as a whole, there are tens of thousands of congregations. These congregations can be loosely divided into three groups

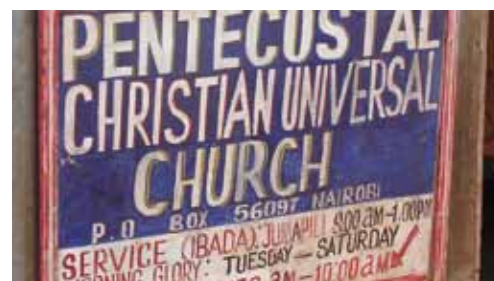


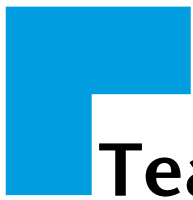
Large, long-established denominations

There are a number of very large and long established denominations in Kenya. Many of these are familiar to people in the West: the Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, the Anglican Church of Kenya and so on. There are also other large groups, for example, the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa, the Free Pentecostal Churches. Some of these have several thousand congregations, with in some cases, over a million members.

In the West, such denominations often have a large liberal element in them, with men and women denying the authority of the Bible, the deity of Christ, and his atoning death and resurrection. But on the whole, in Kenya, liberals are not such a large problem. A much, much bigger and widespread problem is this: in so many of these congregations, regardless of the official teaching of the Church, the message taught amounts to: "Do your best, help people, come to Church, say your prayers, donate money to the church projects and that is what God expects from you". Quite often that message also has attached to it a large dose of the "health and wealth gospel": "If you are a strong Christian, you should not be sick or poor or have any sort of hardship or suffering".

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Teaching the Bible in Kenya

So, in these denominations, there are millions of people who consider themselves to be Christians, who believe that the Bible is the Word of God, but who do not know what the true saving Biblical message is.

But increasingly influential are the second group:

Independent Churches

Some of these are breakaways from the large denominations. Perhaps many years ago there was a congregation where two men both wanted to be the choir master; the one who "lost out", left and formed his own congregation, where he was the choir master. Or an elder took a second wife and was put under church discipline as a result, so he left and just established another congregation where polygamy was going to be allowed. Sometimes a group split off because they felt the missionaries were hanging on to leadership for too long. Or for a hundred different reasons, congregations formed that were independent of the big denominations.

But there are other independent churches. These have a far more African feel to them. Many are church plants

from Nigeria. They are, to my ears, incredibly noisy, with lots of drumming and dancing and wailing and shrieking. These have a strongly "OT" flavour to them: the members may wear white garments, with turbans for the men; there may be animal sacrifices in the services; polygamy is practised; there is often a great emphasis on ritual washings to symbolise (or produce) cleanliness.

In these churches the Bible is generally *assumed* to be the Word of God. But in practice, there is often little or no Bible teaching in these congregations. What the people are interested in are so-called direct revelations from the Holy Spirit. So there is great emphasis on obtaining "prophecies" and "words of wisdom". These are supposed to help a person gain power over the evil forces (and evil people) that oppose him. They are supposed to help a person find out who is putting a curse on him or who is responsible for his wife's barrenness or his children's sickness. They are to discover who has buried bad medicine or evil charms in my compound to harm me. And again, the message of these churches often has a "health and wealth" component as well.

So, in these churches, many, many people say they believe the Bible, but who have very little idea of what it teaches - people who never hear of the grace of God that has been shown to sinners in Christ Jesus; who never hear of the need for the new birth, or forgiveness of sins, or growth in holiness.

Finally, there is the third group:

Cults

Two groups, in particular, are very large: the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists. Again, people who have some sort of allegiance to the Bible (as well as other so-called revelation), but who have no idea of what it teaches.

So, millions of people in large denominations, tens of thousands in the many independent churches and huge numbers in the cults, all having some sort of respect for the Bible and so **the Bible is everywhere!** There are people reading the Bible on buses, parents reading it in school car parks while they are waiting to pick up their children, assistants in post offices and shops and garages reading it (when there is no-one to serve). The Bible is everywhere. But true Biblical understanding is a rarity.

The great need then in Kenya is for people to have a proper understanding of the Scriptures; and that means we need pastors who can rightly handle the Word of Truth. Thankfully there are many pastors who are aware of their lack of training and who are eager to study so that they can more faithfully teach the Bible to their congregations. And that's where my work comes in: teaching theology and training pastors, seeking to get good Biblical theology into their heads and hearts and lives.... so they themselves can live to the glory of God and teach the whole counsel of God to the people of God.

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