

Jesus as *Mwalimu*:

Christology and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context

by Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery

“**M**walimu, may I ask you a question?”

Three young Muslim men had arrived at the home of our church leader where we had just finished our meal and a Bible study. Answering their questions had become the normal routine for me (Alan) during a season of study in that predominantly Muslim village. The local leaders of the mosque had put up significant resistance to the planting of a church, but these guests respectfully greeted those present and began to ask me about topics related to God, Jesus and the nature of the universe. But, on this occasion, I noticed something significant in their typical request: when I am addressed in these strongly Islamic villages I am recognized as a religious teacher—a *mwalimu*.

As a North American, I carry a more restrictive understanding of the title “teacher,” and typically assume its authority is limited to the classroom. For our Makua-Metto friends in Mozambique, the title *mwalimu* is more expansive and signifies a person of honor, whose power and influence speaks into every area of life. The majority of the Makua-Metto can be best described as folk Muslims, whose Islamic ways are neither devout nor orthodox, but whose religiosity shapes the way that they collectively think, speak,¹ and see the world. That socio-religious dynamic creates significant challenges related to ministry, evangelism and contextualization,² and their blend of animism and Islam raises some serious hurdles to the presentation of an orthodox Christology. But it also has the potential of revealing some new theological pathways, and the one I perceived that day was the role of the *mwalimu*.

The significance of a “powerful teacher” is woven into the origins of their country. If you ask their average citizen about the history of the name Mozambique, you will likely be pointed to a man named *Mussa Bin Bique* (Moses, son of Mbiki). While painfully little is known about him, the story goes that the Portuguese arrived and met this influential Islamic *mwalimu* of Arab descent, a slave trader, who held the same authority and respect as a

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traditional king (*Mwene* in Makua-Metto). It's these explorers who applied his name to the country as a whole, and while details of this story are difficult to prove, the tale is well known and referenced in Mozambican public schools. There is even a major university named in honor of this mwalimu.

Another influential, recent example of a mwalimu that many in northern Mozambique are familiar with is Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania. (The Makua-Metto people are mostly situated in Mozambique, but they also extend across the Rovuma River into southern Tanzania). Mwalimu Nyerere was given this title because, as one of my Tanzanian-born friends put it, "he taught the people how to live well together." Before entering politics, he was a school teacher and later in life he translated Scripture into Swahili verse.³

From our experience, the socio-religious role of the mwalimu can communicate a compelling Christology to the folk Muslim of Africa. Jesus, as an older, better, and more powerful mwalimu—even more powerful than Mussa Bin Bique's namesake, Moses—offers his name and his teaching to all in this country and across the world. This image complements the many voices which have already offered meaningful and effective African Christologies "from below." Schreiter, Stinton and Tennent have each identified different African Christological images: Healer/Life-Giver, Liberator, Leader/Chief/King, Mediator, Master of Initiation, Ancestor/Elder Brother.⁴ While these and other related motifs certainly have their place, treatments of this topic have rarely given more than a passing reference to the influence of Islam on African culture and its potential impact on Christology. I (Alan) have found that to introduce this image of Jesus as mwalimu has been the most effective way to frame a Christology for the folk Islamic Makua-Metto people. Their common Muslim

background makes this a familiar category and an effective launching point for exploring the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Instead of a Christology that starts with the virgin birth (which can certainly be a contentious topic), beginning with the idea of Jesus as a powerful religious teacher allows us to take advantage of some surprisingly fertile common ground. Jesus is a mwalimu who offers a yoke of teaching that leads to human flourishing.

It's especially in Matthew's Gospel that we're offered a biblical frame for this Christological approach to the Muslim peoples of Northern Mozambique. It is in this gospel that Jesus is portrayed as the new rabbi, a new Moses, and we believe it substantiates



using the terms mwalimu and teacher interchangeably as a shorthand for "powerful and honorable mentor and rabbi." The relevance of this biblical material calls for a quick review.

Jesus the Mwalimu in Matthew's Gospel: A Short Commentary

Matthew characterizes Jesus as a great and powerful teacher by using a variety of images and metaphors, but we would like to explore this picture of the Christ from four different angles.

The New Moses

Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses by highlighting the connections

between them. From their threatened infancies, to their escapes, to their time in the wilderness, to their each giving a new law on a mountain, their stories appear to mirror each other. For instance, Pharaoh sought to kill the Israelite children; Herod sought to kill the Jewish children. Moses was delivered from Pharaoh by being placed on the Nile, and Jesus was delivered from Herod by being taken into Egypt. Moses brought Israel out of bondage, and Jesus brings the entire world out of bondage. Moses fasted for forty days in the wilderness, and Jesus did the same while being tempted by Satan. After his fast, Moses gave the law on Mount Sinai, while Jesus issued the Sermon on the Mount not long after his own fast in the desert. Jesus engages and expands Moses' teaching saying:

You have heard that it was said (*by Moses*), "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." *But I tell you*, do not resist an evil person. (italics Sparks)⁵

Jesus is not merely presented as the new Moses, but as one greater than Moses.⁶

One example of this is seen by comparing the conclusion of their time on earth: while Moses ascends the mountain in Moab right before his death (Deuteronomy 34), the last event before Jesus' ascension was to climb the mountain where he offered the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20). It is here that Jesus uses the same phrase found in the LXX (Septuagint or Greek) text of Deuteronomy 11:23: πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ("panta ta ethne" meaning "all the nations" or "all the peoples.") Matthew furthers this connection between Moses and Jesus, as both send their followers (Israel in Moses' case and the disciples in Jesus' case) on a "quest among the nations" with the promise "I will be with you."⁷ Although Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land with his people, Jesus promises to always be with his disciples as they commence with his mission.⁸ Jesus, however, showcases the greater theme of love:

he commissions his people to go to all nations in love rather than violence, evangelizing rather than killing.⁹

The True Rabbi

As the new Moses, Jesus is Israel's authoritative teacher.¹⁰ In Matthew 23:8–10, Jesus encourages his disciples to call him by this title:

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

Here Jesus recognizes his superiority as teacher and interpreter of the law over the scribes and Pharisees.¹¹ Although the Pharisees claim titles such as “rabbi” and “teacher,”¹² disciples of Jesus are not to hold onto such titles, for they submit to the one true teacher, that is, Jesus.

An Easy Yoke

Another way Matthew characterizes Jesus as the great teacher is through the imagery of a yoke. Literally, a yoke is a mechanism used to bind two animals for the pulling of heavy loads. In ancient times, “yoke” was also a metaphor for economic and political oppression; forced political slavery was often referred to as “bearing the yoke.” However, in apocryphal Jewish literature, the yoke was likened to the Torah, wisdom, and commands from God.¹³ These multiple meanings shed light on Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28–30:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

While this is a beautiful invitation for his followers, it seems ironic that Jesus describes his own yoke as light, for no yoke was particularly comfortable, especially in light of the political oppression it often symbolized.¹⁴ Rather

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than an oppressive yoke that was all too familiar to Jews, Jesus offers liberation from both political and economic oppression experienced by the lay Jew because of the heightened demands that the Pharisees placed upon them through the oral traditions.¹⁵ It also could seem contrary to Jesus' other statements regarding discipleship.¹⁶ Here Jesus describes his yoke as easy, not because it was less demanding than other yokes, but rather because he offers to come alongside his followers, carrying the majority of the load.¹⁷ This is directly contrasted with the Pharisees' teaching, which Jesus speaks of in Matthew 23:2–4.

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

Jesus is rhetorically mocking the Pharisees in this section, facetiously telling his disciples to do and observe whatever they say but not what they do.¹⁸ The Pharisees' yoke was crushing, which explains why they were not willing to move a single finger to help. This contrasts with Jesus, who willingly took his own yoke upon himself.¹⁹

A Powerful Mentor

Throughout Matthew, Jesus is not only characterized as the great teacher, but also one that is full of power.²⁰ The power to command allegiances and cure both bodies and spirits speaks to Jesus' identity as a teacher, giving further proof of his right to challenge the authorities.²¹ So much so that, in 8:19, “a scribe came up and said to him, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’”²² Not only

does the scribe recognize Jesus as “teacher,” affirming his authority, but wants to continue learning from Jesus.²³ Without the physical power to overcome sickness and death, it seems unlikely that a scribe would have accepted Jesus' spiritual claims of this new mentor over and against the traditional interpretation of the law.²⁴ Unfortunately, neither does merely witnessing Jesus' power to heal guarantee that people will choose to follow him. For instance, when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, some of the Pharisees began to plot to have him killed. Their fanatical allegiance to their own interpretation of the Judaic law had grave consequences: it clouded their vision, blinded them to Jesus' power and authority, and caused them to desperately cling to their own power (12:9–14).

As this brief survey indicates, Matthew portrays Jesus as teacher in a variety of ways: as the new and greater “Moses”; his usage and meaning of the word “teacher” as it relates to the Pharisees, scribes, and Jesus; the contrasting yoke that Jesus offers, which is comparatively easy and light; and finally, Jesus as the authoritative teacher, who has the power to heal as well as to hold their allegiance.

Jesus as Mwalimu among the Makua-Metto of Mozambique

The most important Christological text for this folk Islamic context is Matthew 16 and 17, where Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” It's in Peter's response to his beloved rabbi, “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” that the Makua-Metto see the relation of Christology and the role of the *mwalimu*. In the following chapter, Matthew gives us the vivid story of the transfiguration: the disciples are on a

mountain with Jesus, when suddenly Israel's two great teachers appear, Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets. Peter wants to honor the presence of all three teachers, Jesus included, but a voice from the cloud that had enveloped them instructs, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" The disciples are told to singularly listen to Jesus—his words have more authority than those of Moses and Elijah. This story shows how Jesus the Christ (Christology) is connected to his authority as powerful rabbi or teacher (*mwalimu*). It's significant for people of a Muslim background to recognize that we are not told to follow any other *mwalimu*, be it Moses or Muhammad,²⁵ but are told specifically to listen to Jesus.²⁶

How can Jesus as *mwalimu* be an effective way to contextualize Christology among the Makua-Metto of Mozambique? We need to follow these cues in the Gospel of Matthew and explore what it means in this folk Islamic context. Will Jesus as a powerful rabbi, who carries a different yoke and the power to cure and command, pave the way for a clear Christology and a more holistic practice of the Christian faith? The word *mwalimu*, a term borrowed from Swahili, is used across the tribal languages of northern Mozambique.²⁷ Among the Makua-Metto, it is normally used to reference religious teachers, but it can refer to other types of teachers and professors as well. In the context of the mosque, the common perception is that there are basically two major authority figures: the *mwalimu* serves to instruct the community and is the one who issues the call to prayer, while the imam or sheik (himself a former *mwalimu*), fills the role of elder and ultimate authority figure for the community. In this folk-Islamic context, both of these leaders are understood as capable of interpreting sacred texts as well as providing people with a blessing or administering a curse. They may write out words in Arabic to be dipped in a

cup of drinking water or fashion amulets for a price. In the Makua-Metto culture, these Islamic authority figures, who have the ability to heal, curse and teach, are considered to be some of the most powerful practitioners of magic.

While the *mwalimu*, as a leader in a mosque, is certainly respected, his power to manipulate the words of the Qur'an mean he is often also feared. The layer of magic connected to the *mwalimu*'s authority places an added weight on the people that they struggle to bear. As we explored in the previous section, though, the *Mwalimu* Jesus offers a different, lighter yoke. In Matthew 11:28–30, this yoke (*kolo-kopiko* in Makua-Metto)²⁸ is offered to those who are weary of the old systems



of instruction, those traditional ways of being. Hagner suggests that themes of discipleship, Christology and eschatology are interwoven in this particular passage, and that

nowhere is the invitation to follow Jesus more personal and tender than the encouragement for his hearers to take on his yoke.²⁹

We believe that Matthew's clearest summary of Jesus' yoke is in the Sermon on the Mount. It is Jesus' magnum opus where he shows how the way of life he offers us redefines six ethical categories (5:21–48) and three religious practices (6:1–18), as well as reforms his disciples' relationship to money, to others and to God (6:19–7:12). The Sermon on the

Mount is the yoke that Jesus' disciples are called to wear—one that he himself bore and promises to help us carry. Many in the West have mistakenly perceived the Sermon on the Mount as impossibly hard, a representation of an unattainable, unrealistic ideal. But we have found that while the Makua-Metto certainly find the Sermon on the Mount to be challenging, they perceive it as good news. By calling them to a much better, life-giving alternative, it stands in stark contrast to the different yokes offered in their world.³⁰

Jesus' yoke is his teaching—a teaching that offers a way of life that leads to flourishing. Looking back again at Matthew's Gospel, we can see that words related to "teaching" occur over two dozen times. It is especially significant to note that Jesus specifically instructs his disciples not to call each other "rabbi" (*mwalimu*) because they have only one Teacher, the Christ (23:8–10).³¹ From the mouth of Jesus, we hear a Christology that links his identity to the role of Teacher (*Mwalimu*).

The Effectiveness of Mwalimu as an African Christology

Certainly, all Christological images need to be tested since "each of these images also holds the potential to lead astray without constant vigilance and clarification."³² We have made a biblical and cultural case for the appropriateness of the image of *mwalimu*, but only with an evaluation can this image rightfully stand beside other great African Christologies. Timothy Tennent has synthesized what he believes are four Christological contributions of African theologians,³³ and these we will use to analyze the effectiveness of presenting Jesus as *mwalimu* among the predominantly folk Islamic Makua-Metto people.

1. A Theology from Below

*Instead of focusing "on the ontology of Christ and the relationship of his deity and his humanity as Western theologians have been. . . African Christology tends to be more holistic in the way it integrates the person and work of Christ."*³⁴

Presenting Jesus as *mwalimu* is certainly a vision “from below.” It takes seriously the role that Jesus played on earth as a powerful rabbi whose words have the power to cure and command. Instead of a vision of Christ “from above” that only relies on more theological explorations of Christ’s divine nature, this vision allows Gospel narratives like the Transfiguration to give shape to Christological categories. Jesus as *mwalimu* is also an expression “from below” for the Makau-Metto people because it is a role that is woven into the fabric of their culture—it is part of who they are. Tennent notes that,

if the nations of Africa are to be disciplined in obedience to the Great Commission, it is essential that the issue of African identity be directly addressed.³⁵

While Tennent is arguing for good contextualization (something which the role of *mwalimu* fits well) he is also highlighting the significance of obedience (something that the role of *mwalimu* is equipped to address as well). Jesus as *mwalimu* is integrative in that it does not offer the Makua-Metto people a Christ that only deals with a distant plane of spiritual reality, but is one that invites the Christ to speak authoritatively about the daily realities as well. The image of *mwalimu* has the potential to issue a clearer call to obedience to the way of the Christ than other African Christologies can (such as those that focus on Jesus as Healer or Ancestor).

2. Conscious Awareness of Traditional Christological Formulations

*The “overall tenor of African Christology” is not that of divergence, but is “marked by a profound respect for historic Christian confessions.”*³⁶ Tennent notes that “rather than reading African Christology as an alternative to the ecumenical confessions, a student should read these writers as looking at Christology from an additional vantage point.”³⁷

Inter-religious dialogue often stalls out when the parties involved focus on defending confessional formulations. Approaching Jesus as *mwalimu* as an

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additional vantage point for Christology allows for special considerations when presenting Christ in a culture influenced by Islam. Remaining connected to historical confessions of the past is important, but the church is not beholden to the exclusive use of Christological articulations that have misfired in Islamic interactions for centuries.³⁸ David Kerr observes that:

...inter-religious dialogue is best advanced where, as a “dialogue” of life or a “dialogue of deeds,” priority is given to ethics. This is repeatedly the stance of Muslims themselves... This suggests that an ethical approach to Christology should be the first priority in Christian-Muslim dialogue, both to understand the core of Jesus’ prophetic teaching as contained in, for example, the Sermon on the Mount, and to apply his ethical standards to issues of human life and society with which *qur’anic* ethics are also deeply concerned. This could offer an alternative approach in Christian-Muslim dialogue to the issue that has caused so much misunderstanding and controversy in the past, namely, the personhood of Jesus himself. “Whom do you say that I am?” is a question that can only be addressed in the context of the character of Jesus’ life and teaching, and their impact upon those who lived with him.³⁹

Matthew’s Gospel reminds us that those around Jesus in his day saw him as a rabbi, a role that does not set itself over against creedal affirmations, but rather engages the arena of ethics, and serves as an important on-ramp for helping people to begin to clearly see Jesus. Instead of continuing to exclusively use creedal formulations that invariably hit roadblocks set up by Islamic influence, using *mwalimu* as an alternative Christology allows dialogue to circumvent those dead-ends and leads the communicator to a place where real engagement can occur.

3. Connecting Christ to Africa’s Pre-Christian Past

*African Christology reverses any tendency to present Christ to Africa as “a foreign stranger in complete discontinuity with its own past.”*⁴⁰

As was noted earlier, presenting Jesus as *mwalimu* honors the Islamic history of the local Makua-Metto context and national context of Mozambique. One additional title, that honors the pre-Christian past and is paired well with that of *mwalimu*, but is outside the scope of this article, is recognizing Jesus as *Mwene* (the title for a traditional king in Makua-Metto). By pairing the titles of *Mwene* and *Mwalimu*, it becomes even clearer that Jesus is greater than a prophet like Moses or Muhammad. He is even greater than Mussa Bin Bique—the *Mwene* and *Mwalimu* that Mozambique is named after. That *mwalimu* was involved in selling Mozambicans into slavery, while *Mwalimu* Jesus, the Christ, is in the business of liberating the Makua-Metto people. This Christological presentation of Matthew’s Gospel,⁴¹ of Jesus as the true king⁴² and powerful teacher with the power to command and cure, honors the pre-Christian past in the way it connects to this part of Africa.

4. An Emphasis on the Power and Victory of Christ

*“Despite the diverse Christological images developed by African writers, a common underlying theme is an emphasis on the power and victory of Christ. All of the major African Christological images, such as Christ as Liberator, Chief, Ancestor, Healer, Master of Initiation, and so on, tend to portray Christ in terms of power as Christus Victor.”*⁴³

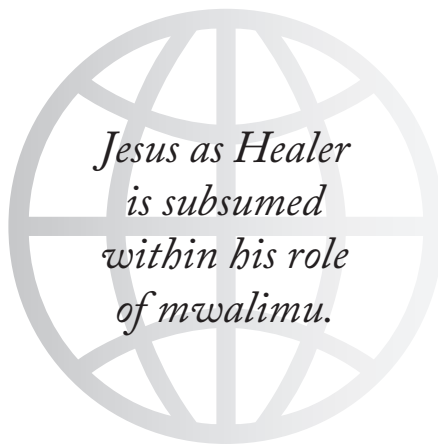
It is interesting that while none of the “powerful” African Christological images listed above include a vision of Jesus

as teacher, the holistic vision of mwalimu in Makua-Metto culture incorporates well the concept of power. As we noted before, Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus as a powerful teacher, one whose words have authority to cure and command. For example, in Matthew 13:54, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue and in amazement the people ask, "where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" That verse is important in the way it connects the concepts of wisdom and power with the blessing of people. In comparison, the Islamic mwalimus our Mozambican friends are familiar with are understood to use their power and authority for monetary profit.⁴⁴ But that abuse of the power of God is not limited solely to Islamic teachers. In Matthew 22:29, Jesus critiques the religious leaders of his day, saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." The assumption behind that comment is that Jesus, in fact, does understand the Scriptures and does understand the power of God. Jesus is using that power to heal in the proper way. In Jesus, we find a mwalimu, a powerful teacher, using his authority not for selfish gain, but instead to serve. Calling Jesus, Mwalimu, taps into the authority of this title while critiquing its abuse.

Approaching Jesus as mwalimu also reframes the perception of Jesus as healer, for it encourages more respect than that of a traditional healer who is denied the same level of honor among the Makua-Metto people. This is not unique to Mozambique. Diane Stinton noted that due to negative connotations, a significant portion of Africans interviewed in her research had a negative reaction to the idea of Jesus as Healer.⁴⁵ One problem with seeing Jesus as Healer particularly in the African context is an overcorrection—the potential misunderstanding that arises from emphasizing physical health to an unhealthy degree. Proponents of Jesus as Healer can potentially take the short step into a version of the prosperity gospel—a Christianity where Jesus supposedly takes away all suffering. It ignores that Jesus

also invites us to suffer, just like he did, on behalf of God's kingdom in the world. Suffering is a vital concept in Makua-Metto culture; the church will sidestep it to its detriment.⁴⁶

The advantage of understanding Jesus as Healer subsumed within his role of mwalimu is that it values Christ's power to cure while pairing it with his authority to command.⁴⁷ When I have discussed Christological questions with Mozambican believers, they note how no one goes to a traditional healer expecting to repent, but they expect simply to pay something to be cured. The image of Jesus as mwalimu, on the other hand, invites us to experience both physical and spiritual healing,⁴⁸



and is geared towards obedience, challenging us to repent and change. Understanding Jesus as Healer within the context of Jesus as mwalimu could lay the groundwork for a more holistic anthropology and be a better defense against drifting into what Stinton sees as a witness to Christ marred by the health-and-wealth gospel.⁴⁹

It seems clear that the image of Jesus as mwalimu harmonizes well with other African Christologies and should take its place alongside them. It's an approach that can pick up strands that have fallen aside in other presentations and weave them together into a vision of our Lord that is particularly meaningful for people of a folk Islamic heritage.

Conclusion

In their book, *Understanding Folk Religion*, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou assert that "Jesus Christ is the center of theology, for it is through him that we definitively know God."⁵⁰ It is significant that a book on folk religion sees Christology as foundational for engaging the world as it is. Our Mozambican friends understand the work of a mwalimu to be very practical and powerful—teaching people how to pray, how to respond to illness and trouble, and how to live. Mwalimu Jesus teaches us how to love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36–40) in a way that encompasses our bodies and our spirits. And Matthew's Gospel helps us understand that Jesus as mwalimu is an important piece of the Christological puzzle as it paves the way for a more holistic practice of Christianity, one that has a proper perspective on both physical and spiritual health.

An authentic African Christology must address the major questions that the culture is asking.⁵¹ One of those important questions is where common ground for Christian-Muslim engagement can be found. The vision of Jesus as mwalimu provides a useful alternative to other good African Christologies in this folk Islamic context because it honors northern Mozambique's pre-Christian identity with a rich, layered category that (to borrow language from Stinton) Jesus both "fits" and "transcends."⁵²

We can imagine Jesus asking Mozambicans the question he asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" An appropriate answer that Makua-Metto believers can offer, one that resonates with their folk Islamic context, is this: "You are the Mwene (Christ/King). You are our Mwalimu (Powerful Teacher)." This is an inculturated African Christology, one that speaks clearly to our Mozambican friends, pointing them to Jesus' authority to cure ailments and command allegiances. It points us to Jesus' final instructions to his disciples

before his ascension, to that Great Commission. He is the great and powerful mwalimu who, in contrast to Mussa Bin Bique, offers the yoke of liberation rather than the harsh yoke of slavery. Mwalimu Jesus offers his name, not to the single country of Mozambique, but calls for his name and teaching to be spread over the entire world. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ For example, in Makua-Metto, the word for “fasting from food” is *utthuka ramatani*. So, the term that even Christians use for fasting is connected to Ramadan. Another example: the Makua-Metto word for religion, *ittiini*, comes from Swahili/Arabic roots.

² For more on evangelism in this context see: Howell, “Building a Better Bridge: The Quest for Blessing in an African Folk Islamic Context,” *IJFM* 32, no. 1 (Jan–Mar 2015), 43–51.

³ For more on Nyerere’s influence and impact see Phil Noss and Peter Renju, “Mwalimu Nyerere Engages His People: Scripture Translation in Swahili Verse,” *Journal of Translation*, Vol. 3, Number 1 (2007).

⁴ Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 117. Tennent notes that, “A survey of the key publications on African Christology reveals six major images that have been proposed: Christ as Healer and Life-Giver, Christ as Liberator, Christ as Chief, Christ as Mediator, Christ as Master of Initiation, and Christ as Ancestor/Elder Brother.” The overlap among these metaphors is his reason for concentrating on Jesus as Healer and Jesus as Ancestor. For other general surveys of African Christologies, see Schreiter, Robert J., Ed. *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), and Diane Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004). Stinton outlines four models: 1. Jesus as life-giver (especially healer); 2. Jesus as mediator (especially as ancestor); 3. Jesus as loved one (family and friendship); 4. Jesus as leader (king/chief or liberator). Unfortunately, neither Schreiter nor Stinton give more than a passing reference to the influence of Islam on African culture and the potential impact of that on Christology.

⁵ Kenton L. Sparks, “Gospel as Conquest: Mosaic Typology in Matthew 28:16–20,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 68, no.4

(2006): 658–659. For a much fuller discussion on Mosaic typology and Jesus as the new Moses see Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁶ Relevant to the discussion on Hebrew typology in Matthew, Sparks also sees Matthew’s connection of Jesus with David, Joseph, Elisha, Abraham, and Isaac. See Sparks, 662.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 661.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 661. In his article, Sparks points the reader to Barbara E. Reid, “Violent Endings in Matthew’s Parables and Christian Nonviolence,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2004): 237–255 for a full argument of pacifism in Matthew.

¹⁰ Surprisingly, although a major purpose of Matthew’s gospel is presenting Jesus as the great teacher and Jesus claims the title for himself, only those opposed to Jesus actually address him as “teacher.” While some may assume that the title of teacher was too commonplace for Jesus the Messiah, perhaps their usage of it reflected their own misunderstanding of who Jesus was. Because the scribes and Pharisees viewed themselves as the authoritative teachers of the law, by referring to Jesus as “teacher,” they are wrongly equating Jesus with themselves. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28 Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1995), 768; and Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13 Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 216.

¹¹ This is further seen through the following seven woes to the scribes and Pharisees.

¹² For a discussion on the use of the words “rabbi” and “teacher” see Hayim Lapin, “Rabbi,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Volume O–Sh, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 600–602.

¹³ Charles L. Tyer, “Yoke,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Volume 6 Si–Z, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1026–1027.

¹⁴ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T&T International, 2004), 188.

¹⁵ While there is some debate, with assuming the post-70 CE date of Matthew that is agreed upon by some scholars, Matthew’s audience would have been experiencing political oppression under the Roman Empire. For a discussion on the dating of Matthew see Davies and Allison, xii; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William

B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 42–44; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, lxxiii–lxxv. For a discussion on Jewish oppression see Graeme Lang, “Oppression and Revolt in Ancient Palestine: The Evidence in Jewish Literature from the Prophets to Josephus” *Sociological Analysis* 49, no.4 (1989): 325–342.

¹⁶ In regards to difficult teachings of Jesus, I am particularly thinking of Matthew 5:48 and 16:24–25.

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 349. Jesus carried the yoke perfectly and promises to be with us, not allowing us to be crushed by the burden of his yoke. See Matthew 1:21–23 and 28:20.

¹⁸ Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 257. Talbert cites I Kings 18:27, Isaiah 6:9, Jeremiah 44:25–26, and Amos 4:4–5 as other examples of this kind of ironic mocking.

¹⁹ Additionally, another contrast is seen in the way that the Pharisees held onto powerful positions of authority, while Jesus gave up his seat in heaven in order to save humanity. Keener, 349; Philippians 2:5–8.

²⁰ In Matthew 7:28–29, after preaching the Sermon on the Mount, “the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” Unlike the common teachers of the law, who relied heavily on past traditions in their teaching, Jesus claimed a unique authority over the law. After hearing this, the crowds were amazed, for they had never heard one with such authority. His authority was proven in the following a triad of miracles (8:1–17). See Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 193.

²¹ Talbert, 95–96. In ancient times, authority rested primarily in tradition. For a discussion on premodern epistemology see Kenton L. Sparks, *God’s Words in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 26–30.

²² Hagner notes that this scribe “reflects good Jewish practice in choosing his teacher” (as opposed to the teacher choosing the student, which was not common) and that it was common practice for a student to live with their rabbi, listening and learning from them. See Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 76–77; 216.

²³ This is a rare case in Matthew’s gospel, for this scribe accepts Jesus’ teaching. Unfortunately, it is clear from Jesus’ response, however, that the scribe does not

understand what he is asking, for Jesus responds, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” For a relevant discussion on the master-disciple relationship and the distinction between “sage” and “disciple” see Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 30–32.

²⁴ This is seen in Matthew 9:1–8. First Jesus says, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” After the scribes accuse Jesus of blaspheming, Jesus says, “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” He then heals the paralytic man. After the healing, the crowds respond by glorifying God.

²⁵ While this title is respectfully used in reference to them, they are most commonly referred to by the title of *nabiu* or prophet.

²⁶ Interestingly, in Makua-Metto, there is a linguistic connection between the word for listening (*wiirwa*) and obeying (*wiirwalela*).

²⁷ The word is used in Mwani and Makonde Bible translations as well.

²⁸ Or *ncipocipo* in parts of the Chiure District. Because of minimal agricultural exposure to beasts of burden, yokes in this context are assumed to be for humans to wear for the purpose of balancing and carrying two heavy loads.

²⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 322.

³⁰ My wife, Ladye Rachel Howell, has made the Sermon on the Mount her primary text for discipling Makua-Metto women.

³¹ One way to summarize and contextualize Jesus’ instruction in these verses for this setting, is this: “You should not call each other *Mwalimu* (like Muslims in this context do), because you already have one *Mwalimu*. And you should not call each other Father (or Padre—like Catholics in this context do), because you already have one Father in heaven.”

³² Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 111.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁸ For an exploration on contextualizing Christology that addresses the issues of trinitarianism and monotheism for more orthodox Muslims (not folk Muslims, though, unfortunately), see Martin D. Parsons, *Unveiling God:*

Contextualizing Christology for Islamic Culture (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005).

³⁹ Kerr, David A. “Christology in Christian-Muslim Dialogue” in B. F. Berkey & S. A. Edwards, eds, *Christology in Dialogue* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1993), 215.

⁴⁰ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 115.

⁴¹ One example of the connection between Jesus as King and Teacher is noticeable in Matthew 22:41–46, which addresses Jesus’ identity as the Christ or *Mwene*. That section is immediately followed by Jesus’ instruction that he is the one true Teacher or *Mwalimu* (23:1–12).

⁴² For more on the implications of understanding Jesus’ leadership as *Mwene* or king in Makua-Metto culture, see Alan B. Howell, “When Having a Bad Leader is Good: Processing a Negative Experience and Applying Leadership Lessons from the Kings,” *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Practice* 8, no. 2 (Summer–Fall 2017).

⁴³ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 115. For more on how the Christus Victor atonement metaphor is useful in the Makua-Metto context see Alan B. Howell, “Through the Kaleidoscope: Animism, Contextualization and the Atonement,” *IJFM* 26, vol. 3 (Fall 2009).

⁴⁴ For more on the occult and the connections to finances among the Makua-Metto people, see Alan B. Howell, “The Occult in Mozambique: Dramatic Case Studies,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* vol. 47, no. 3 (July 2011).

⁴⁵ Stinton, 82–84.

⁴⁶ For more on the concept of suffering in Makua-Metto culture, see Alan B. Howell, “Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering,” *IJFM* 29, vol. 3 (Fall 2012).

⁴⁷ So while Stinton (pages 81, 89, 91) rightly details the varying opinions on the validity of the single category of “Jesus as Healer” from her interviews, in my own qualitative interviews regarding the category of *mwalimu* (both formal and informal) with church leaders, as well as usage in preaching, teaching and personal conversations, I have yet to find a single person (Christian or Muslim) who questions the appropriateness of Jesus as *mwalimu*.

⁴⁸ As Tennent notes, “Africans simply do not maintain a sharp demarcation between physical healing and spiritual healing, as often occurs in Western writings.” Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 118.

⁴⁹ Stinton, 42.

⁵⁰ Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 24.

⁵¹ Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 77.

⁵² Stinton, 142.

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