

## Cultural Analysis and Thematic Biblical Theology Cross-Cultural Approach of Gospel Communication<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

How can culture be analysed and organised, and how can the cultural findings be used to facilitate cross-cultural evangelisation through thematic biblical theology? The objective of this article is to explore and generate ideas and principles for integrating cultural analysis and thematic biblical theologies better to communicate the Gospel in the contexts and sub-contexts of Konkomba culture. The first component presents an anthropological approach for cultural analysis and a case study of the Konkomba people of Ghana in a functionalist-interpretivist framework. The second component uses a missiological framework provided by elements of the Four-Horizons Model, the Tridimensional Model and the Grand Story approach for organising and presenting the biblical themes in a hermeneutic perspective, engaging with the main cultural questions previously identified, answering them biblically and approaching the audience for comprehensive applicability.

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### Keywords

Cultural analysis; Gospel communication; Thematic biblical theology; Missionary anthropology; Cross-cultural evangelization.

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## 1. Introduction

The relationship between the Gospel and culture is at the root of missiological studies, especially in cross-cultural environments, where there is a constant need to communicate the Gospel in a way that is theologically faithful and also culturally intelligible and applicable.

The question addressed by this article is: how is culture to be analysed and organised, and how are the cultural findings to be used to facilitate cross-cultural evangelisation through thematic biblical theology in similar contexts to the Konkomba people of Ghana?

The final objective is to present an approach for Gospel communication based on cultural analysis and thematic biblical theology for use in cross-cultural missionary initiatives in similar contexts.

The objective is divided into two parts. First, to develop and present an approach for cultural analysis arranged in four dimensions (historical, ethical, social and phenomenological), based on a case study of the Konkomba people of Ghana, West Africa.

Second, to propose a framework that organises and presents the biblical themes in a way that is theologically faithful and culturally applicable. The overall result is the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication.

## 2. Intercultural Communication

Shaw and Van Engen (2003:103) defend that missionaries have often missed the connection between Gospel proclamation and theories of communication, stating the crucial need to study and practise their mission using cultural and communicational principles.

Intercultural communication is a line of study within both communication theory and cultural analysis, as it combines both areas.

Ting-Toomey (1999:272) proposed that intercultural communication happens when individuals, influenced by different cultural communities, negotiate meanings.

Gudykunst (2003:163–166) explained that some scholars refer to intercultural communication as a phenomenon that occurs expressly between people of different nationalities, whilst others extend the concept to communication occurring between representatives of different ethnic, religious or regional groups. Those authors in the latter group advocated that any meeting of individuals could be conceptualised as an intercultural meeting. They transformed the current conceptualisation of intercultural communication by inserting academic, anthropological and scientific values into its conceptualisation and experience, as expressed in works such as *Beyond Culture* (Hall 1976), *Communicating with Strangers* (Gudykunst and Kim 1997), *Communicating across Cultures* (Ting-Toomey 1999), *Handbook of Intercultural and International Communication* (Gudykunst and Bella 2002) and *Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication* (Gudykunst 2003).

According to Hiebert (2008:14–15), interculturality emerges from movement between cultures, not necessarily from cultural diversity. In this way, interculturality can be understood as everything that occurs from the encounter of cultures. On the one hand, the encounter of cultures is highlighted through the construction of social sciences, the scale of linguistic and sociocultural differentiation between different groups; but on the other hand, it argues for its similarities.

Conceptual construction of intercultural communication intersects with the base of knowledge about culture and semiotic concepts to explain the theoretical foundations of communication between cultures with its exchanges of symbols and ideas. Thus, it can be understood that intercultural communication is the process of an exchange of symbolic movements, involving different cultural patterns, that results in mutual understanding.

## 2.1 Functionalist-Interpretivist Framework

Schultz and Hatch in the article *Living with Multiple Paradigms: The Case of Paradigm Interplay in Organisational Culture Studies* (1996) reflected on the studies of Burrell and Morgan (1979), Gioia and Pitre (1990), Hassard (1988), Parker and McHugh (1991), Weaver and Gioia (1994) and Willmott (1990) and presented a new strategy called Paradigm Interplay, suggesting that paradigms for cultural studies could not only be compared, but interchangeably applied in different areas.

Schultz and Hatch (1996:529) used functionalism (Durkheim 1949; Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Parsons 1951; Merton 1957) and interpretivism (Schutz 1967; Garfinkel 1967; Geertz 1973) as a way to present the strategy within the domain of organisational culture studies, which is basically built on an emphasis on simultaneous appreciation for both the contrasts and the similarities found between two or more paradigms. They assert that the similarities between both theories inspire interplay between the paradigms.

In their strategy, analysing and contrasting functionalism and interpretivism, they identified three implications of interplay: generality/contextuality, clarity/ambiguity, and stability/instability. Furthermore, according to the interplay strategy, the recognition of the interdependence between these theories enables the researcher to come to a more elusive and complex appreciation of organisational culture (Schultz and Hatch 1996:552).

Functionalism and interpretivism differ, in the area of organisational culture studies, as they define an analytical framework. For Schultz and Hatch, the functionalist analytical framework is predefined and universal, presenting similar levels and functions of culture found in the entire unit. An interpretivist analytical framework is emergent and specific with opportunities for the creation of understanding in a unique way in each cultural context.

The models for analysis of information are also different. Functionalists approach culture in a categorical pattern searching for the identification of cultural elements and discovering the causal relations between them, while the interpretivist approach is more associative, searching for meanings and exploring the associations between them. In terms of the analytical process, functionalists are convergent, condensing and bringing elements of cultural analysis together, while interpretivists are divergent, expanding and enriching cultural analysis.

This theoretical framework is used in the cultural analysis of the Konkomba people of Ghana in an ethnographic assessment, combining the analysis of segments and functions of the culture in a functionalist approach and also seeking for meaning and implications that go beyond the local reality in an interpretivist perspective.

## 2.2 Models of Gospel Intercultural Communication

Although the Gospel speaks supra-culturally and trans-temporally, the way to formulate the questions to which the Gospel is the answer varies from culture to culture (Newbigin 1989:141–142). The Gospel is the same, but the human questions vary from place to place and group to group (Hiebert 1999:171–172).

Three models for cultural analysis and Gospel communication are presented as they bring fundamental contributions to our goal. The first one is the Four-Horizons Model formulated by Daniel Shaw and Charles van Engen (2003), a hermeneutic process for Gospel communication. The second was developed by Christeena Alaichamy (1997) and named the Tridimensional Model. It proposes that communication should happen in three parts: coupling, commonality and bridging. The last is a result of a number of theologians and missiologists such as Leslie Newbigin (1986), Michael Goheen (2011) and Christopher Wright (2014), who defend a hermeneutic approach to reading Scripture as one grand story.

The Four-horizon's Model emphasises different worldviews represented in various contexts, aiming to communicate what God said through: God's context-specific intended meaning in revelations found in the Old Testament; God's revealed intended meaning in the New Testament that involves a new understanding of the Old Testament; the Gospel communicator; and the contemporary recipients. It is designed to collaborate with an effective hermeneutic for communicating the Gospel in an intercultural context (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:82–95).

Four horizons are highlighted, God, the particular context in which God spoke, the context of the communicator and, finally, the context of the new recipients. Therefore, new information from specific contexts may bring new perspectives to biblical texts (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:97). The authors contend that the Gospel will always be communicated in a particular context and understood in a specific cultural matrix, so all horizons should be taken into consideration when proclaiming the Gospel (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:98).

The second model was developed by Christeena Alaichamy (1997), named the Tridimensional Model. It proposes that communication should happen in three parts: coupling, commonality and bridging. Coupling connects the message with the recipients' assumptions, mediating between the content and the recipients.

Commonality identifies what is common with both the author and the audience: worldview, history, assumptions or other common elements. Bridging builds a bridge between the intended message and the recipients' context, the author or translator having the main responsibility for that (Shaw and Van Engen 2003:117). The technical structure of the method is based on three parts: analysis, synthesis, and presentation of the message. Therefore, Gospel communication should happen as an intentional initiative to analyse the intended message, synthesised in an approachable framework and presented in a way that is understandable and applicable to the recipients' context.

The third model is a hermeneutical perspective for reading Scripture as one grand story. It is the result of several studies conducted by a number of theologians, missiologists and scholars; such as Leslie Newbigin (1986), Michael Goheen (2011) and Christopher Wright (2014); and consists basically of the theological assumption that the biblical message (and any message or passage in Scripture), is part of a grand unified story and should be communicated as such.

This hermeneutic concept is based on three main movements. The first one is to approach and embrace Scripture as the narrative that gives meaning to all human history. Newbigin (1986:61) argues that the Christian faith is the lens by which we should observe and understand the whole of history, not just Christian religion. The Scriptures, therefore, are not a private story for Christians, but the only true universal narrative for the whole world. For Wright (1992:6), the Bible is a drama consisting of events that expose the truth about God and humankind, especially the telling of the story of redemption. Reformer John Calvin (1846:48–49) stated that the reality of creation and its meaning is accessed only by God's revelation by faith. Although creation is a manifestation of God, it is not self-explanatory, as it can be fully understood only through God's revelation by faith; therefore the whole Scripture is crucial to guide humankind to the whole truth of God. Goheen (2011:204) contends that the proclamation of the Gospel should be narrative, Christ-centred and missional; and it should be communicated as an integrated narrative, as the Scriptures reveal one unfolding story, which is the world's true story.

The second movement is to approach the human history and human context with a prophetic and apologetic perspective, contrasting the world's worldview, values, principles, convictions, religions and behaviour with the true story revealed by God in the Scriptures and having the church as his living message.

Kevin Vanhoozer (2016:17) contends that the drama of doctrine exposes the church before the world to testify God's truth by proclamation of the Gospel and the impact of the church's testimony. Goheen (2011:215–217) presents a comprehensive explanation of this understanding, defending the combination of words and deeds. He defines evangelism as a verbal communication of the Gospel (Jesus' life, death and resurrection) and states that proclamation without a public healthy Christian life harms the communication of the Gospel, that both word and deed should work together, making the Gospel credible.

The third movement is a combination of the first two, applied to a local context. It is about partnering with local people with the goal of facilitating their own application of the universal truth of God in their context. Goheen (2011:9, 216) calls attention to this point and calls organic evangelism the effort of the church living and proclaiming the Gospel in everyday life in a way that makes sense to everyday questions. He defends that this approach demands from the communicator intentionality and patience, listening, interacting and dialoguing with the audience and paying focused attention to their questions: what are the deepest hungers to which the gospel gives answer?

There are four relevant similarities in the three methods presented. The first similarity is the recognition of the original message intended in Scripture that should be faithfully communicated. The second similarity comes from the recognition of a tension – or a challenge – when dealing with the intended biblical message in a human cultural context. Three of these contexts are highlighted: the context within which the Scriptures were revealed, Old and New Testaments, the communicator's context, and the audience's context. The third similarity is the conviction that God is acting and guiding the communication of his message in a human context. The fourth similarity is the necessity to use a more comprehensive and unified presentation of the Gospel; that the Gospel is not made of a few sentences with specific meaning, but that the Good News is part of the universal truth of God.

### 3. The Konkomba People of Ghana

The Konkomba people of Ghana's ethnographic assessment combines the analysis of segments and functions of the culture in a functionalist approach and also seeks for connection, meaning and implications that go beyond the local reality in an interpretivist perspective.

### 3.1 Overview

Although the Konkomba people are perceived by outsiders as one group, they see themselves as having different sociocultural divisions, each with distinguished cultural profiles and dialects. According to Tait, the most well-known Konkomba tribes are the 'Betshabob, the Bemokpem, the Benafiab, the Begbem, the Besangma and the Bekwom' (1961:151). Their mainland is in the northeast of Ghana and northwest of Togo, and the population is estimated in 2019 as more than 1 million. According to the *Ethnologue*, the main Konkomba dialects are Komba, Lichabol, Ligbeln, Likoonli (Likonl, Liquan), Limonkpeln, Linafiel and Nalong. They are part of the Gur ethnic cluster and speak different dialects (Lewis 2009; 2015).

The complete picture of the Konkomba people today covers the traditional and the modern, villages and cities, as well as traditional religion and Christianity. However, the picture presented in this article, which is a partial picture, is of the traditional culture of Konkomba farmers practising their traditional religion and living in their homeland.

Sources of information about the Konkomba are the ethnographical studies of David Tait (1958; 1961), studies about the people and cultures of Ghana (Allison 1997; Assimeng 2007; Fortes 1945; Fortes 1987 and Opoku 1978) and the anthropological field investigation done by the author from 1993 to 2001 while serving as a missionary among the Konkomba people of Ghana, Limonkpeln speakers, in Koni village and surroundings, Nkwanta region, northeast of Ghana (Lidorio 2001).

### 3.2 Four Dimensions: Historical, Ethical, Social and Phenomenological

Konkomba cultural data was organised according to functions and segments, and analysed as part of the cultural unit, proposing the symbolic meanings, arranged into four components: historical, ethical, social and phenomenological.

The historical dimension addresses the question: where do the people come from? It deals with the origin of the people's group according to their own worldview, and searches for reports, beliefs, myths, and religious records that indicate how the group understands its own origin. The areas investigated are: beginning, creation and ancestorship, territory and land.

The ethical dimension addresses the following question: what are the people's values?



This dimension relates to social and moral values and should cover areas such as the cultural group's secular heritage, kinship and religious heritage. The areas investigated are: tradition, ruptures and tribal identity. The social dimension seeks to answer the question, how do the people organise their society? This ethnographic study addresses the gathering, social organisation and social categories.

The areas investigated are: social authority, family and clanship. The phenomenological dimension's question is: what are the forces among them? This dimension explores how the group perceives the spiritual world, both visible and invisible. The investigated areas are: rites and ceremonies, ancestor reverence, spiritual persons, spiritual entities, mystical medicines and death and funerals.

### 3.2.1 Historical Dimension

**Beginning.** The beginning of time is unclear, but related to the creator of everything and the first ancestors. Myths point to an ancient time when the first family broke their relationship with the creator. The myths among the Konkomba are mainly myths of origin, rebirth and renewal, apotropaic spiritual beings and transformation. There are no well-known messianic or soteriological myths, although there is a strong belief in life after death in a kind of god's house, *Uwumbordo*. There are hundreds of myths about heroes who are basically ancestors; and there are different totemic myths, especially tracing the clans' origins with specific kinds of animals (Lidorio 2001:93, 115; Tait 1961:59, 226; Opoku 1978:26).

**Creation and ancestorship.** *Uwumbor* is identified as the creator of everything and is a personal entity. He is good and merciful. He is everywhere and can see everything but does not interact with people. It is not clear how he allows or interacts with evil, as life can also be taken by evil spirits, sorcerers or witches. Ancestors are the spirits of important elders who have died. They are connected with *Uwumbor* and a totemic influence; they also continue to connect with their families and are revered, communicating through living elders and are believed to have great power and wisdom, as they are now in the unseen world (Tait 1961: 43, 54; Lidorio 2001:86–87, 115; Lévi-Strauss 1983:290; Opoku 1978:10, 36–37; 54–56, 60).

**Territory and land.** Territory is connected to a group's ancestors and every clan, segment, lineage or family traces its history to the territory of its ancestors. These territories are believed to provide and transfer spiritual power to the people.

Konkomba identity is connected to their land, the concept of territory and especially the formation of their compounds. These are not only places of residence and farming, but areas with social and spiritual meanings under the overall protective influence of the ancestors (Tait 1958:180; Tait 1961:14; Dawson 2009:84; Lidorio 2001:16–17).

### 3.2.2 Ethical Dimension

**Tradition.** One of the primary values is the capacity to understand and keep traditions. The main traditions concern knowledge of myths, relations with ancestors, use of the language and performance of familial rites, including funerals. All traditions are kept by the group and not by any individual, as the Konkomba see themselves as one community that involves not only the living, but also the dead, their memories and influence (Lidorio 2001:12, 17, 18, 42–43; Opoku 1978:35–36; Fortes 1987:66–67).

**Ruptures.** Shame and honour are values of the group that are connected especially with traditions. Neglecting to perform a respectable funeral for parents is seen as a dishonour to their memory. Neglect of sacrifice, or of pouring libation are also seen as dishonours to the family. In one sense, sin is perceived as any kind of departure from the main traditional elements, especially if involving the ancestors or the patrilineal extended family (Tait 1961:59; Lidorio 2001:51; Evans-Pritchard 1966:326).

**Tribal identity.** Although there is a sense of unity based on genealogy, the strength of the groups is in clans, segments, lineages and families. They see themselves as different from non-Konkomba tribes and are deeply connected with their land and territory. Their identity is mainly founded on an understanding and maintenance of tribal traditions, with emphasis on clanship and ancestorship (Tait 1958:180; Talton 2010:1; Fortes 1987:66–67).

### 3.2.3 Social Dimension

**Social authority.** The main social authority among the group is the elders, both living and dead, including ancestors. This authority is used to create and keep the clans, segments, lineages and families together. Another layer of authority derives from a chieftaincy that may make decisions or bring elders together for the same purpose. A third layer is to be found in the spiritual leaders, diviners, fetish keepers and even sorcerers and witches.

A final social authority may be found in the consensus of the group, whenever it is deemed appropriate (Tait 1961:34, 61, 77–78; Assimeng 2007:36, 167; Lidorio 2001:45, 56–60; Opoku 1978:36–37).

**Family.** A traditional Konkomba family is extended, patrilineal, patrilocal and sometimes polygamous, and formed by a residential group comprising a series of close relatives built around a patrilineal line, where men from this same line will divide the space with their wives and children. Marriage happens by agreement, consent or exchange in a singular or polygamous format, and always involves formal negotiation. All marriages occur within a patrilineal inheritance system. Exchange marriage connects individuals in a binary system: a man will give his sister, niece or cousin to his future brother-in-law in return for receiving a wife in exchange. Lately, marriage also may occur by consent when a young man and a girl propose to marry. In any format, marriage is a long formal process that involves family agreements (Tait 1961:93–94, 160–162; Lidorio 2001:12, 70–71).

**Clanship.** There are three types of clans: the unitary, the compound, and the special form of the compound, the contrapuntal. Clanship is a defining factor for organising life among the Konkomba, as it defines marriage possibilities and agreements, dimensions of loyalty on several levels, chieftaincy, compound composition, religious ceremonies, land rights and several other social specifics. The Konkomba social structure is based on powerful ethnic loyalties to clans, but intraclan fissures in new clans, as well as disputes and warfare, also occur (Olson 1996:296; Tait 1961:69; Lidorio 2001:65).

### 3.2.4 Phenomenological Dimension

**Rites and Ceremonies.** There are rites and ceremonies for every important moment in life. After birth, a child receives a traditional medicine to protect it from evil spirits. During divination, offerings are given to the ancestors to thank them for their guidance. Sacrifices of animals are made to please the ancestors and seek their help. At any time when an elder feels it is appropriate, libation is used to pay respect and please the ancestors. Ceremonies, followed by sacrifices, are used to protect against sorcery and witchcraft. Sacrifices seeking protection usually happen during a pregnancy, birth, the naming of a child, marriage, travelling and farming, as well as when facing illness, deliverance and during a funeral (Tait 1961:21, 35, 43, 54; Allison 1997:87–90; Lidorio 2001:84, 86–87; Sarpong and Adusei 2012:70; Sundermeier 2002:10; Opoku 1978:9, 11, 54, 56, 60).

**Ancestor reverence.** Ancestors are acknowledged by their families, lineages and clans through rites, ceremonies and general acts of reverence. The main ways of expressing reverence to the ancestors are by pouring libation, making sacrifices and keeping the shrines and idols of the family. The main responsibility for doing that rests on the shoulders of the elders of the family and the oldest sons in an extended family compound. Connection with the ancestors is believed to assure blessings in life and protection after life (Fortes 1987:66–67; Fage 1961:7; Kopytoff 1971:129–131; Lidorio 2001:42–45).

**Spiritual persons.** In one sense the category of spiritual persons involves all people from the group, as there is no clear division between material and spiritual realities. There are, however, specialised categories: elders who are in charge of libation, shrines and sacrifices in an extended family, lineage or clan; elders who are advisers about tribal taboos; diviners who guide people through their contact with the ancestors; fetish keepers, who keep the idols, spiritual amulets, medicines and sacred objects of the family; spirit holders, who are believed to control certain spirits and prevent their attack; fetish priests, who perform more elaborate ceremonies, normally connected with specific spirits; sorcerers, who manipulate medicines, spirits and other elements to make evil; and witches, who are believed to attack spiritually and even kill others with a spiritual evil power. During times of conflict, some are also distinct: *ululedaan*, the one who can disappear; *kidjakamon*, the one who cannot be hurt by bullets and arrows; and *udjakanja*, the warrior who will win a war with his spiritual power (Lidorio 2001:47–48, 89; Opoku 1978:37; Tait 1961:59).

**Spiritual Entities.** There are several categories of spiritual entities among the Konkomba group. The best known are god (*Uwumbor*), the creator of all things; ancient ancestors, normally related to the clans in ancient times; ancestors from a clan, lineage or family genealogy; spirits, who were never human beings and may be manipulated by people; bush spirits, who are evil and hardly able to be manipulated by people; powerful evil spirits which may control others; dwarves, which live in the forest and may attack people; transformational spirits, which may inhabit people and animals in a totemic relation; spirits which inhabit shrines; spiritual powers related to idols and sacred objects; and spiritual totemic forces that are impersonal. Some of them are known by name and skills, also associated with fetishes. *Kininbong* is the main evil spirit. *Tywonpamakan*, evil spirits or demons, can assume different forms, like trees, rocks and human beings.

*Inyameh* is a spirit that follows someone during the night and shows itself as fire. *Utoye* also follows people during the night and makes a specific sound, but it is not seen as dangerous. *Nwaar* is a fetish like *grumadii*, *tigalii* and *nkunpatapa*: the one who kills those who make mistakes. *Nana* (grandfather) is another main fetish, which needs to be built first, before other fetishes. *Grumadii*, known as having great power, can be invoked by his followers to protect or harm people (Tait 1961:223; Opoku 1978:10–11; Lidorio 2001:88–90).

**Mystical Medicines.** A large range of amulets, talismans and mystical medicines are used by the group to protect, attack or kill people and can be made by either ordinary people or spiritual men. Sorcerers and witches are known to make specific types of mystical medicines, such as poisons. Sacred objects are used to protect children, pregnant women, and those who are farming, building or travelling. Mystical medicines are used mainly to heal those who are sick and to protect anyone from evil spirits. In order to prevent witches, magicians, sorcerers, and other evil powers from harming someone, a person may be put under the protection of a spiritual entity by using its talismans and *jujus*. They may be worn around the neck or, in the case of women, around her waist, or around the wrist or hung on the door-post of the house. *Yenho* are amulets made by the *unhodaan*, a medicine man for different purposes: protection against snakes and poisons; increasing farm production and giving extra strength during a time of conflict. *Bikpuaniib* is a cloth that is put outside when a *kebek* (a traditional instrument) is played, invoking special spirits for foretelling (Lidorio 2001:88–90; Tait 1961:232–233; Evans-Pritchard 1966:322; Opoku 1978:147–149).

**Death and Funeral.** There are three different levels of funeral: *likpuul*, performed three or four days after the death; *ubua*, which can be repeated a few times depending on the dead person's age, clan and social status; and *ubuarja*, the final funeral. A funeral has many different meanings and functions: to maintain tradition and family unity, to publicly acknowledge the importance of the dead person, to present family status in society, and to ceremonially guide the spirit of the dead person to set it free (Sundermeier 2002:10; Lidorio 2001:76, 84; Opoku 1978:135; Matsunami 1998:64; Sarpong and Adusei 2012:71–72; Fortes 1949:323).

## 4. Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication

The proposed approach guides the application of thematic biblical theologies to better address the specific cultural questions highlighted by the four dimension's framework in a functionalist-interpretivist perspective; and presents biblical themes based on a missiological framework provided by elements of the Four-Horizons Model, Tridimensional Model and the Grand Story approach in a hermeneutic perspective, engaging with the main cultural questions previously identified, answering them biblically and approaching the audience with a comprehensive applicability.

This article uses the expression 'thematic biblical theology' to refer to a biblical theology described and arranged by themes in the Scriptures as part of the biblical grand story.

### 4.1 Overview

The Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication is organised into seven stages:

1. Collect and organise the cultural data obtained by literary or field research.
2. Revise the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication's framework.
3. Complete the suggested questionnaire made up of 215 cultural questions.<sup>3</sup>
4. Reference the data used with its source.
5. Build a cultural profile in four dimensions, analysing each dimension's information and identifying the thematic biblical theologies that address the main points.
6. Summarise the cultural profile in 15 points, considering the implications for Gospel communication in each point, and prepare the thematic biblical theologies that are connected with the cultural profile.
7. Present the thematic biblical theologies in five steps.

**3** The author developed a questionnaire with 215 questions divided into four dimensions (historical, ethical, social and phenomenological) to enable the process of collecting, organising and analysing the cultural data.

The thematic biblical theologies are presented in a progressive system of five steps, as follow:

1. A verse or portion of Scripture that is related to the thematic biblical theology is chosen.

2. The narrative's explanation is prepared, which is divided into two parts: the original context (which involves the context of the original text and the original audience) and intended message.
3. The central lessons related to the narrative are placed as part of the biblical grand story.
4. Contrasts and similarities between audience's cultural beliefs and biblical perspectives are investigated.
5. A dialogue with the audience is promoted, applying biblical truths to the daily lives of the people, having in mind the cultural analysis and the biblical answers in specific areas of the theme.

## **4.2 Presentation's Design**

Redemption is one of the thematic biblical theologies developed by the author to present the Gospel to the Konkomba people of Ghana as a result of the proposed approach. Following the suggested framework: 1<sup>st</sup> step, a biblical narrative was chosen (Rom 3:22–26), and, 2<sup>nd</sup> step, the narrative was explained (text, context and audience) with an emphasis on the intended message. In this case, the intended message was summarised in three points: there is a universal effect of sin in humanity; God's solution for the crisis is historical, universal and spiritual; and salvation happens as promoted by God through a specific mechanism.

Then, 3<sup>rd</sup> step, the central lessons were identified: God's plan to redeem people exists because men sinned against him, having been expelled from his presence; and God's plan to redeem people was motivated from the beginning by love and culminated in the sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Searching for contrasts and similarities, 4<sup>th</sup> step, the contrasts between the Konkomba traditional way to understand redemption and the Christian biblical proposition could be understood in two different aspects. The first one is the source of redemption. The similarity is the understanding by both Konkomba traditional culture and the biblical teachings that the offender cannot redeem himself, as he or she needs a spiritual power to forgive, redeem and solve the human crisis. The contrast is found in the fact that Konkomba seek for redemption through social and spiritual rites that are performed by society, through communal participation and specialists in the tribal society: elders, clan leaders, sorcerers and others. In the biblical perspective, the source of redemption is purely God. He is the one who, by love, invites his people to be transformed and freed from sin and death.

He is the one who initiated the movement of human freedom. It is God who sent the Saviour, Jesus Christ, to die for those who sinned, bringing back to him those who believe.

The second aspect is the mechanism of redemption. The first similarity between Konkomba rites and biblical proposition is the recognition of a broken universe in a moral, spiritual and legal way. Both agree that redemption (in any form and time) is necessary, as there is evil in human society, the human heart and the overall universe. The second similarity is the personal posture of those who are seeking redemption. Both picture people with a humble attitude. Those who are offering sacrifices for spiritual entities in the Konkomba world, as well as priests and common people sacrificing to the Lord in the Old Testament, come before the unseen world with a humble and deprived posture. The main contrast in the mechanism of redemption is clearly defined. For the Konkomba, redemption (which is only partial, never for life) is the result of human performance, well-conducted sacrifices for specific spiritual entities done by specialists with the correct elements. The mechanism of redemption is promoted by the offender and conducted by specialists. In the Scriptural perspective, the mechanism of redemption lies entirely in God's hands, God's will, and God's initiative. Through the voluntary death of Jesus on the cross, God revealed his legal act to forgive the sins of those who believe. It happened through the substitutive sacrifice of Christ, in place of the offenders. And this divine sacrifice cannot be received by human merit, effort or payment, only by faith.

The validity of redemption is also a contrast. For the Konkomba, there is no concept of complete redemption (for the whole of life or for eternity), but practices that redeem people partially, keeping them away from the spirits' revenge. In Scripture, the validity of redemption is eternal, once and for all. Since the sacrifice of Jesus was universal and eternal, those who believe are invited for a life of total and eternal freedom.

The 5<sup>th</sup> step, dialoguing with the audience, Paul's intended message in this portion is divided into three parts. The first one is the universal effect of sin in humanity. He explains that there is no difference between Gentiles and Jews as 'all have sinned' (v.23). Paul teaches about the universal aspect of sin that goes beyond languages, cultures, territories and times. The Scripture is inviting the Konkomba to see and embrace the reality of the universal effect of sin, starting with the Konkomba perception of the sins' effects (diseases, conflicts, lack of rain and death) and expanding to the universal effects among all cultures and nations in all times.



Therefore, the daily crisis lived by the Konkomba on different levels of life are part of the overall picture and their pain is experienced by other people in different levels and contexts.

The second part is God's solution for this crisis, which is historical, universal and spiritual. Paul explains the crisis, affirming there is 'no difference between Jew and Gentile' (v.22) as 'all have sinned' (v.23) and presents the solution stating that 'all are justified' (v.24). He teaches that this solution is an act of God, motivated by God's grace. It is free and happens through Jesus (v.24). The Konkomba seek redemption through social and spiritual rites, sacrifices, libation and mystical medicines, but all these efforts aren't enough. Therefore, they are invited by God to embrace, by faith and thanksgiving (believing and praising him), the singular and eternal solution in Jesus Christ.

This solution is not partial or temporal (as sacrifices and libations are seen to provide, demanding new acts in every season), but total and eternal. It is not conducted by the offender, elders or specialists, but by God, and therefore has no error or weakness.

The third part regards the mechanism of salvation. Paul uses legal terms to express this mechanism in a judicial scenario. Sin contaminated human history and the human heart making all people unrighteous before him, as expressed in verse 10: 'there is no one righteous, not even one'. So, God became flesh in Jesus Christ, was tempted but did not sin, being righteous and paying on the cross what humanity was supposed to pay, death. The Konkomba mechanism for salvation, rites and ceremonies, can't save, as there is no one righteous. The specialists who lead the ceremonies, elders who make sacrifices, ancestors who lived in ancient times, and the dead, for whom funerals are performed, are all unrighteous, as all seek for purity and redemption. Only through Jesus, the pure and righteous Son of God, was the price paid, the sacrifice accepted and people set free, being able to enter into the *Uwumbordo*, the house of God.

## 5. Conclusion

The problem raised in this article was how culture could be analysed and organised, and how the cultural findings could be used to facilitate cross-cultural evangelisation through thematic biblical theology in similar contexts to the Konkomba people of Ghana. The objective was to explore and generate ideas and principles for integrating cultural analysis and thematic biblical theologies to better communicate the Gospel in similar contexts.

The article presented an anthropological approach for cultural analysis in a functionalist-interpretivist framework defended by the Paradigm Interplay theory, organizing the cultural findings into four dimensions (historical, ethical, social and phenomenological) based on a case study of the Konkomba people of Ghana. Then, it presented a missiological framework provided by elements of the Four-Horizons Model, the Tridimensional Model and the Grand Story approach, organising the biblical theme's presentation in a hermeneutic and contextualized perspective.

The overall result was the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication, structured in seven stages and culminating in the exposition of thematic biblical theologies distributed in a progressive system of five steps: a portion of Scripture; its original context and intended message; central lessons in the text as part of the grand story; contrasts and similarities between audience's cultural beliefs and biblical perspectives; and dialogue with the audience, applying biblical answers for cultural questions in specific areas of the theme.

For its first application, it can be used to research specific people-groups, when similar to the context presented, to produce a comprehensive ethnographical profile through a functionalist-interpretivist framework arranged into four dimensions. The second application is specific to the missionary world, where the cultural findings can be organised and analysed to facilitate Gospel communication using thematic biblical theologies that address, explain and answer the target-group's cultural issues theologically, producing a comprehensive evangelisation project, especially in contexts similar to that of the presented case study. This approach can be potentially helpful among unreached people groups similar to the presented context and not well-exposed to biblical redemption's grand story.

This article makes two suggestions for further studies in this area. First, there can be further application of this approach in other cultural settings, testing and expanding the Kerygma Approach for Sociocultural Investigation and Gospel Communication in broader environments. Second, there can be further exploration of missionary anthropology as an area of study, development, application and training, through the comparison and integration of different models and approaches as a dynamic furtherance of learning, testing and expanding these models in missionary fields.

Specifically, this study suggests the investigation of the potential integration of two anthropological theories (functionalism and interpretivism) in the missionary effort of cultural analysis; and

the three models presented as missiological framework for communicating the biblical narratives: Four-Horizons Model, Tridimensional Model; and a hermeneutical approach for reading the Scriptures as one grand story.

In this capacity, this proposed approach aims to serve the church of God, especially those who give their lives to seeing the name of Jesus well understood and glorified among all people.

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