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**TEACHING FRANCOPHONE NEGRO AFRICAN LITERATURE
FROM
A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

by

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INTRODUCTION

In teaching Francophone Negro African Literature the integration of faith and learning from a christian perspective is very important .Since *“literature -like arts in general-forms a major window on human culture”* .Therefore , *“getting to know good literature is getting to know human beings as they are seen to be from a wide range perspective.”* .However there is evidence from related articles indicating that many teachers and pastors have the need to make Christ the center of all Seventh day Adventist teaching and learning , literature courses included .Nevertheless ,there seems to be hardly any study of francophone Negro African Literature .Yet ,there are claims that some of the literature texts proposed by government for official examination lead and support animistic theories .In other words ,when a christian asks; “what is Negro African Literature ?” This important question does not mean exclusively ,or even primarily the genres involved ; poetry,drama or prose?”but first of all what is its content ? Thus the problem and purpose covered in this study .

PROBLEM AND PRURPOSE

The main important problems addressed in this essay are :

- 1-To find the worldview that is connected with Francophone Negro African Literature
- 2- To develop a methodology combining faith and learning in the Francophone Negro African Literature classroom

The purpose of this is to equip Christian teachers with a knowledgeable value for improving the integration of faith and learning .

PROBLEM AND DEFINITION

I-PROBLEM

There is in general an ignorance of black african socio-cultural background

Robert Cornevin testifies that *“Most of the black african writers are ignored by the european public ,this is most importantly because specialized journalists lack information”*

Ignoring most of the time the basis of african sociology ,european specialists in literature limit themselves to studying the style and give debatable judgements on this basis.Truly speaking ,it seems impossible to judge a work of imagination if you do not consider the complex network of family links based on ancestral worship which rules black african societies “ .That is why the knowledge of black african literature is linked to the knowledge of black african socio cultural background .

Which socio-cultural aspects have influenced black african literature ?

Oral literature /Tradition

This oral tradition explains the formation of an oral literature .In fact ,

"Black Africa ,though lacking Scripture ,has cristalized its wisdom in oral literature .And each content ,uninterrupted links of a lonf past ,swarms each evening the wisdom of elders .They give it to those who are willing to make benefit of it and to the wind who will spread it around the world because wisdom is not good for oneself only .And ,one does survive(or outlive) when he shares his wisdom ".

*Présence Africaine ,No XIV-XV
June -Sept 19th , p 165*

It is around the fire in the evening ,the family gathered with some frends that one relates stories so that they can rest for all the works during the day... Telling stories in the evening is part of the tradition.Because ,by doing it during the day ,one could lose his or her father or mother .No!This could avoid working ,doing what one is supposed to.Because poverty ,according to the African , is the elder daughter of laziness. .Therefore ,it is during the nighth that they do tell stories .During the nighth ,the ambiance ,fires ,moonlights ,animals shouts , songs all at unisson ,hands clapping , drums .all that atmosphere in telling stories in an exciting way to allow the soul to be strongly receptive. And rural societies hold their drama : liturgical or profane drama. Masses Epiphanies (Cote d'Ivoire),Kotebon (Mali) Mvet and Osila (Cameroon)

And you could find specialists in the art of telling those stories, The modern writer is nobody else than that story teller who now uses the rules of that art which could have been oral in previous times .What is then Francophone Negro African Literature ?

2 Definition

Francophone Negro African Literature is that form of literature seconded by Francophone Negro Africans , which reflect the "the francophone African experience or society . It could exist in the written

form or oral form (as the story teller of old would have presented it around the evening fire)

This definiton may not be foolproof. But it is still a fair definition considering the controversies surrounding the proper definitioon of Francophone Negro African Literature. Controversies which are not the main concern of this paper .

3- The Primary period of the forerunners

It is important to point out that the impact of the Negritude movement of Cesaire and Senghor was greatly felt in the University of Sorbone and literature areas have so great importance that it has succeeded in writing off great actors before world war two. At the beginning of the twentieth century three intellectual hearts distinguished themselves : Senegal (the most previous) , Dahomey and Cameroon after the great war . The sympathy and gratitude of French people for Blacks who had supported and assisted them during their fights allowed the success of Bakary Diallo's *Force-bonté* (strength and goodness) the novel is a testimony of one of the "sharpshooters" . Soon , after "*Force-bonté*", other novels were published : such as *Les Trois Volontés* of Malic - *Le reprouvé* "of" Massyla Diop *L' esclave* of F. Lonchoro from Dahomey .- *Dogouicimi* of Paul Hazoume .- *Karim et Mirages de Paris* of Ousmane Sore Diop . In Paris in the days just after the first world war , the Dahomean Marc Tovalou Hovenou the Senegalease Lamine, Senghor and the Malian Tiemoko Garan Kougate are those sustaining the defense line of Blacks.

As a result , this action led to the political level before the French Left , we had a movement directed by L.S Senghor , Aime Cesaire, L.G Damas *L'étudiant noir* "the Black student" and the review *black world* , which would be the basis of the concept "*Negritude*" . That concept was more developed after the second world war with for instance the combination of black american litratures , which took birth from the "*Negrorenaissance* " during the 1920's in the USA. Also , this concept was developed in Black Literature of Caraïbes, Maghrebian literature and black african literature.

These are in a few words the great precursors of Negro-african literature of french speaking countries . The purpose of that great intellectual mobilisation was to acquire the political independence of african countries . Another aspect of their purpose was the emancipation of the black soul . What about the biblical background ?

It is extremely important to put the black people in the biblical background in order to correctly specify the place and role of the Bible among Black Africans. The reason is that they do not clearly appear in Negro -african Literature .

BIBLE AND NEGRO-AFRICAN LITERATURE

1- BLACK PRESENCE IN THE BIBLE

This study presents a work conducted by R.P Mveng Engelbert a catholic priest who is at the same time a wellknown theologian among Africans,a historian and a novelist .In his book *La Bible et l' Afrique Noire* ,edited in 1968. Interviewed by Nkou Joseph ,he said : “ I gave a communication where I quote from the Bible verses that refer to black men ; to black african and where I concluded that the old black african is eventually one of the elements connected with the spread of the Biblical tradition and this by several means .First you would find black africans in the biblical geography from Genesis to the period genesis refers to. The land of cush that is the black african and again still in genesis from the origin of civilisation you have the genealogical tree with the genealogy of Nemrod and of cush ,the first great founder of black civilisation .He is the one who established the first towns which elaborated the first constitution of the first law .This is extremely surprising .And then in the book of Numbers ,you have the famous account of Moses 'marriage that form is fondamen tal ,because Moses married Jethro's daughter .In his book :The poligamy in the Bible ,Ron Press established that Zipporan was a Midianite and also a cushite, a **black woman** .The account is a biblical fact .It is stated in the book of Numbers Chapter 25,that God is opposed to marriage between the Jews and the Gentiles and specially the Midianites .In fact any Jew who attempted marrying a Midianite or a gentile would be condemned to death .But God makes an exception for the cushites.They should not be considered as vulgar gentiles . They are deeply associated with revealed message and elsewhere in other books of the Bible we see that each time cush is mentioned, it is not in the same terms as the other gentiles..In Issaih chapter 18 at the very moment that the prophet rebukes all the surrounding pagan nations even the Jewish nation, when he came to cusch ,there was a more conciliated term .He sent his message to the Jewish nation speaking to them and he concluded by saying that ,he expected the day when people of black skin tall people woud bring offerings to him .We see in king Ezekias palace a servant named Ebed Melec ,who is the only one who had a moral understanding in that palace and opposed the group that wanted to

mislead the king . God in order to reward Abed Melec ,said to him that he would form an everlasting covenant with the God -fearing man .

There are also Black Bible character that are prominent in the New Testament . We find the account of the eunuch of Ethiopia who was baptized by Philip ,the deacon on his way back home from Jerusalem . He was a black .Ethiopia is an African country .

2- BIBLE AND NEGRO AFRICAN PARALLELISM

The Bible and Francophone Negro African Literature have several main similarities

1-Religiousness

Francophone Negro African poetry is essentially religious .Here the poetry is characterized by an intense awareness of the reality of another Being.As in hebrew poetry where God is present everywhere .

Example:Leopold Sedar Senghor has introduced several truths in the term of Prayer in his poems to glorify the greatness of God

*"C'est l'heure pure ou dans la rue Dieu fait ferner la vie (Ethiopiennes)
That the pur hour where God ub the street put ab ebd to life .*

*Seigneur de la lumiere et des Tenebres
Toi ,Seigneur du cosmos (noctures)
Lord of light and darkness ,you Lord of cosmos) "*

2-Love of nature

Example : As in hebrew poetry,the beauty or majesty of nature is never an end in itself .Love of nature leads beyond nature to her creator and inspires the poet with a more intense devotion to God

In the Bible *"fire and hail ;snow and vapours ; stormy wind "may come but they come fulfilling his word"*(ps 148:8)

3-Universal qualities

The Bible and Francophone Negro African Literature poetry are essentially concentered and they are sententious compressing much into little .They are rich in figures of speech in similes and metaphors and personifications that lend freshness and vigor to their ideas and make them clear to men of all classes in all nations through all ages .

. 'ye kata ye mone gol wa ye di je ? "

"Which one would you rather eat ,a crab or a cat -fish? "

4-Image symbolism and vocabulary from the scripture tradition ,from both the Old and New testament

Example

a)- water which gives life

"As the bewalers drink at the fountain of Simal" (Ethiopiquest) Senghor

b)- Planters -harvesters too commune in the gospel

"God upolds the life "

c)- Mana and bread

"This is the time of th Mana"

"I have eaten the bread" (chant a l'ombre) Senghor

5-Parallism concerning the theme

Example : The theme of the fiancee (Ethiopiquest) Senghor Song of Songs (Bible).

The coming back of the prodigal son .The them of the promised victory of the new world over the old

"Here comes the time of signs and reckoning

New York ! Or here comes the time of mana and Hyssop"

It is the pure hour where in the streets God does upold the life post memory" (Ethiopiquest)

Senghor

"Shall come peace,shall come the morning Angel Shall come the morning light " (Noctures)

Senghor

**COMBINING FAITH AND LEARNING IN FRANCOPHONE NEGRO AFRICAN
LITERATURE CLASSROOM**

Any Adventist teacher would of course face problems in teaching Francophone Negro African Literature .Dr Pierre Celestin Ovono testifies that most difficulties encountered as an Adventist teacher are at least in two different orders:

-Administrative

Before the decree that allowed the righth of Sabbath observance in Cameroon , Literature courses were usually scheduled that day .And this constituted a great handicap for some students and teachers .

-Internal

Dealing with the tension between adventist ethics and exciting themes can also be a problem . For example . **Le Devoir de violence** by Yambo Owolo Guen ("the duty of violence ")

Or **Les soleils des independences** by Amadou Kourouma ("the suns of independences") .

In each one of the novels ,there are shrewd scenes ; scenes of great cruelty , unbelievable situations and acts. Most importantly some novels are difficult to explain in a christian way with their : .Themes of ancestors worshipping ,themes of violence ,themes of casnnibalism and themes of totems.Here animals like tigers,gorilla ,snakes and some trees have super natural power . For example in **Enfant noir**_by Camara Laye ,The alligator is the double of his father There are also themes of reincarnaion , and themes of animism for example In the **Soufle** by Birago Diop where it said that those who are dead have never gone ,they are in the shadows of darkness .The dead are not all burried they are in heaven also .Here nature is nothing else than a perpetual renewal .Popular belief proposes that life is everywhere and always renewed "*The wind blows ,there is a hiss like men voices* " the Echoe that is life transfers from one man to another.

Again the themes of death and life can cause problems for the Adventist teachers .For example among Bantu ,there is a belief that says that every man has at least four eyes .He would use two during his earthly mission and two duiring his spiritual end. But of course some people would be able to use their four eyes during theirphysical life .They form a class of mysterious people .They can communicate with the dead, see the unseen ,touch the untouchable ,hear the voice of silence and they master the universe more than those who have two eyes .

After exploring all these difficulties, the main question is that, why then teach francophone Negro African Literature in Christian colleges and universities ?

Literature is one of the best way where beliefs and values may be presented to students however they would also receive false knowledge, false beliefs .A suitable strategy is therefore required in order to integrate faith and learning in the Francophone Negro African Literature course .Then how to prepare the stage

METHODOLOGY

1-Didactic Approach

First of all ,the teacher should be intentionaled in preparing his courses, outlines and the plans for his classes . He should ensure that his outcomes are clear .He will list the knowledge,attitudes, skills as well as beliefs and values that he would expect his students to acquire and embrace during the course

* Then the teacher will select carefully the textbook(s) and assigned readings for the course ,ensuring that they provide a platform and an opportunity to address key issues and themes that demand reflection and a personal response .

*Again he should state at the beginning of the course ,the presupposition or assumptions that he will bring to the studying of the subject .These may be outlined as his own worldview .Then he may also ask students in advanced classes ,as an assignment to state in writing their personal view (worldview).

*Whatever the topic once he has covered the relevant facts data he should move on to concepts then to meanings and values .He should keep in mind that he is interested not only in approaching the subject from a Biblical christian perspective but also in the insights that the subject provides to illuminate faith and beliefs.

* Furthermore the teacher should pose probing questions to the subject using a launching pad for the key issues or themes that he has already identified .He should bring case studies for discussion . He should foster a safe class environment that encourages mutual trust .

Therefore the teacher must avoid the method of presenting just one part of the truth .Or even by excelling in apologetic reasoning criticizing , condemning and denigrating the author 's literary thoughts and values or again the indoctrination approached by imposing the biblical point of view of one's given theme *on*

this issue the word of God should be proclaimed with power ,but also with intelligence and tact .To go to the Beti people and to say bluntly to them that their beliefs are superstitions from satan is to make a pedagogical mistake "

Joseph Nkou : **Teaching the Bible to Black African ,1980**

In the same way , Aime Cosendai mentioned religious syncretism that would mix up together christian doctrine and african believes .This subtle compromise between faith and customs would surely lead in a fatal way to an important double distortion .The rejection of the main truth that God revealed in his book in order to adopt the tradition of men .Then comes the "christianisation" of some customs and beliefs which contradict deeply Christ's teachings revealed in the Holy Scriptures . Or finally in each shocking themes one should prepare students with misrepresented , misinterpreted and mislead doctrines in an antipaganistic debate .

2-Literary approach

"The best literature makes us feel what it will be like to hold others views of the world it helps us get inside mind set very different from our own" James W Sire 1990

It is first of all an invitation to listen attentively to the author searching his main thought with respect , intelligence ,and with rigor , without being quite objective .Again it is an invitation to an impassioned search of the meaning of this text by getting its historical sittings and its background but also the search of its words, meanings, syntaxe, structure and its poetic feelings, a quest of the author's intention and aim according to his background .What did he use to think and feel?

Example : According to the background ,what Youmbo Owolo Guen wanted to say in his **Devoir de Violence** ,is that the old Africa has not been that land of peace - That paradise of earth ,-

Which Negro African author would picture : Violence was everywhere .There were wars and fights The sahifs reigns were sanguinary .

3-Pedagogical Approach

Dr Pierre Celestin Ovono says that this requires the respect of deontology that means the teacher must explain the themes as they are exposed by the author .*"If one aspect is hidden that would be trickery and academic dishonesty , in fact ,we must form complete men"*Here there is no need to go far from the main line of the book .The pedagogical ethics demands not to hide anything from the student .It requires that all Literary truth must be presented to him as the author put them according to the maturity age and critical discernment of the student .Even now black students need the right of knowing what and how were their ancestors 's culture

beliefs and thinking .Of course the biblical view must be presented and introduced to them .Shocking their culture or not *"there is simply no other way to produce a unified overview of biblically sanctioned attitudes toward nonbiblical literature"* .That is the only way the teacher can form and train more effective and well balanced men morally , intellectually and spiritually . On this issue ,Arthur F Holmes said *"The student who is simply conditioned to respond in certain ways to certain stimuli is at a loss when he confronts novel situations, as he will in a changing society undergoing a knowledge explosion .He needs a disciplined understanding of his heritage plus creativity ,logical rigor and self -critical honesty ,more than he needs pre-packaged sets of questions and answers"* Arthur F Holmes 1999 .Pages 4-5

Then the teacher should present his own standing . His choice and present arguments for that

"So the study of culture produces a mixed bag of insights into the ways things really are .For some things we learn through human culture are true and some quite false"

"But because literature embodies various world views it should be read with the mind awake"

James. W. Sire 1990

4- Theological Approach

Creativity provides space without apologies for the spiritual dimension in the classes

Spiritual aspect may be done by assigning to a student the reading of a short devotional thought at the beginning of the class if it is the first in the morning ,placing a relevant quotation on the board ,singing a Christian song , praying a sincere prayer and a personal testimony of gratitude.Of course prayers and songs constitute the cornerstone of the black African Soul *"l'émotion est nègre la raison est hellène"*

Leopold Sedar Senghor

"the question a teacher must ask about his teaching is not what can they do with it? But rather what will it do to them" Arthur F. holmes 1999

The teacher will listen diligently to his students in order to understand .He should learn from them in order to appreciate and not to judge .But most often the classes are heterogeneous .Students bring a different world view ,values and beliefs to school

Furthermore ,in order to have an effective integrating faith and learning , the teacher must attempt to discover his students immediate concern .Perhaps they worry about their jobs ,their health ,or theirfamilies .These

suggest the avenues by which he can best approach them and gain their confidence .The teacher should make himself available to his student in order to continue the dialogue and he questioning after class in his office or in some other quiet setting .These private conversations lend themselves to deeper levels of destiny ,strengthening personal faith and commitment In essence , the teacher should also attempt to live and practice his teaching - The message he would like to pass on.Of course

"any contradiction between the message and the messenger would demolish and destroy the confidence and would make any testimony impossible "Aime Cosendai 1981

5-Ethical approach

Here the teacher would show what makes the difference between Adventist standing and secular behavior .For example : In "Ville Cruelle" by Mongo Beti , he should study the literature character and foster on revolution and not violence .Banda was not a man of violence ,he was a revolutionist , a peaceful revolutionist ,but Koume was a man of violence in the novel, he died .The teacher would play in that aspect. In this case ,it will be helpful for teachers to know that:

"Learning is the outcome of my experience which adds to the knowledge that an individual has accumulated and result in changed attitudes ,values,or actions"

John Matthew,June 2001

At this point , when dealing with novels which are deeply interested in the colonial period ,and attempt to play down on the complex relation which is being established between the colonized and his new master ; or address the impact of the new value which the new multiracial society is producing , or examine the social world view and the conflicts linked to that concept .

For example **Une vie de boy** " the life of the boy made" **Le vieux Nègre et la medaille** by Ferdinand Oyono -**Le pauvre Christ de Bomba** by Mongo Beti and **La forêt illuminée** by prof Gervais Mendo Ze

The teacher should study ,present and teach according to the mission and philosophy of the Seventh day Adventist Education : That is integration of faith and learning .

CONCLUSION

This paper elaborated a methodology designed to guide a teacher in the teaching of Francophone Negro African Literature, an approach combining christian faith and learning .The role of the christian education in dealing with literature was seen to be crucial in the integration of faith and learning as such ,he promotes intellectual ,moral and spiritual excellence .Furthermore ,there is a need of more Francophone Negro African Christian scholars to produce Literature texts ,novels on the basis of which a comprehensive Christian world view and find a way to stimulate research and publication in the area of Christ centered ,Bible based and service oriented education .Therefore ,the success of any integration of christian faith and learning program willdepend to a large degree on how well the christian literature teacher will appreciate accept and apply valuable approaches like the ones presented in this essay

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