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# Envy: Differences between the West and Africa

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## Abstract

Envy is perceived and handled differently in the West than in Africa. Defined as "a negative . . . response to someone else's superior quality," envy is largely considered psychological in the West, and is often suppressed to avoid the stigma of a negative "emotion." In contrast, Africans often express envy openly, at least to outsiders. Open expression of envious desire for what the West has underlies contemporary formal education in Africa, that as a result has little local fit. Unlike in the West, envy in Africa translates into witchcraft. My experience in Africa tells me that this is not magical or supernatural in the western sense of these terms, but rather is a way of responding to powerful and potentially destructive envy. Freedom from envy comes through faith in Christ, thus making clear the need for mission, discipleship, and culturally relevant theological education. My observations on envy in Africa are based on my own experience—born and reared in a White British community but having participated in village life in East Africa using indigenous languages, from 1988 to date, in the course of missionary work. Being deeply a "westerner," with profound exposure to Africa, enables my translating what is less known in the West (African ways of life) into the "familiar," that is, western scholarship. This is on the basis that good translation should always be into what is "known". Although geographically and historically my exposure to African ways of life is very limited, I am inclined to refer to "Africans" rather than more specific ethnicities (tribes) that I know well, so as not to imply that the people whom I have gotten to know over many decades through closely sharing in their lives are uniquely peculiar.

## Keywords

envy, Africa, development, witchcraft, mission

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## Introduction

Envy "occurs when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it" (Smith and Kim, 2007: 46) Defined by Lange and Crusius (2015: 284) as "a negative . . . response to someone else's superior quality," envy results in pressuring someone who has something that you find desirable to stop having it or to share it with you. From ancient times envy has been known as a terrible and sinful practice. Biblically, envy of God's ability may have underlain the choice to eat of the tree of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6). Certainly, envy seems to underlay Cain's murder of Abel. Both of these occur right at the start of the first book of the Bible (Gen. 1–4).

There are diverse cultural responses to the inherent human tendency to envy. All are ways of trying to come to terms with or to counter something almost universally recognized as malicious and evil. This article contrasts ways of responding to the consequences of envy in the West with those that are prominent in Africa. It suggests that the way envy is handled and its consequences can be determinative of much of people's ways of life. I consider intercultural comprehension of envy between the West and Africa to be confused if one does not take sufficient account of underlying philosophies.

In the West, psychology these days influences how envy is understood. This is particularly seen in the ongoing impacts of positivism, whereby verification of a "reality" is "by the empirical sciences" only, according to the definition of positivism in the Meriam-Webster dictionary. In the West this squeezes envy into a "not-real" category, and into being a member of a group called emotions. Consequences of envy in the contemporary West are often attributed to factors other than envy, which "has been argued to be closely related to . . . other emotions" (Lange et al., 2018: 579). Examples of "other emotions" that might be thought of as substitutes for attributing envy to someone could be a desire for acceptance or popularity. This seems to occlude the need to directly counter envy. While in line with western convention I frequently refer to envy using the English term, as an *emotion*, I consider the association of envy with the category of "emotion" to be misleading if it implies that envy is a side issue to human living.

In contrast, in parts of Africa known to me, envy is a major driver to people's ways of life, as Africans tend to take others' envy as the basis for any misfortune they themselves are experiencing. Countering others' envy is thus seen as the means to success and prosperity. As a result, a great deal of life in Africa can be considered to be determined by efforts at avoiding becoming victim to envy, while at the same time making others victim to one's own envy.

In much of traditional Africa, envy is largely associated with what are in English often known as spirits or G(g)od(s). Envy is dealt with in various ways, which western terminology (perhaps unhelpfully) associates with witchcraft, such as "curses," or spells. This includes diverting the consequences of people's envy (understood as "spirits") to third parties. For example, the practice of *loko dhoch* among the Luo people of Kenya comprises transferring the uncleanness of sin (such as envy for example) to a passer-by, as a means of bringing healing. By contrast, in biblical belief, relief from

the vagaries of envy is found in one over-arching, all-powerful, and caring Spirit of God.

The assumption that translation should be from the unknown to the known (i.e. learning from the known to the unknown) underlies this article. This requires a translator to be native to the language and cultural context being translated into (Harries, 2020).

## Envy in the West

In the West, psychology influences how envy is understood. It is widely acknowledged that attribution of the causes of envy has shifted in major ways in the western world in recent centuries.[1] In the past, envy was associated with crediting witches for one's misfortune, or the absence of witchcraft for one's fortune (Harries, 2012: 129). This is clearly no longer considered mainstream practice in the West (Priest, 2015b: 36). Such attribution has been replaced by notions of physical causation. For many, the universe is seen as akin to a machine in which every cause has an effect, so every effect must have had a (physical) cause, at some point. On this model, outcomes can be anticipated according to particular understandings of rationality.

To avoid the stigma of being envious in the contemporary West, the consequences and awareness of envy are often attributed to factors other than envy, such as the desire for acceptance or popularity. To use Elster's (1998: 165) words, envy can be "transmute[d] into other emotions." Yet, "a vast varied array of outcomes can [only] be fully understood" in the light of envy (Smith and Kim, 2007: 61).

Envy can motivate the "achieving of a standard of excellence" (Lange and Crusius, 2015: 289). An undercurrent of perhaps lesser-known studies of envy, such as that by Khan and Noor (2020: 182), consider that envy can "produce positive results."

Recent studies of envy, that are invariably strongly influenced by psychology,[2] categorize envy in various ways. For example, Protasi (2021) divides envy into four categories:

1. emulative envy;
2. inert envy;
3. aggressive envy;
4. spiteful envy.

Other scholars explore the relationship between malicious and benign envy. Lange et al. (2018) consider both of these to be an outcome of pain. In a groundbreaking work, Smith and Kim (2007: 62) understand envy as universally "socially repugnant," although conceding that "the empirical study of envy is only in its beginning stages" and "the next generation of research on envy has many issues to examine" (Smith and Kim, 2007: 60). Lange and Crusius (2015: 285) also find that while "malicious tendencies are an essential element of envy," benign envy can be positive, providing "a motivation to reach a standard of excellence" (Lange and Crusius, 2015: 290).

Considering envy to be "good" if it results in emulation, suggests that admiration of others is desirable. ("The moving-up motivation of benign envy leads to positive improvement for oneself" (Khan and Noor, 2020: 182).) Such desirability has various drawbacks related to the above, apart from its aggravating feelings of failure ("self-loathing, wallowing in one's misery" (Protasi, 2021)) on the part of people who aspire to emulate but find that they cannot do so. Defining "success" by counting the number of someone's admirers, seems to be a foundational issue that is transforming use of social media sites into depressing experiences for all but the glamourous few (PsychCentral, 2021). It invites the practice of deception, "fake it till you make it,"[3] which in promoting lies and dishonesty can hardly be considered a positive for many human communities. Diverting admiration from a rationally successful completion of a task to a popularity contest has many hazards, including that of producing a constant undermining of rational functions in human community. It seems that recent scholarship on envy, especially when directed by psychology, suffers from a tendency to overrate individualism and to fail to sufficiently note community behaviors.

Whether or not envy can be a positive thing clearly depends on how it is defined. It can also depend on other aspects of the comprehension of the appropriateness or otherwise of different worldviews, for example, the question of the advisability of emulation of certain people. Choice of the "wrong" model can have many deleterious consequences, as discovered by UK schools finding their students imitating media personality Andrew Tate (BBC News, 2023). Girard (2001: 19–31) makes a clear case to the effect that the prime person to imitate must be Jesus Christ. "Benign" envy of other people may not be benign at all, if Jesus is the only one we ought to imitate, and if imitation of others leads to violence.

There are other problems with the inherent human tendency to imitate others, for example, whenever behavior that is being imitated pertains to something that is scarce. That scarce thing may be very difficult for the envious person to acquire. Girard (2001: 19–31) clearly articulates that the failure of communities of people to achieve that to which they aspire easily results in cycles of scapegoating, which in the USA has led to riots and mass shootings, while in traditional Africa, scapegoating equates to the killing of witches (Girard, 2001: 74–75).

## Envy in Africa

Unlike in the West, envy among Africans translates into witchcraft (not magical or supernatural) as a way of representing, carrying, and funneling envy's power and potentially destructive nature. Witchcraft being dangerous to life and limb, Africans tend to try to hide their envy from each other to avoid accusations of witchcraft, or they may try to avoid the appearance of having something that others would be likely to envy. In order to avoid envy in situations where someone is in need, the situation "should," according to African thinking, be addressed in contexts that impart honor (or, the reverse of this, force people to avoid shame). (This would be like Euergetism, wealthy benefactors being rewarded by public honors. (See "Euergetism in the Oxford Classical Dictionary: oxfordre.com).) Thus, a need for funds is addressed in a public

event attended by as many people as possible. What people give is known—so that they be honored for it. This is widely known as "harambee" in East Africa, and is used to raise funds—be it for a church roof, school fees, and so on. It is followed by communal eating.

## *Open expressions of envy to outsiders*

More open and free expression of envy in sub-Saharan Africa is often reserved for when one addresses outsiders, a point often made by Maranz (2001), although he rarely uses the term envy itself. Open expression of envy can be in humor, a kind of joke, to test a person. Africans often express envy openly to outsiders on this basis. Outsiders who fail to realize the humor underlying such a "test" can end up offended. Those who give generously can turn what might have been intended as humor, into a relationship of dependency on donors. Such a reaction effectively invites ongoing open expression of envy with foreigners by people who as a result seriously expect to be given what they are asking for.

Let me illustrate this kind of test with an example. An outsider visiting an African village is wearing a good set of shoes. Villagers are envious. They jokingly say to the outsider, "Give me your shoes." The outsider is expected to respond in humor, for example by saying, "There are too many thorns here for my bare feet." If, however, the outsider hands over the shoes, this will have turned a humorous comment into a serious potential means of getting wealthy. The latter is, unfortunately, likely to prompt envy among Africans. Such mis-construed humor has certainly, it seems to me, majorly contributed to the contemporary situation in which Africa is enormously dependent on western people's largesse.

Another example of open expression of envy to outsiders: I recall walking in a tourist area in southern Africa with a British colleague, who was on his first ever visit to the continent. My colleague was thrilled and excited to be in such a "different" place and at making so many friends.

"Hey," said a young African lad with a broad grin. My colleague stopped and went to him.

"Give me a dollar," he told my colleague. My colleague came back to me, deflated. His reading, as a Brit, of the behavior of the young man had made him think that this might be a true friend interested in him. Instead, he was presented with a request for money in such a way as to say, "I am poor and so deserving, whereas you obviously have too much wealth." In other words, the request seemed to be rooted in envy.

This was not the only visitor I have had who has been so "deflated." There appears to me to be a massive difference in many African people's open willingness to express their envy directly and bluntly to foreigners from Europe, by comparison with how Europeans relate among themselves. That is to say that, as a Brit, I was raised to consider envy of another to be something unpleasant that I should overcome, conceal, or try to do away with. Open expression of envy, verbalizing a desire to have something that belongs to someone else, is in the Europe known to me considered very childish or immature behavior. If I do need to ask someone for something, then I will try to give the

person a face-saving outlet, such as, "Please will you give me £10 as I am right out of money, *but if you can't no problem, I will find another way*." As a European it is embarrassing to find myself in a position in which I have inadvertently run out of money.

My frequent experience in every African country in which I have lived is otherwise: people are very quick to ask western people for help (Maranz, 2001: 87). African people seem very often to put themselves into situations in which they need money to go forward, but they do not know where that money is going to come from. For example, African people will enroll in a course at a college and begin studying, while knowing that when the deadline for payment comes, they will not be able to pay. David Maranz (2001: 10, 37, 51) alludes to the nature and habituality of these kinds of requests in all the African countries he surveyed. From his research he found it is normal for African people to live beyond their means and that having a surplus is associated with selfishness (and is also likely to lead to being envied by others—a dangerous position as will be described below).

## *Envious desire for western education*

The "power of the idea of the West," keeps others in tow (Ha, 2018). One consequence of the open expression of envious desire for what the West has, relates to contemporary formal education in Africa, that has little local fit. A western approach often used to raise funds as a means of improving the standard of living in Africa is that of pointing to the fact that, on their own, poorer African economies simply cannot achieve what happens in the West.

Traditional education in Africa was very different from the modern education that was widespread in Europe by the end of the 19th century (Bowen, 2003/1981). When colonialists and missionaries travelled to Africa, they often set up "modern" educational programs for their hosts. Originally literary subjects might have been taught in the local indigenous language. Many, one imagines, did so in the hope that recipients of these programs would see the value of education, so that recipients establish their own education using their own thinking.[4] Instead though, what happened in many cases was a little different, related to envy. In order to acquire funding, subjects had to be taught in colonial languages, such as English. Ongoing pressure from colonial powers (Ogot, 2003), combined with the local perception that foreign education is better than what African people could do for themselves (Brutt-Griffler, 2002: 65), resulted in almost all educational curricula and structures in Africa being importations and imitation of foreign models of education. Even the language of instruction continues to be imported. This tendency by Africans to desire western education in a non-indigenous language makes it difficult for African people to think for themselves without their thinking being condemned. This seems to have become ever more exaggerated with advances in globalization.

In addition to the poor fit of western-style education in Africa, the expense of a western education is a difficulty many African people known to me have. Poor economies struggle to afford the high standards achieved in the West. These high standards are increasingly visible through the media and internet. Thus, African people put "envy-pressure" on the West to get financial help to boost their educational systems.

This is "pleading poverty," which of course is always relative. What the African people are doing lets the West know that they are envious of them. Since envy is the powerhouse of witchcraft in Africa (Harries, 2012: 129), someone who responds to envy is seen as demonstrating that they fear witches. The West's responding, for example, by sponsoring African children through school, provision of bursaries, subsidies and aid, and so on, can thus be considered to be responding to witchcraft (whether the West realizes it or not).

I often hear African people pray for their children to get help to support their education. After getting that help, parents and others related to the children vocalize through prayer their thanks to God for providing the help. In this sense, God can be said to be "envy." That is, God is prayed to for help. Then mechanisms related to envy are put in place (African people plead poverty, for example through indicating that the standard in Africa is lower than the one that is widespread in the West). These mechanisms produce the goods by prompting western people to give. As a result, God is thanked, in other words; envy is thanked. This is not to say that "God is envious." Rather it indicates that envy can fulfil the same role(s) as would God. This can happen as follows: if you have no food, you might pray to God, and God provides food. Alternatively, you can make it clear to people around you who have food that you are envious of them. They give you food through fear of your envy. So, envy can fulfil the same role as God, that is, envy can be God to you.

## *Hiding envy from "insiders": Pressure from belief in "limited good"*

Expression of envy in Africa, it seems, while it can be very acceptable with respect to outsiders, can be frowned upon among extended family or clan. A suspicion, such as that classically alluded to by Foster (1965) of a widespread conception of "limited good," implicitly supposes that one person's envy will pull something toward the envier and away from the envied. For example, the Luo people in Kenya have something called *dhoch*. This is a kind of uncleanness, that results in illness or some bodily misfunction, healing of which requires its being transferred to someone else. This very belief will influence behavior. For example, envy puts pressure onto the envied to reduce that quality for which they are envied, such as to give away cattle, not to complete the house they are building (Schoeck, 1969: 74), or to eat only in the privacy of their home. I have found the practice of not wanting to be seen in public with one's wife to be widespread in Kenya. This is presumably, in part at least, motivated by fear of the envy of others. So as not to appear to have a large herd of cattle, African people may have others look after some of their cattle for them elsewhere (a practice sometimes known as *mos*, that is widespread in Luoland in Kenya). Certain products belong to those who are doing the "looking after," for example the milk, the dung, perhaps certain calves. The identity of the actual owner of the animal concerned is obscured by this loaning process, thus the owner avoids being the target of envy, which African people need to avoid if possible so as not to be treated badly by the envious.

## *Dealing with envy in Africa*

Sharing knowledge of one's wealth, or even skills and aptitudes, risks inviting envy, which can, in many African people's view, sometimes have disastrous results. To deal with envy, African people have developed a variety of strategies including witchcraft, untruthfulness, and hiding realities such as ownership of cattle, as mentioned above. Fear of being the target of envy can determine conversation styles. Asking someone for personal information implies that one is envious. As a result, requests for information are not made. Those responding to any requests for information may tell untruths to mislead the inquirer's assumed orientation to envy.

Many African people try to counter envy by sharing everything openly. In some cases, such as the Maasai people, even wives can be shared (Walulya, 2005). Many consider that one's food and one's wealth should be shared by all. Thus, an important rule, in African households known to me, is that visitors must be included if household members are found to be eating. To refuse to share food, or even to suggest that one not share food, with a visitor, is frowned upon. Instead, one should be freely sharing all one has with those one relates with. This situation has many ramifications. Bearing in mind that not all cultures possess concepts such as that of love, as known in the West, one ramification is that the expectation to share food will discourage people from visiting the poor, hungry, or sick, unless the visitor is ready to hand over a generous gift. Visiting someone in desperate need without a gift contravenes the rule that one must share. So, visiting the sick can become the prerogative of the wealthy while others will avoid visiting such a person. Those who are not wealthy may simply "leave them to their fate." After all, if one arouses envy by making a visit, and has no gift with which to assuage that envy, that makes one liable either to being bewitched or being haunted should the troubled person die. At the same time, relating to such a person "charitably" without some clear motive (e.g., the person is your parent) may raise suspicions, for example that the food you give has been poisoned and your real motive for supposedly charitable giving has been to kill the sick person because you want their wife, land, job, or perhaps you want to take some revenge, or you may be seen as acting out of spite (Schoeck, 1969: 12).

Another widely known way to deal with envy is moving out of one's own community to live among non-relatives, because envy is always the fiercer the closer the relational bond. Hence, when I lived in the north-west province of Zambia, refugee farmers from Angola had a reputation of thriving more than did locals.

In parts of Africa known to me, people who anticipate others being envious of their wealth can use "medicine" to protect their wealth from thieves. For example, an African man might place a substance close to the location of his crops that is said to have an immobilizing effect on a prospective thief. Should someone come to steal his maize at night, it is said they will be found immobilized at the spot the following morning. Reports of this having happened are periodically circulated. This acts as a deterrent to envious thieves. As a result of this kind of practice, maintenance of superstitious beliefs in African communities may reduce cases of theft. (The medicine I here refer to does not act biomedically or physically. A substance may be considered to harm a person

even if buried underground near a path that the targeted person only has to pass along. The effectiveness of the medicine arises from the shock experienced by its target, that someone could be so hateful toward them as to search for and "plant" such medicine.) I have also heard this said in relation to cattle. People living in superstitious communities who take out medicine to protect their cattle can leave the cattle largely physically unprotected at night, knowing that potential thieves fear the effect of the medicine should they come to steal. (In less superstitious communities, cattle have to be locked up at night in a building, or will be prone to getting stolen.) The power of the medicine lies in the jealousy of the owner of the goods, who intends to deny others the opportunity of enriching themselves at his expense. This jealousy is pitched against the envy of the thief, who wants to consume or destroy the property of the owner.

It is very tempting to consider others (such as those who seem envious) to be responsible for one's problems. African colleagues are often incredulous: "How does the West get by without witchcraft?" I have shared that incredulity in reverse—"why do Africans believe in, and fear, witchcraft?" Eventually the penny dropped: witchcraft and envy are close cousins.[5]

Africans' belief in witchcraft is not fundamentally about a misguided understanding of the "supernatural." I consider the supernatural, as understood in the contemporary West, to be rooted in the belief in positivism, which puts aspects of human living that cannot be reduced to physical forces into a "non-existing" category that is often labelled, "supernatural." Likewise, African belief in witchcraft is not about non-existent "magical forces." In African languages known to me, I am not familiar with any term that translates the English term magic. The understanding that African people believe in "magic" I take as being an outcome of a western understanding of Africa. Witchcraft practices and beliefs are a means of articulating, responding to, taking advantage of, and trying to deal with the outcome of powerful interhuman fears, such as those of anger, lust, suspicion, the feeling of being despised, and particularly, envy. The forces are invisible, but very natural to interhuman relationships, not "supernatural" at all. My focus here is on the forces produced by envy, articulated in many African ways of life using terminology that is in English associated with witchcraft.

Just as westerners like to tell Africans that witchcraft does "not exist," Schoeck (1969: 10) tells us "there is . . . no such thing as envy." Neither envy nor witchcraft are things in themselves. There is no witchcraft without someone doing the bewitching, as there is no envy without someone one is envious of. This is similar to fear: being afraid *of* something or someone. Like "being afraid," envy must be "of" something, unlike other emotions, such as anger or sadness. One can be angry without being angry of anything, and so also "sad," but one cannot be envious if there is nothing of which one is envious.

Externalizing one's suspicions in order to take counter action against envy by using witchcraft spells, poisons, and other methods, is however not always helpful. Sometimes, a heart-originated diagnosis of someone working against one can turn out to have been correct—so and so really did set out to seduce my wife, causing her to leave me. Should your wife realize the string of people you suspect are seducing her, this will reveal your own insecurities. Such suspicions could be deeply troubling to

her. Should others find out about your insecurities, those others may mock you. Such accusations becoming public may put her into a serious jam, causing her either to fear relating to other men in ways that would widely be considered normal and acceptable, or to despise her husband, or both. Either way, the context of suspicion aroused by the husband's qualms, demonstrated by issues he takes to a witchdoctor, may rock his marriage. This illustrates how damaging it can be to reveal one's envy. (Strictly, this is jealousy, not envy, but the outcome may well be the same—the jealous or envious person searching for a means to injure or kill the person who is bringing the threat.) Being known to be envious (jealous) can amount to an assumption that you are practicing witchcraft. (Hence, someone may confess to an accusation of witchcraft, of which they were ignorant until accused.)

African people's responses to social pressures (such as those of envy) are often ignored in contemporary scholarly literature. Widely hidden responses to such pressures acting contrary to a wider well-being of a community help to explain "puzzling behavior" (McClendon, 2018) that takes African communities toward poverty, unless this is alleviated through outside intervention

## Overcoming envy in Africa

It should be clear that unless or until the above kinds of restrictions on life caused by envy can be overcome, a basis for "development" rooted in objectivity and truth remains a distant dream for Africa. Thus, envy comprises a very serious barrier to human progress and prosperity. Any significant inroads into knowing how to overcome, prevent, or suppress destructive envy, would mark major steps forward for mankind!

### *Hindrances from the West*

Unfortunately, envy is encouraged in Africa by international aid practices and contemporary counters to racism. Western attempts to help alleviate poverty in Africa lead to African people easily becoming dependent on foreign donations (Maranz, 2001: 126). Using foreign subsidy to blanket western education across the African continent often helps to obscure and obfuscate indigenously sensible, powered, and rooted efforts made to relieve problems caused by envy. It would not be difficult to make the case that whatever innate tendency many African people have to "wear their envy on their sleeve," the same tendency is being encouraged by the wider world. We could say that open expression of envy by Africans is being rewarded by massive amounts of money flow, including aid, to the continent. However important or right such aid may or may not be in other respects (see Harries, 2011), the way it rewards and thereby encourages levels of overt envy, and discourages rationality, perhaps needs to be carefully considered.

The West's preventing honest and truthful research and investigation into people's beliefs on the basis that the outcome might be racist, leaves indigenous African communities who use English stuck in a conceptual no man's land. In other words, their

self-understanding, if not very carefully translated into English, can appear to be racist. Similar categorizations by western people that classify God's acts in a supernatural way have rendered the helpful impact of the Gospel—that previously formed the West—nowadays largely invisible should the said "supernatural" subsequently be assumed not to exist.

It should be clear that unless or until the above kinds of restrictions on life caused by envy can be overcome, a basis for "development," rooted in objectivity and truth, remains a distant dream for Africa. Thus, envy comprises a very serious barrier to human progress and prosperity. Any significant inroads into knowing how to overcome, prevent, or suppress destructive envy, would mark major steps forward for mankind! Schoeck (1969: 5, 15, 76, 148) gives us many suggestions on how this can happen in practice. He attributes the overcoming of envy to religion, more specifically to Christianity. (I knowingly go back to Schoeck (1969) for some of his views, that are little reflected in recent literature on envy produced by psychologists.) Following this, he further points out, the West has been able to suppress envy (Schoeck, 1969). Modern psychology, for example, made little mention of envy until recent decades: "Envy is surprisingly absent in the recent revival of political emotions" shares Protasi (2021:4). "Envy is almost a taboo topic," Foster (1972: 165) tells us. The major origin of suppression of envy among humankind, has been and is, in my view clearly, Christianity. I state this by drawing on Girard's analysis of the impact of Christianity on mimetic desire. Mimetic desire is very similar to envy (Girard, 2001).

## *A biblical response to envy*

Envy is often taken as an "evil" implicit to human society. Scholars like Lange and Crusius (2015: 284) reflect this in referring to envy as a "deadly sin." If envy is a sin, then implicitly, "secularized . . . society [cannot] . . . ever solve' it" (Schoeck, 1969: 5). Despite efforts at whitewashing it, most scholars and others continue to see envy as one of the most destructive parts of human nature. Gwyneth McClendon's (2018) descriptions show how envy, spite (keeping those people down who are already worse off), and the desire for admiration (a rise in someone's view in the eyes of others), have a profound effect on inter-human relationships. Her work can help us to better understand the complexity of the problems that the Gospel of Jesus is "up against" in Africa. It could also help us to perceive why western scholarship struggles to accurately comprehend the vagaries of African life. Whereas western thinking tends to conceive of humankind as facing outwards to their environment—that which is seen around them (hence the term "worldview")—there is a basic sense in which today's Africa is battling with so-called "emotional" issues arising from relationships with others. While commonly referred to in English as emotions (a kind of problematic add-on to normal rational life), these are often translated into English from African languages as "spirits," which in Africa are focal to the whole of life.

When African people are set free from such "spirits" of envy through their faith in Christ, those set free expect prosperity to be forthcoming—and often it is—as would be found to be the case by comparing Christianized and not-Christianized communities in

Africa, for example Kenya with Somalia. The difference in prosperity due to the influence of Christianity is also seen in comparing educated with uneducated African people, as contemporary education has grown out of Christianity (Bowen, 2003/1981). Hence, McClendon and Riedl (2016: 119) comment that in Pentecostal churches in Nairobi the "approach to economic development . . . focuses on individual mental transformation [and not either] material handouts or systemic reform." This mental transformation I take as being a move away from fear of envy and spite, in favor of trust in God's provision.

Much of the more recent writing that I have explored about envy is founded in an unapologetic and perhaps unconscious and even unknowing foundation in psychology. That is, truths expounded by psychology of all kinds can be relatively uncritically presupposed. Psychology, as many "modern" disciplines, taking an analytic approach, bases itself in the study of aspects of human behavior independently of the wider whole. Human life is treated like a large jigsaw puzzle, involving numerous scholars each honing their piece of the jigsaw, on the assumption that some kind of overcoming of the problems of envy will be achieved when as a result parts are correctly re-assembled. Unfortunately, this approach can dampen appreciation of the biblical solution to human sin (envy)—sacrifice, in Christianity of the Son of God himself.

The Christian Gospel brings relief to Africa by displacing the need for witchcraft (scapegoating) by the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14–15). To help Africans suppress their envy—a necessary step required for indigenously thought and powered socioeconomic development to occur—a Christianization of Africa is required. Some would term that to be the need for Christian discipleship. Christian instruction teaches that the person to be envied is—and in the end must be—only Christ himself. Emulation of a person who self-sacrificially gave his all out of love for others, including sinners, even when those sinners hated him enough to want him killed (Luke 23:21), is clearly, for many, part of the ultimate way to bring peace and the kingdom of God on Earth. There are no failures in the imitation of Christ, the Son of God, whose fate was to be hated by all to the point of their being determined to murder him.

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## Notes

1. "Very few of us are willing to give up our belief in the physical world," says Crash Course. Such belief underlies contemporary understandings of causation. But, does Crash Course speak on behalf of the globe, or only the western world? (Philosophy, 2016).
2. The approach to envy taken by psychology is very different, for example, to the older biblical approach, at least insofar as the Bible advocates for sacrifice, the shedding of blood, for forgiveness of sin.

3. Faking it till you make it, is the way forward for African youth, according to Dawson (2023).
4. My own view, is that the ideal way to have put Africa on a firm foundation from which to develop, might have been to bring them only the Bible, that is, not to have engaged in a lot of donating and development assistance.
5. Although the connection between envy and witchcraft/sorcery seems to be under acknowledged, a careful check does find much reference to it (Harries, 2012; Priest, 2015a: 4; Schoeck, 1969: 13, 418).

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## Author biography

Jim Harries (b. 1964, PhD Theology, University of Birmingham, UK) chairs the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission. His ministry in East Africa includes teaching the Bible using the Swahili and Luo languages, as well as prayer ministry, orphan-care, and writing/research. Jim has published numerous articles related to missiology, promoting mission practice using indigenous languages and resources. His most recent book, currently in-press, is entitled: *Vulnerable Mission in Depth: Listening to God and Man in Africa*.