

African Proverb of the Month
June 1998



Nalukolekejaga sonda (ng'weli) walola lwala. (Sukuma)

Nilikuonyesha nyota (mwezi) na uliangalia kidole tu. (Swahili)

I pointed out to you the stars (the moon) and all you saw was the tip of my finger. (English)

Sukuma ([Tanzania](#))

Explanation:

In the history of the Sukuma people in Tanzania in East Africa (and African people everywhere) there is a great richness and wealth in their culture, language, traditions and customs (like the vast richness of the stars). But people recognize, understand and use only a very small part of this treasure (like seeing only the tip of one's finger). Similarly in the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ there is "the breadth and length and height and depth" (*Ephesians* 3:18) (like the vast richness of the stars). But people recognize, understand and use only a very small part of this treasure (like seeing only the tip of one's finger).

This Sukuma proverb also teaches that sometimes people can focus on the wrong part or point of a particular subject such as African culture, that is, look at the tip of the finger of the culture rather than its stars. The challenge of inculturation and contextualization is to go beyond the superficial changes in liturgy and religious symbols to an all-encompassing pastoral inculturation that has African flesh and blood. Similarly, people can focus on the wrong part or point of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The challenge is to go beyond the rules and regulations of the Bible to a complete transformation in the Christian life.



This Sukuma proverb also hints at the vast treasure and many possibilities in using African proverbs and other forms of African oral literature and oral communication to preach the gospel and develop an inculturated and contextualized African Christianity. This is one of the great

challenges of inculturation in the Christian Churches in Africa today: to make a correlation between African oral literature and cultural symbols and Christianity and to express this in pastoral theological reflections and actions that concretely speak to people's every day life. This task includes both theology and praxis in developing a functional African Christianity and an applied pastoral inculturation.

For further information see pages 17 and 53 (Notes 1 and 2) in *Towards An African Narrative Theology* (available from Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, Kenya and Orbis Books, Maryknoll New York, USA as well as from online bookstores).

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