Methodists are busy negotiating a specific (South African) Christian identity between their Methodist Faith and African Traditions: Most of the interviewed persons do not seem to have difficulties in combining both. In this regard too the book offers an interesting case study.

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Ernst Wendland is a long-time missionary to Zambia and a teacher at the Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka since 1968. He has also been working as a translation consultant for the Bible societies of Malawi and Zambia and as a visiting professor in the Department of Ancient Studies at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. He published the present monograph in 2005 with two stated main goals: "to reveal and describe...the captivating verbal artistry as well as the engaging local theology of the Chinyanja Sewero radio programs" (p.18). This book is not a result of any thesis, although the author's doctoral thesis in 1979 had dealt with radio narratives in the Nyanja language.1 Wendland began collecting the radio programme recordings forming the source materials of the present study in the early 1990's as part of an earlier research project focusing on Chichewa-language revival sermons broadcast on Trans World Radio.2 Wendland's study on vernacular African Christian radio drama is pioneering. It is difficult if not impossible to find other studies on the same topic. The author's source materials consist of over 70 cassette recordings of Sewero radio plays transcribed, summarised and partly annotated and translated by his seminary students.3 However, some doubt will remain as to the complete accuracy of the radio programme transcripts and translations and the conclusions drawn from them, since the author himself hints about the possibility of "errors, omissions and misinterpretations" (p.19). The author defends his student collaborators by stating that he himself is a "non-mother-tongue-speaking cultural outsider". In spite of this uncertainty, the author and his African collaborators have no doubt carried out a valuable task in documenting and analysing a largely unstudied but important segment of Christian mass communication in Africa.

Sewero means "a play" in the Chinyanja language (formerly known as the Chichewa language in Malawi). Wendland's study sets out to present, interpret and analyse in a conservative

2 Wendland, Ernst, Preaching that grabs the heart: A rhetorical-stylistic study of the Chichewa revival sermons of Shadrack Wame (Kachere Monograph No. 11), Blantyre (Malawi): CLAIM, 2000.
3 On p.98 Wendland states that he has a corpus of over 80 Sewero dramas, but on p.17 he only mentions "over 70".
evangelical apologetic way a selection of Malawian evangelical radio plays produced and broadcast during the 1990’s and until 2002. In this period the Sewero plays were broadcast by Trans World Radio (TWR) from their short wave transmitters in Swaziland and later also through their new local FM service in Malawi. TWR is a worldwide conservative evangelical missionary radio network with headquarters in the United States.

Many African countries continue to be mainly oral cultures with a low literacy rate: e.g. in Malawi this rate is at approximately 30%. In such societies, radio is still the primary mass medium reaching the masses of average people. Since the 1950’s, earlier than TWR, several other Protestant missionary radio projects have been targeting the African continent, beginning with ELWA in Liberia, Lutheran Hour studios in Nigeria, Radio Voice of the Gospel (owned by the Lutheran World Federation) in Ethiopia and Radio CORDAC in Burundi.

Wendland rather vaguely claims that “Africa has been a focal continent in TWR’s plans from the very beginning” (p.42). The truth is that although TWR did begin its operations on the African continent from Tangiers on the Moroccan coast, its early broadcasts in the 1950’s only targeted Spain and other European countries. Only with the establishment of its short wave radio station in Swaziland in 1974 did Africa become a real target area for TWR. Unfortunately Wendland’s book fails to place TWR and its Sewero programmes into their proper context by ignoring the existence of other significant Christian broadcast-ers and radio drama productions on the airwaves of Africa.

The book’s rather long title reveals not only what the book is about but also a certain bias. Indeed, the author’s enthusiastic admiration of the ingenuity of these radio plays is clearly manifested throughout the book. Already in the preface (p.15), Wendland praises the radio plays’ “manifest verbal artistry, rhetorical power, theological insight, and practical relevance for Bible believers...living in central Africa”, adding that “these dramatic productions cannot fail to leave a positive impression on any audience, whether the listeners happen to understand Chinyanja or not”! The author does an unfortunate disservice to the object of his study by starting off with praises of its “great success and excellence” (p.20). Such comments, if indeed deserved, should rather be gradually justified by the study and presented in its conclusions.

In fact, since Wendland even mentions at the start as one of the actual aims of his study “to encourage the Sewero program staff to continue their excellent efforts” (p.19), the reader can hardly consider the author to be neutral or objective. Furthermore, at the end of the book an unhappy footnote reveals that the author also hopes his monograph might help in getting new sponsorship allowing the recently suspended Sewero programme production to continue...4 Only late in the book (p.200) does Wendland recognise that “not all Sewero productions are equally effective or excellent in communicative terms”, finally admitting some cases of imperfection: e.g. poor per-

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4 p.260, footnote 48.