

CURRENT THEOLOGY

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN THEOLOGIES

JUSTIN S. UKPONG

Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt

Contextualization of theology has, within the last few years, become a major theological orientation of our age whether in the North Atlantic region or in the South. It is within the framework of this general orientation that three major theological currents have emerged in Africa in the last two decades. The first and the oldest of these is African inculturation theology, simply referred to as African theology. Briefly stated, this theology is an attempt to give African expression to the Christian faith within a theological framework. It involves a conscious engagement of European Christian thinking and African religious thought in serious dialogue for the purpose of integrating Christianity into the life and culture of African people.

The second is South African black theology. This takes after the American black theology and aims at relating the gospel message to the social situation of segregation and oppression in which the blacks in South Africa find themselves. Black theologians see the gospel as the Good News to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor, and they are concerned with discovering and propagating this Good News of liberation.

The third is African liberation theology, which, though a late starter, having appeared only about a decade ago, is becoming very popular in most parts of Africa. There are three subcurrents in this theology. One is based on the indigenous socioeconomic system, the second takes after the Latin American model, and the third involves a combination of elements from both approaches. They seek genuine human promotion in the context of the poverty and political powerlessness of Africa, and take the form of Christian reflection within the context. Like black theologians, the liberationists believe that the gospel has a liberating message for Africans in their state of poverty, oppression, and exploitation.

Though young, these theologies unquestionably excel in terms of output. But in the mass of literature available, one must search long and hard to be able to find a single publication that provides a comprehensive picture of what the African theological grapevine looks like. This essay is an attempt to zero in on the main outlines of these theologies and analyze and evaluate them.

As will have been noted, these three theologies are based on three different issues which, though separate, are nevertheless related: the issue of culture for African inculturation theology, and the issue of color for South African black theology, and the issue of poverty for African liberation theology. Many authors in discussing African theology consciously or unconsciously tend to take one or other of these issues as basic and then attempt to integrate the other issues into the framework elaborated for the basic issue.¹ Others admit only the theology based on one particular issue as *the* relevant theology for Africa.² I consider both approaches inadequate for articulating the different concerns raised by these issues and the Christian response to them. The approach taken here is one which acknowledges each of these issues as different in nature from the others, and therefore as demanding a different theological approach. Yet these issues and the theologies based on them are at the same time seen to be interrelated. Such an approach allows for the full development of these theologies and for a mature and exhaustive treatment of the issues involved. With this in view, I shall discuss each of the theologies separately and then attempt to show how they are interrelated. But before discussing them, I shall examine those circumstances or factors that made them possible at the time they appeared.

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

The emergence of African theologies (as also their development) involves a long and unsuspected process determined not so much by the ingenuity of scholars as by certain circumstances and factors which must be taken not separately but together. These may be designated as the cultural factor, the historical factor, the sociopolitical factor, contribution of social sciences, and the theological factor.

The Cultural Factor

This factor has a special bearing on African inculturation theology. I shall develop my analysis of it in two premises.

My first premise is that African inculturation theology, being a phe-

¹ Charles Nyamiti, e.g., treats liberation as a theme in his framework for inculturation theology; see his *The Way to Christian Theology for Africa* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba, n.d.) preface, and *African Tradition and the Christian God* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba, n.d.) 26-43.

² Zablon Nthamburi seems to take liberation as the only relevant issue, and liberation theology as the only relevant theology; see his article "African Theology as a Theology of Liberation," *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)* 22 (1980) 232-39. In South Africa, Manas Buthelezi rejects African inculturation theology, accepting black theology as the only relevant theology for Africa; see his "An African or Black Theology?" in *Essays on Black Theology*, ed. M. Motlhabi (Johannesburg: University Christian Movement, 1972) 8; and "African Theology and Black Theology: A Search for a Theological Method" in *Relevant Theology for Africa*, ed. H. J. Becken (Durban: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973) 20.

nomenon of the Christian religion in Africa, is a function of the process of the interaction over the years of African traditional religion and culture with Christianity presented through European culture. This interaction has produced two things: the selection and integration of elements from both sides as well as cultural tension.

European communicators of the Christian message to Africans were very selective in their use of the resources of African culture in their task, for only certain elements of Christian expression were thought to be compatible with local resources. This was as it should be, given the logic of a situation where neither the communicator nor the audience knew much of each other's culture. However, those elements of Christian expression that have been selected and have to some measure been successfully integrated have continued to exploit the resources of African culture. An example is the concept of the Deity. The Christian concept of God has to some extent been successfully integrated into the local culture through the use of the local name for God. There was no problem in initiating the integration of this concept, because Africans already have in their religion the concept of a Supreme Creator God. And after these long years of interaction there has developed a high degree of mutual understanding and appreciation. As a result, there is today a desire to express the Christian concept of God in African terms, as a help to a deeper understanding and internalization of the Christian concept of God by Africans.

There are other areas where integration has not been successful. In these areas there exists in the life of the ordinary African Christian a tension between the received European forms of Christian expression and his own cultural forms of religious expression. This tension is manifested in, for example, syncretistic practices. It can only be resolved through a creative integration of European Christian thought-system and African religious thought-system, which African inculturation theology aims at achieving.

My second premise is based on the well-known fact that African society is today undergoing and to some degree has undergone a transition from a traditional to a modern society. This has meant the emergence of reflexive critical thinking; for, as Robin Horton points out, in the traditional society (which is referred to as the "closed predicament" or "closed system of ideas") critical reflexive thinking is absent because of the lack of alternatives, but in the modern/Western scientific-oriented society (referred to as the "open predicament" or "open system of ideas") such reflexive thinking is "inevitable."³ While the inevitability of reflexive thinking in an open predicament is contestable, it cannot but be admitted

³ "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," *Africa* 37 (1967) 155.

that the open predicament creates the appropriate situation for critical reflection to take place. Within this premise it becomes evident that in the closed predicament it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for African theology to develop; first, because theological work, which is a "second-order" intellectual activity, demands critical reflection, which is not available within the closed predicament; second, because the closed predicament is conservative and therefore could not create the climate necessary for the emergence of African theology, which is in a sense a reaction to conservatism. Thus the rise of African theology must be seen as corresponding with the emergence of the open system of ideas in African society which has begun to be experienced today.

The Historical Factor

With regard to inculturation theology, the history of Christianity is full of milestones of inculturation—milestones indicating what has been achieved in one cultural situation and thereby pointing to what could be achieved in another. The Council of Jerusalem affords us the first example of such milestones. Here what is important is not so much the actual regulation arrived at at the Council (Acts 15) as the basic attitude of the apostles in approaching their first problem of inculturation of Christianity. In effect, the decision of the Council was that since Christianity, which had hitherto been Jewish, was now becoming Gentile as well, unnecessary Jewish cultural burdens were not to be placed on the Gentile converts.

At Athens Paul carried the cause of inculturation much further than what was achieved in Jerusalem; for he not only identified the unknown God of the Athenians with the true God whom he preached, but also preached to them in philosophical terms understood by them, quoting from their literature (Acts 17:16-34).

As Christianity moved from the Mediterranean region to Europe and flourished there for so many centuries, European culture in no small measure shaped Christian expression, and Christian ideals in turn influenced European mentality, outlook, and culture. Our traditional theological system is a heritage from this situation.

In addition to this inculturation current, we also notice all through the history of Christianity another current marked with Christianity's challenge to elements of the cultural milieu. Jesus challenged Jewish messianism, which laid emphasis on an earthly kingdom. He made no compromise with the Pharisees in their external observances and on their attitude of segregation and discrimination against the "sinners" and the publicans. Also, it is very clear to the apostles that the Good News was meant for the Jews in the first place. But Paul had no hesitation in

telling the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia that by their hardheartedness they had forfeited their right to first position. He was now to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

When Christianity reached Europe, it set up a stiff opposition to paganism. This was a testimony to and an expression of its capacity to challenge the cultural milieu.

All this makes it imperative that while inculturation is desirable, it should not be a mere naive introduction of any and every cultural practice into the Church. Rather, it ought to be the response of culture to a challenge issued by the gospel of Christ, a response that maintains the proper balance between the exigencies of culture and the demands of the gospel.

Another historical fact that must be reckoned with is the existence of Eastern as distinct from Western theology in the Catholic theological tradition, as well as theological pluralism in the Western church. All these have contributed to the process from which African theologies have emerged.

The Sociopolitical Factor

In the later 1950's and early 1960's a political "wind of change" blew across Africa, and in its wake several new independent states emerged from the tutelage of colonialism. This phenomenon has remained a major factor, whether positively or negatively considered, in the analysis of change, even religious change, in Africa today. Positively, it has contributed to a new awareness and a felt need for the realization of independence in all its aspects. Negatively, it has intensified the bitterness of Africans against colonialists in nonindependent African states and has led to the opening up of avenues, including religious ones, for the expression of revolutionary sentiments.

During the colonial era African culture suffered disdain at the hands of the colonizers. After independence, however, an all-out attempt was made to reaffirm its identity and integrity, as true selfhood was seen to include cultural identity. A return to the indigenous culture was the "in" thing. People replaced the European suit and tie in a hot climate with a more culturally designed dress that was better suited to the climate. Architects were now drawing inspiration for their designs from the traditional building patterns. Culturally adapted music and dance forms began to replace European ones at centers of recreation. A sense of value for whatever was of the indigenous culture began to emerge, and people began to extol whatever was traditional and cultural, sometimes even to excess.

The wave of this cultural revival did not leave Church practice un-

touched, and any continued exclusion of African culture from the life and practice of the Church was to be seen as a denial of African identity within the Church. There was a great desire, among African intellectuals particularly, to show a positive attitude towards and an appreciation of African culture.⁴ Thus superficial modifications were made in liturgical celebrations. Religiously meaningful indigenous names were being preferred at baptism to foreign saint names, and even adults already baptized with foreign saint names were dropping them in favor of indigenous names.

The same philosophy that inspired the search for cultural identity also inspired the search for political and economic identity expressed in liberation theology. African nations have discovered that even after political independence they are still tied to the influence and the dominance of the Western powers in terms of world economy and polity. The search for a new economic and political structure thus started in some African states.

Black theology of South Africa arises, too, from a reactionary sentiment and has as its point of departure the social discrimination practiced against the blacks in that country. It attempts to redefine and reinterpret Christianity in terms of a liberating force in the context of segregation and oppression.

Thus, while the attainment of independence by some African states has given rise to the search for African theology of inculturation and liberation theology, the nonattainment of it forms the background to the African version of black theology in South Africa.

Contribution of the Social Sciences

The current quest for African inculturation theology must, in terms of its origin, acknowledge an indebtedness to the social sciences, particularly sociology and anthropology. The first main contribution of these twin sciences was the introduction, in the last century, of a pluralistic concept of culture as opposed to the classicist monolithic concept. Culture came to be defined in terms of differences in existing societies rather than in terms of one society taken as a paradigm. Thus the idealistic-inductive definition of culture gave place to an enumerative-deductive one, and societies came to be looked upon as autonomous entities in the process of change rather than as dependent entities that were expected to develop according to the pattern set by a model.

This is not to overlook the initial erroneous theories of these sciences, such as the linear theory of social evolution, the evolutionary theory of

⁴ J. S. Mbiti, "Some Current Concerns in African Theology," *Expository Times* 87 (1976) 166.

change, etc., which bear on our topic; it is rather to recognize the positive contribution these sciences have made. Their best theories have produced a new way of thinking which has led to a re-evaluation of African culture. Working on ethnographic materials gathered from the field, modern anthropologists have been able to identify various values to be recovered from African culture, e.g., the sense of community, the sense of the sacred, closeness to nature, high appreciation of life after death, etc. In the process, too, whatever dead wood there was has been exposed and allowed to fall apart.

For students of religion and theology, the advancement in these sciences in modern times has opened the gate for comparative evaluation of African values in the context of Christianity. Researches along this line have yielded immense results; in particular, they have led to the realization that African culture has a great potential in the process of evangelization. This was the beginning of African theology, and African theologians of the future must see themselves as building on this foundation.

The Theological Factor

Here I shall discuss three major theological developments which in the last few decades have contributed in no small measure to the present quest for the different African theologies.

The first of these developments is the *theological renaissance* that had started to brew on the international theological scene early in the present century, coming to the fore in the post-Vatican II period. The main thrust of this movement, in the aspects relevant to our topic, was that dogmatic theology was no longer being looked upon as a mere explanation of dogmas but as the actualization of the meaning of divine revelation in relation to the present situation of man and woman. This meant that theology began to be understood more and more in terms of proclamation. It was now acquiring a hermeneutic orientation, and its task was being seen more in terms of answering the questions posed by the hearer rather than being content with offering explanations following on a predetermined a priori. In terms of methodology, the proponents of the movement were bent on getting behind scholasticism to salvation-history and patristics. And based on the fact that dogmatic statements and their theological elaborations were set within certain cultural and religious contexts, they set for themselves the task of critically analyzing such statements and their theological elaborations, using scientific historical methods.

Another aspect of this movement is theological pluralism. Since theology was now to be concerned with the human situation, pluralism arose

not only on account of a plurality of philosophies, but also by reason of a plurality of life-experience and forms of Christian involvement in the world.⁵ This has given rise to theological involvement in the issues of race, poverty, and culture in Africa.

The theology of the *Second Vatican Council* is another development that has influenced the rise of African theologies. In the first place, the entire orientation of the Council was marked by the theology of *aggiornamento*, an updating of the Christian life in all its forms—liturgical, pastoral, catechetical, spiritual, theological, etc. *Aggiornamento* meant for the Council a “radical reappraisal of the whole bearing of the Church in the world of the twentieth century.”⁶ This alone was enough to inspire in African theologians and churchmen a certain questioning as well as creativity as to the mode of presentation of Christianity in Africa, including the presentation of theology.

In addition to this is the specific theology of the Council relating to different areas of the Christian life. First of all is a new theology of the laity (found mainly in the Council documents on the liturgy and on the laity) whereby the laity are moved from a peripheral to a central position in the Church. The liturgy, too, is now understood as a means whereby the faithful express in their lives the nature of the Church. This calls for active participation on the part of the faithful, and a celebration that is intelligible and meaningful to them.

The ecclesiology proposed by the Council has an important bearing, too, on inculturation theology. By presenting the Church in the model of people of God (*Lumen gentium* 9-14), the Council has de-emphasized the hierarchical in favor of the pastoral image of the Church. The doctrine of the collegiality of bishops (*Christus Dominus* 4-6; *Lumen gentium* 22) has led to the recovery of the local/particular church, which the Council defines as an active representation of “the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ” (*Christus Dominus* 11; see also *Lumen gentium* 26, 27). In these documents, therefore, we find the first steps towards the realization of a “world church” in which the universal is present in the particular, and in which there might be room for the development of autochthonous forms of Christian expression.⁷

Add to all this the Council’s declaration on non-Christian religions, which has led to a positive re-evaluation of African traditional religion and culture for the benefit of evangelization (*Nostra aetate* 2).

⁵ Cf. Claude Geffre, *A New Age in Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1974) esp. 35, 43, 45-49, 63-70.

⁶ Cf. Christopher Butler, *The Theology of Vatican II* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967) 16-17. The Council’s deliberations on this point were expressed in the document *Lumen gentium*.

⁷ Cf. Karl Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *AFER* 22 (1980) 324-26.

The third development has to do with the rise of *African independent churches* which seek to employ African expression in Christian worship. The mode of worship of these churches as well as their theology have been highly attractive to African Christians in the mainline churches, and gradually the exodus of such Christians into the independent churches has become so great as to be of much concern to the authorities of the mainline churches. This has made church authorities and theologians of the mainline churches in Africa think in terms of transforming their modes of worship so as to be culturally meaningful to their members. For a successful and enduring achievement of such endeavor, a great need has been felt for the backing of a theology that is authentically African as well as Christian.

AFRICAN INCULTURATION THEOLOGY

Background

The expression "African theology," which is used to refer to African theology of inculturation, did not come into use until 1955 and did not gain currency until the 60's.⁸ The reality it represents, however, as we shall see, goes back much longer than this. Two other names, "theologia Africana" and "African Christian theology," are also used to designate this theology.

Even though by the fifth century (Council of Chalcedon) Christianity was already flourishing in North Africa, the people south of the Sahara were to wait for many centuries afterwards to receive the Good News; for it was not until the 15th century, during the time of the Portuguese exploration of Africa, that sub-Saharan Africa first came in contact with Christianity. The 19th-century scramble for and partition of Africa sparked this initial contact into a great missionary action. Thus, as it exists today in sub-Saharan Africa, Christianity, whether we think of it in terms of organized church/denomination or otherwise, came in the wake of the great missionary expansion of the last century. An indication of the impact of this missionary activity is the large and regular church attendance, the burgeoning vocations, and the general vivacity which characterize the Church in Africa today. In terms of statistics, the total number of Christians in Africa increased from about 143 million in 1970 to about 171 million in 1975 and 203 million in 1980. This number is forecast to rise to about 236 million in 1985.⁹

In spite of this phenomenal success, however, the widespread syncre-

⁸ Cf. K. Nsoki, "Genèse de l'expression 'théologie africaine,'" *Televa* 4 (1979) 43; Mbiti, "Some Current Concerns" 164.

⁹ These figures are taken from D. B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopaedia* (Oxford: OUP, 1982) 782, and have been corrected to round numbers.

tistic life of many African Christians calls into question the extent to which Christianity has been digested and assimilated by them. Personal syncretism of Christianity and the traditional religion is practiced not only by illiterate Africans but also by educated ones in most parts of Africa.¹⁰ A careful analysis of the situation reveals that the observed acts of syncretism among African Christians are not so much a sign of lack of Christian commitment as an expression of the fact that Christianity, *as transmitted* to the African, has not been made to respond fully to his culturally-based religious aspirations.

It is in the face of such a situation that contemporary African theologians are seeking a new way of achieving a more effective breakthrough in the communication of the Christian message to Africans: the way of dialogue between Christianity and the indigenous thought-system.

The aim is to give expression to Christianity in African religiocultural terms, to work towards creating a synthesis between Christianity and African culture and religion, to present Christianity in a way congenial to the African's view of reality, and to integrate Christianity into his world view. The final goal is to help the African live out Christianity authentically within his cultural milieu and to integrate his religious personality.

The project of African theology has not been without its problems. The very term "African" is pregnant with difficulties: What is the stamp or trademark that makes a theology African? Are we justified in talking of "African theology" in the singular when there are so many cultural differences among African peoples? Should we not rather talk of African theologies? Who is competent to do this theology? Is it only the African?

Just like the term "African," the term "theology" itself presents another set of problems. By historical tradition, theology in terms of methodology is understood as the application of a system of philosophy to clarify Christian doctrine. In this light, where does Africa, without any system of written philosophy of its own, stand in terms of developing an autonomous theology? Must we not then wait for the full development of such a system of philosophy before embarking upon the task of constructing African theology? Besides, all that needs to be clarified in the Church's doctrine has already been clarified in the early centuries of the Church by Western theology. Is African theology therefore necessary? Should we not then strive for African catechesis rather than African theology? Also, Christian theology lays claim to universality. Can African theology be considered to be of universal applicability?

The problem of the identity of African theology has to be seen within

¹⁰ Cf. Jean-Marc Ela, "From Assistance to Liberation," *Lumen vitae* 36 (1981) 316; and Onuora Nzegwu, *Blade among the Boys* (London & Ibadan: Heinemann, 1972) 139.

the larger context of theological reflection in general and theological pluralism in particular. Theology, if its etymology is anything to go by, has to do with human reflection on God. This immediately posits a twofold aspect in theology—the divine and the human—which, though distinct, are inseparable. Truths about God, indeed all religious truths, make up the divine element. For the Christian, they are the truths contained in the Scriptures as well as in the Church's doctrinal formulations and tradition. As for human reflection on these truths, this can only be done from a cultural point of view; for, even though man is the maker of his culture, he is indeed reciprocally the product of his culture. His thinking is necessarily conditioned by the way he has been culturally formed. Unconsciously, then, man reflects on divine truths from a certain cultural standpoint. The fruits of such reflection formulated as theology necessarily bear the imprint of that culture.¹¹ Culture must, therefore, be seen as an inseparable part of any theological system. And every culture possesses "sets of values and ideals," intangible elements, all that are specific to it and make one culture different from another.¹² It is those sets of values and ideals which are African that will identify this theology and make it distinct from other theologies.

But in the face of the well-known diversity of cultures among the various African peoples, can we talk of African theology as if only one culture is involved? The answer is yes and no. "African theology" is used in the singular in the exclusive sense, that is, when we want to point to those theologies originating from and sharing African cultural background as a group apart from other theologies originating from other cultures. "African theologies," the plural, is used in the inclusive sense to distinguish between different types of African theology (inculturation theology, liberation theology, and black theology) as well as to indicate differences in the cultural backgrounds of each of these theologies or the different approaches to them. In this context a theologian refers to his own theology as "an African theology" in much the same way that we talk of Thomistic theology or Augustinian theology. Thus one may talk of an African inculturation theology and an African liberation theology. Theologians writing from the same background and whose works follow a particular trend might be said to belong to one school of African theology in much the same way as we talk of the Alexandrian school of theology, etc. Thus the expressions "African theology" and "African theologies" are valid depending on the context.

¹¹ Cf. Bernard Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) xi.

¹² Cf. E. A. Ruch, "Is There an African Philosophy?" in *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*, ed. E. A. Ruch and K. C. Anyanwu, (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1981) 17.

Since every theology is culturally conditioned, the question as to who is competent to do African theology is seen to be pertinent. Another consideration that makes this question pertinent is the fact that, more than other sciences, theology cannot be approached with cold objectivity. A theologian must be fully involved in his enterprise, and this implies involvement in Christianity and in the African situation. Thus, to be competent to do this theology, besides being a Christian, one must be well informed about the African sociocultural situation. This applies equally to the African and to the expatriate theologian. One does not, therefore, become qualified to do this theology simply because he is African, for there are many Africans who have not only lost touch with their culture but have not studied it scientifically. Nor is one automatically excluded for being expatriate, for some expatriates have studied African culture and can become "marginal" Africans.

The relationship between philosophy and theology must be seen in the light of the changing function of theology. It is true that what we now know as Western theology developed from the application of the Greek philosophical system to explain Christian doctrine. There is no question that we owe to that process the clarifications made by the early councils. But theology is today less concerned with clarifying doctrines and more concerned with promoting Christian living through better ways of presenting Christian doctrine.¹³ African theology is, therefore, not concerned with clarifying doctrines but with helping the African faithful to live Christianity, and making the gospel message and Christian doctrines meaningful to their life situation. It is concerned, therefore, with presenting the Christian message in a particular context rather than clarifying it generally. And this is not just catechesis but the theoretical basis for catechesis.

It must immediately be added, however, that denying the need for a philosophical system as *ancilla theologiae* does not mean denying the need for epistemology and metaphysics, for all theologizing is based on certain epistemological and metaphysical assumptions. Thus the African theologian would do well to make explicit his epistemological and metaphysical assumptions before presenting his theology.¹⁴

With regard to the universality of African theology, all theologies are culturally conditioned. But this is not to say that theologies have no universal applicability. Here there is need to beware, on the one hand, of the classicist position which made one culture the universal culture and denied the title of culture to the way of life of other peoples, and on the

¹³ Cf. Geffre, *A New Age* 31.

¹⁴ A few African theologians, e.g., Charles Nyamiti and V. Mulago, do explain their methodological assumptions, but many do not.

other, of the positivist position which sees no interrelationship in cultures. All cultures have both universal and particular elements. That is why cultures are both open and closed systems, and this is what permits cultural interaction and cultural borrowing.

The problem with traditional Christian theology's claim to universality does not, then, lie with the claim itself but with the understanding of culture that lies behind the claim. It is a claim enunciated within the framework of the classicist understanding of culture, whereby only one culture was recognized and hence only one way of doing theology was thought to be valid. In that monolithic frame of reference, theologies elaborated in other cultural contexts could be neither valid nor universal. But within the framework of the modern pluralistic understanding of culture, to say that a theology is universal does not contradict the fact that it is also culturally bound. Conversely, to say that all theologies are culturally conditioned is not to deny their universal applicability. It means that a theology, though culturally conditioned, is capable of being universally understood, can influence other cultures and theologies, and is open to being influenced by them. In this respect African theology, not being a closed but an open system, is capable of entering into dialogue with other cultures and theologies, and of being understood universally. It is, in other words, a universal theology.

Content

In terms of *materials* that can be pointed to as constituting the corpus of this theology, we take the concept of African theology in a very wide sense. This ranges from John Mbiti's understanding of African theology as any theological reflection by an African Christian (doing so, of course, from his cultural point of view) to Charles Nyamiti's understanding of it as explanation of doctrine with the use of African philosophical arguments. African theology may, therefore, be found, as Mbiti points out, in oral form (sermons, teachings, etc.), in symbolic form (arts, drama, etc.), and as written theology.

In the area of written theology I include the following materials: (i) *Bible translations into African languages and African Bible commentaries*. These belong to African theology in the sense that biblical translations and commentaries take certain theological viewpoints and are done within a certain cultural context. These must, however, be seen as prolegomena to African biblical theology, and they should provide needed biblical material for the other branches of African theology. (ii) *Comparative study of African and biblical religions*. Such studies belong to substantive African theology at least in the sense of African fundamental theology, for they often point out the way of integration of the concepts

of both religious systems. Many such studies abound and they are continually being produced, particularly as university dissertations. (iii) *Presentation of the Christian message in terms of African cultural background.* This is substantive African theology. So far as can be discerned in the writings of theologians, this generally takes the form of Christian reflection on the traditional religion and culture for Protestants, while among Catholics it takes the form of a presentation of Christian concepts in African categories by the use of African thought-processes.

In terms of *concerns* addressed, two may be identified: pastoral and biblical. (i) *Pastoral.* This is concerned with all matters relating to the religious life of the Christian community and the ordering and promotion of Christianity within the religious context. It has to do with religious knowledge, which involves elements normally found in systematics and catechetics, as well as religious practice, which involves elements of morals/ethics, pastoral strictly speaking, and liturgy. Thus the term "pastoral" is used here in a very wide sense. (ii) *Biblical.* This is concerned with relating the Bible to the African cultural milieu. Even though this addresses a concern that has to do with the religious life of the Christian community, it is not included under pastoral because biblical theology is recognized as requiring a methodology of its own.

African inculturation theology as it has developed today (in the Catholic Church at least) cannot be understood outside the context of the phenomenon that may generically be referred to as "indigenization." Basically, indigenization supposes the encounter between Western forms of Christian expression and indigenous forms of expression, and expresses the idea that in this encounter the Christian message attains expression in indigenous forms and idiom. Attempt at indigenization started with the early missionaries. In most cases this was superficial, owing to a lack of sufficient knowledge of the local culture. In other cases attempt at serious indigenization did not meet with widespread success, as people did not seem prepared for it.¹⁵

Two *approaches* to indigenization may be discerned: a moderate one expressed by the term "adaptation" and a radical one expressed by the term "inculturation."

Adaptation (Moderate) Approach. (Other terms that refer to this approach are "accommodation" and "Christianization.") This approach is characterized by processes involving adjustments introduced into a given dominant pattern, structure, or format, the structure itself not being touched. Examples of this in the liturgy include the translation of texts

¹⁵ The efforts of Placide Tempels, O.F.M., at inculturation in the 1930's in the Congo were certainly serious. One reason why it did not spread all through Africa is that the minds of the faithful were not sufficiently prepared for it that time as they are today.

into the vernacular, and introduction of indigenous symbols into sacramental rites without the format of the rite being changed.

In terms of African theology, the theologian who follows this approach seems to feel obliged to use more or less strictly the format and procedure of Western theology. This is revealed in his general approach, the way he organizes his themes, and his methodology. Thus the Catholic theologian in doing African theology thinks primarily of applying African philosophical principles to present Christian doctrine. The themes chosen for discussion and the way they are organized and presented follow the pattern of Western theology and reflect, with modifications, the way traditional Western theological manuals are organized. The Protestant in doing African theology also organizes his material according to the pattern of Western theological manuals and thinks in terms of expressing biblical concepts in African thought. Thus the difference between Western theology and African theology occurs only with regard to the elements within the theological format, which itself remains untouched. The general orientation is towards presenting the Christian message for better understanding and knowledge. The premise is that within African culture conceptual models can be found through which the Christian message can be presented. One task of the theologian then is to identify these models through a "rigorous criticism" of African culture. There is, therefore, a preoccupation with identification of themes in African culture, themes appropriate for transmitting the Christian message. But since the Christian message as we have it today is already embedded in Western cultural expression, another task of the theologian is to identify the "kernel" of the message as it exists in Christianity today. He must distinguish essential Christianity from its cultural expression. Thus the theologian views his work as that of "translating" the Christian message from its Western cultural setting into African cultural setting. This leads him to focus largely on the beliefs and principles of Christianity.

This approach, which is the mold in which most of African theology today is set, seems to assume the Western format for theology as normative. Its concept of Christianity is based on a theology of revelation that emphasizes the disclosure of doctrine; hence there is great concern to identify the kernel of the message. With this theology of revelation, the assumed attitude to African traditional religion and culture is mistrust; hence the need for rigorous criticism of elements and themes taken from it for the transmission of the message.

Inculturation (Radical) Approach: (Other terms that designate this approach are "incarnation" and "Africanization.") This approach is a significant departure from the above. It aims at structural changes. It reviews the received structure and rearranges it to suit the structure of

the indigenous pattern of expression. A typical example in the liturgy is the Zaïre Mass, whose format is different from the traditional one with the following prominent features. At the beginning of the Mass there is a long litany invoking the ancestors; the penitential rite comes after the homily, followed by aspersion and kiss of peace; the Eucharistic prayers are composed according to African prayer pattern; there is much interpolation, singing, dancing, drumming, and bodily gesture all through the Mass.

In terms of African theology, this approach is characterized by its ability to be creative and pose new questions, and by its general departure from the format of Western theology. This departure is the result of two significant factors: a return to the original sources of Christian expression, i.e., the Bible and tradition, and a total opening out to the whole of African traditional religion and culture as opposed to mere selection of themes from them. A return to Scripture and tradition affords theologians of this approach the chance to recapture the spirit and the faith of early Christianity and to see how these guided the development of Christian reflection down the ages. Its influence, therefore, is not from Western theological methodology only, but from theological methodologies available down the Christian ages. It looks to African traditional religion for insights as to the sense of direction and pattern in theologizing. Thus, since African traditional religion is a way of life and not a collection of doctrines, African theology in this approach becomes a life-oriented as opposed to knowledge-oriented theology. There is less emphasis on systematization and hence less emphasis on the use of African philosophical system to present Christian doctrine. This is not to say, however, that this approach is necessarily nonmetaphysical, but it does say that there is no preoccupation with a systematic use of philosophy.

In this approach the theologian's task consists in rethinking and re-expressing the Christian message in terms of the African cultural milieu. The task basically involves confronting the Christian faith and African culture so that faith enlightens culture, and in the process there results the interpenetration and integration of both. The basic data of revelation as contained in Scripture and tradition are critically reflected upon for the purpose of giving them African cultural expression. From this is born a new theological reflection that is African and Christian.

Different theologians view this approach from different angles. For Professor Mushete the focus is on

the members of the African Community who have heard and accepted the Christian message and who are now trying to proclaim and live it out in their own cultural milieu. Gradually this milieu is purified and superseded through a

life of faith exercised with full freedom. This paves the way for a new and perhaps unforeseen incarnation of the Gospel message.¹⁶

This is the grassroots method. The problem it raises, however, is how to help the people at the grassroots to give expression to their experience of faith and life, how to help them attain the freedom necessary for this self-expression; for if they do not possess such freedom, they cannot live out the faith in terms of their cultural milieu. Needed to balance it, therefore, is another method which seeks to reflect upon the data of revelation and reinterpret them in the light of the cultural milieu. Both methods need one another for effective and incarnational theology.

The difference between the adaptation approach and the inculturation approach lies in this: as a finished product, the former retains the pattern of Western theology, while the latter does not, being influenced by African traditional religion as to format, design, and organization of themes. In terms of method, the difference lies in this: while the former goes to the Bible and tradition for the kernel or essence of pure Christianity, the latter looks to these to recover the spirit of Christianity and the Christian faith. And while the methodology of the former may be referred to as "translating" Christianity, that of the latter may be described as giving birth to or sowing the seeds of Christianity.

Profile of Selected Authors and Their Works

The works of a few authors are here discussed and identified with one or other of the above approaches.

Placide Tempels, a Belgian Franciscan missionary in the Congo (now present Zaïre) in the 1930's, was the champion in all Africa of what is today known as African theology. In English-speaking Africa he is best known for his *Bantu Philosophy*,¹⁷ probably his only work translated into English. But what is often not known is that he wrote *Bantu Philosophy* as his "handmaid" of African theology. In this book he lays down many ideas that he takes up in his catechetical and pastoral reflections. For him, African theology meant the application of African philosophy to present Christian doctrine. Since no written African philosophy was in existence, he set out to construct one. He identified the Greek philosophical concept of "being" with the Bantu concept of "vital force," and built upon this an African ontology which he applied in his catechesis. He can

¹⁶ "History of Theology in Africa" in *African Theology en Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) 27.

¹⁷ Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959 (first published in French, 1945). A collection of many of his writings is published in *Notre rencontre* (Leopoldville: Centre d'Etudes Pastorales, 1962).

be said to have pioneered the tradition of the adaptation approach to African theology.

V. Mulago of Kinshasa Catholic Theological Faculty and some other French-speaking theologians follow in the tradition set by Tempels and use the adaptation approach. Mulago has written extensively on African theology. In *Un visage africain du christianisme*,¹⁸ his major work, he proposes that for effective evangelization we must first understand the people's culture and philosophy. From these, comparable elements are derived through which the gospel message is "engraved" on the souls of the people.

Charles Nyamiti, a Catholic priest from Tanzania, has attempted to give a systematic approach to this theology. He defines African theology as "neither a new religious doctrine, nor a sort of syncretism between Christian teaching and African religious beliefs, but the very self-same Catholic doctrine expressed and presented in accordance with African mentality and needs."¹⁹ Basically, his method consists in using African philosophy to present Christian doctrine, but since no system of African philosophy exists, he proposes ways of arriving at philosophical methodologies to be used in African theological discourse.²⁰ He follows the adaptation approach.

John S. Mbiti, a Protestant theologian from Kenya and director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Bossey, is easily the most outstanding among Protestant theologians in the field of African theology. His theological writings cover both the pastoral and the biblical branches. Working within the Protestant tradition, for which theology means basically a reflection on Scripture, Mbiti in *African Concepts of God*, e.g., does not go into philosophical arguments in his theology but makes a rather direct confrontation of Christian concepts with African concepts of God and shows how the one is verified in the other.²¹ His work falls between the two approaches; for while his method is radical, his format is rather traditional.

E. B. Idowu is at present the Nigerian Methodist primate. In *Olodumare*, one of his major works, he shows Yoruba belief in God as parallel to Christian belief, and in an extensive way investigates the people's history, their songs, proverbs, myths, symbols, etc., to bring out the Yoruba conception of God.²² His works fall between the two approaches.

¹⁸ Paris: Présence Africaine, 1965.

¹⁹ *The Way to Christian Theology for Africa* 1.

²⁰ See *ibid.* 7-11.

²¹ London: SPCK, 1970. His other works include *African Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor, 1970) and *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: SPCK, 1975).

²² London: Longman Group, 1962. His other works include *Towards an Indigenous*

Bishop Tshishiku Tshibangu is the rector of the National University of Zaïre, Kinshasa. He employs the radical approach to African theology. In his *Théologie positive et théologie spéculative: Position traditionnelle et nouvelle problématique*²³ he tries to go back to the history of theological method with a view to gaining insights for a methodology in African theology. In *La théologie comme science au XXème siècle*²⁴ he examines possibilities of new methodologies for relating theology to the human person and society so as to assist the people to understand revelation in their own way.²⁵

Ngindu Mushete is of the Catholic Theological Faculty, Kinshasa, Zaïre. Like those of Tshibangu, his works reflect the radical approach to African theology. In his *Le problème de la connaissance religieuse d'après L. Laberthonnière*²⁶ he studies the theological methodology of Laberthonnière, who faced more or less the same problem that faces us today: how to relate theology to culture.²⁷

John S. Pobee is a Protestant theologian in the University of Ghana, Legon. In his *Toward an African Theology* he defines its task as that of "translating" Christianity into authentic African categories.²⁸ He insists, like Nyamiti, on the need to identify the kernel of the Christian message and offers "the cross" as an example of such kernel.²⁹ His work takes the adaptation approach.

Aylward Shorter, W.F., a Catholic missionary priest in East Africa, is, with Nyamiti, among the most outstanding English-speaking Catholic theologians in the field of African theology. He has made a major contribution towards defining a methodology for African theology.³⁰ He adopts the radical approach.

Douglas Makhathini is a Lutheran theologian from South Africa. For him, this theology is a biblical reflection expressed in African categories. Thus, unlike his colleagues who do black theology in South Africa, he does not borrow from Western theology, but rather emphasizes elements of the indigenous religion. This theology is not as popular in South Africa

Church (Oxford: OUP, 1965) and *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Oxford: OUP, 1973).

²³ Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1965.

²⁴ Kinshasa: Presses Universitaires du Zaïre, 1980.

²⁵ His other publications include *Le propos d'une théologie africaine* (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa, 1974).

²⁶ Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa, 1978.

²⁷ His other publications include *La théologie in Afrique d'hier et aujourd'hui* (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa, 1977).

²⁸ Nashville: Abingdon, 1979; see 9, 17-18.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 18.

³⁰ Some of his major works include *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation* (London: Chapman, 1975) and *African Christian Spirituality* (London: Chapman, 1978).

as is black theology. Manas Buthelezi, a leading protagonist of black theology in South Africa, attacks it for not dealing with the dehumanization of the black man in its program.

Another leading proponent of this theology in South Africa is Gabriel Setiloane.³¹

Evaluation

My framework, purpose, and scope impose on me an evaluation that is general rather than detailed and specific. I shall first assess this theology as a whole in terms of its aim, and then assess the methodology of African theologians in a general way.

The main goal of African theology is to make Christianity attain African expression, thus creating an atmosphere where Christianity may come to be regarded and accepted as part and parcel of the people's way of life. That such integration is necessary for the future success of Christianity in Africa can hardly be argued. Already there exists a gap between the people's way of life and some of the Christian principles they have been taught. This is mainly because Christianity has been presented to them as a set of principles and not as a way of life; for, to become a way of life for Africans, Christianity must be made relevant to and expressive of the way they live and think. African theology attempts to consciously influence the people's thinking and way of living. It sets out to accomplish this through a judicious integration of African perspectives with Christian teaching. In the measure that it is successful in such integration, African theology will become at one and the same time a symbol and a means of bridging the gap between Christian principles and the African's way of life. In its general context and aim, therefore, African theology is seen to fulfil a felt need.

With regard to the works produced, it is to be observed that many authors do not make explicit those metaphysical, epistemological, and anthropological assumptions that lie behind these theologies. This seems to be a general weakness in new theological ventures. But the virtue of autocriticism seems to call for it, at least for the purpose of ensuring the relevance of the venture. Thus the theologian should show to what extent the methodology employed is compatible with the African's view of reality and process of knowledge or on what anthropological grounds one justifies the approach taken.

Inculturation is a complex issue: it raises the question of faith, revelation, and religion (African and Christian). In the process of building an African inculturation theology, all these realities are involved. For the

³¹ See David J. Bosch, "Currents and Cross Currents in South African Black Theology," *Journal of Religion in Africa (JRA)* 6 (1974) 6-9.

purpose of clarity, it seems necessary to present the theologian's understanding of the relationship between these realities. Such an exercise will not only help the reader in understanding and following the theological exposition; it will clarify for the theologian himself the direction and demands of his task. John S. Pobee is an example of an author who pays attention to this point, but many others do not. Pobee further identifies the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* as his approach to the study of African religion.

African theologians still seem to be searching for a viable approach to the study of African traditional religion and culture for the purpose of their theological elaboration. Some, like Pobee, adopt the particularist approach and intend their theology for a particular ethnic group, though hoping also that it might be applicable to other groups. Others, like John Mbiti, adopt the comparative approach and intend their study to have universal application for the whole of Africa.³² While the particularist approach has the advantage of avoiding generalizations not well supported by experience (the major weakness of the comparative approach), it tends to give the theologian's work an unfinished look. When, e.g., Pobee says he hopes his theology will be applicable to other ethnic groups, one feels that his task is unfinished. According to this approach, there will be as many African theologies as there are ethnic groups in Africa, without any of the theologians attempting to relate his own theology to another ethnic group—a situation that hardly seems desirable. Aylward Shorter has suggested a multidimensional approach, and Newells Booth has suggested what for brevity may be called the “fish-eye-view approach”³³ (that of consciously and explicitly studying other religions from the vantage point of one's own), both of which seem to provide for the weaknesses of the particularist and comparative approaches.

Finally, Catholic authors in particular must be reminded of the need to have their works grounded on a solid biblical foundation.

SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK THEOLOGY

Background

Black theology came into Africa from the United States of America and thrives only in South Africa, where the blacks are engaged in a social struggle similar to that faced by the blacks in the U.S., a struggle that occasioned the rise of black theology there.

³² For an explanation of “particularist” and “comparative” approaches, see Shorter, *African Christian Theology* 39–41, 51–53.

³³ See *African Religions: A Symposium* 3–6.

By the strange logic of apartheid, whereby nonwhites are discriminated against, it has become permissible in South Africa for four million whites to rule and control the destiny of twenty million nonwhites in that country; for in South Africa active involvement in politics is not permitted to the large majority of nonwhites. By the same logic, too, Africans may not interact socially with Europeans: they may not sit in the same bus or the same church, or walk along the same path, or live in the same vicinity with Europeans. Opportunities for good education and for social and economic advancement are denied the blacks.

One finds it legitimate that the blacks in South Africa should question the quality of Christianity practiced by their white oppressors, since apartheid represents a blatant contradiction to the law of love, the cardinal principle of Christianity. Besides, Christianity in general does not seem to be rising to the challenge posed by such a contradiction. Traditional Christian theology has been insensitive to such a vital issue. What the black theologians are doing is a reaction to the lethargy of traditional theology, an effort to respond in a Christian way to the situation.

Content

The first major breakthrough came in 1971, when a seminar on black theology was held at Rodespoort and James Cone's ideas were discussed. This was followed by other seminars in the same year; Cone remained the dominant influence until later, when this theology began to take on its own characteristics. Basil Moore, a white theologian who was at the time leader of the multiracial University Christian Movement (UCM), played a leading role in the introduction of this theology into South Africa. He found in the UCM a ready forum for discussing this theology. Today, however, on account of its specifically racial character, this theology finds authentic expression only in the exclusively black South African Students Organization (SASO) and is popular among theologians of the younger generation. Among its leading exponents are Manas Buthelezi, Steve Biko, and Adam Small.³⁴

Black theology starts by appealing to black consciousness and black identity as the way to a rediscovery of the downtrodden humanity of the black man. In developing this theme, the African philosophy of "negritude" is combined with the militancy of American black theology. The aim is the conscientization of the blacks to a positive re-evaluation of their black existence. Up till now they have been taught to despise their blackness, to equate what is "white" with what is valuable, to strive after "white" ideals, and to interpret themselves in terms defined by the whites.

³⁴ Cf. Bosch, "South African Black Theology" 5-6.

But now the black man must recover his "somebodiness" and appreciate his blackness—a thing he cannot change. He must no longer look to the white man for his self-definition.

The recovery of black consciousness is a necessary and logical step towards black theology, for without such consciousness the black man is not able to reflect realistically on his situation or arrive at the full gospel message. From appeal to black consciousness black theologians go on to reflect on the Christian message in the light of the life experience of the blacks.

In terms of methodology, since the Bible must have meaning for the black man—a humanity in need of liberation—liberation themes in the Bible are sought out and interpreted in the light of the black man's experience. The most cherished theme in the OT is the Exodus. Black theology sees Jesus as a liberating God fighting on the side of the oppressed, and the content of the Christian gospel as liberation, based on the redemption. Black theology eschews the spiritualizing concept of redemption, whereby Christ is conceived as having died to save souls. It rather understands redemption as embracing the whole person in his/her social, spiritual, economic, and political situation. Man and woman are, therefore, put in a position to appropriate this redemption for themselves and overcome their "alienation from the wholeness of life." To preach the gospel faithfully, therefore, the Church must join in this liberating march, and ministers of the Word of God must seek out ways of explaining this liberating activity of God in the world.³⁵

Black theology is concerned with the liberation not only of people but also of the gospel. The gospel must be liberated to be able to speak to the whites on the blacks' situation; for if the whites are Christians and do read the gospel, what do they make of the commandment of love of neighbor?³⁶

Black theology appears to have a good understanding of the implications of Christian love. Ernest Baartman, e.g., states that though it is difficult "to love the white man," the black must; for we cannot afford to hate our fellow human.³⁷ For Manas Buthelezi, Christian love is what makes the gospel unique. If whites hate blacks, blacks must not hate whites in return if they want to be Christians.³⁸

Within the context of Christian love, black theology is very concerned about the integrity of the Christian Church. Apartheid is a negation

³⁵ Cf. Hubert Buckler, "Black Theology in South Africa," *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 29 (1973) 194; also Allan Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa" in *African Theology en Route* 173-74.

³⁶ Cf. Bosch, "South African Black Theology" 16.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 16-17.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

within the Christian fold (since the whites are also Christians) of the cardinal principle of Christianity, love of neighbor. Christianity is one all over the world: we are bound together by the same baptism and by the same belief in God the Father of Jesus Christ. The Christian Church in South Africa must, therefore, not be viewed in isolation. What goes on in the Christian fold in South Africa should impinge upon the universal Christian conscience. Christians, whether in South Africa or outside it, should be concerned to set the gospel free to bear witness to the situation.³⁹

Black theology is an ecumenical venture within the historical churches involving both clergy and laity. It challenges all black Christians to rise above denominational differences and to realize their common identity. Christianity is one, and denominational barriers must give way to unity in the spirit of the gospel.⁴⁰

Black theologians do not pretend to create a universal theology. They admit that their theology is situational and hermeneutical. It is based on the experience of their present situation, such that if this situation changed drastically, black theology in its present form would lose its validity. Thus it is not meant to be a perennial but a functional and relevant theology. It is meant to influence and change people's consciousness and to be proclaimed and experienced.⁴¹

Evaluation

In their attempt to reinterpret Christianity in the light of their situation, black theologians sometimes fall into oversimplifications and overemphases. Mogkethi Motlhabi, e.g., calls for a rejection of the "master images" of God and for an exploration of those images that speak of the suffering God.⁴² It must be counterstated here that while other images of God may be researched, those "master images" remain valid. The solution is not to reject them but to emphasize a more relevant image.

To the credit of black theologians, there is self-criticism within the ranks; for while Adam Small, e.g., absolves blacks from not loving whites, Baartman and Buthelezi demand such love as the mark of a Christian.⁴³ Many of them, too, warn against a situation whereby the oppressed of today become the oppressors of tomorrow.⁴⁴

³⁹ Cf. Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa" 174.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.* 17.

⁴¹ Cf. D. Makhathini, "Black Theology" in *Relevant Theology for Africa* 12; also Bosch, "South African Black Theology" 18.

⁴² "Black Theology and Authority" in *Essays on Black Theology* 96.

⁴³ See Bucher, "Black Theology in South Africa" 197.

⁴⁴ Cf. Bosch, "South African Black Theology" 20.

AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Background

The term "liberation" belongs in the context of socioeconomic development. It was first used in this context in Latin America around 1965 in preference to the term "development," to designate a structural and radical approach to socioeconomic development.⁴⁶ In the 1960's, underdevelopment came to be seen as a structural rather than a functional phenomenon, and this led to the search for a structural approach to socioeconomic development. In Latin America the new approach took the form of the liberation movement, from which background arose the Latin American liberation theology as a reflection on the gospel and the great Christian themes within the perspective of the liberation process.⁴⁶

The expression "liberation theology" came into Africa from Latin America and did not become popular in Africa until about a decade ago. That popularity was boosted by the holding of the first conference of Third World theologians in Tanzania in 1976, at which Latin American theologians played a major role. The poor socioeconomic conditions in Africa have led Africans to the search for this theology, which is committed to the cause of the poor in their struggle for a better humanity and a better society.

Africa is a land of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, starvation, and disease. Most of its teeming populations are agrarian and live at bare subsistence level. It is a land of unemployment and overcrowding in the cities. Like other Third World countries, Africa suffers from the political domination of the superpowers. This situation has made the message of liberation theology very pertinent in Africa.

Content

In so far as liberation theology is a reflection on an approach to socioeconomic development that emphasizes structural changes, it is possible to talk of three currents of liberation theology in Africa: the African indigenous type that bases itself on an African socialist system, the Latin American type, and a combination of the two.

Indigenous approach. In Africa today an attempt is being made to create an indigenous theology of development. In John Mutiso Mbinda's article "Towards a Theology of Harambee"⁴⁷ we have an example of this.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM, 1974) 25-27; Hugo Assmann, *Practical Theology of Liberation* (London: Search, 1975) 45.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* ix; Assmann, *Practical Theology of Liberation* 3.

⁴⁷ *AFER* 20 (1978) 287-95.

Mbinda is a Catholic priest from Kenya who at the time he wrote the article was teaching at the Gaba Pastoral Institute there. Harambee is a Swahili word meaning "to pull together." It is a catchword used in the context of communal labor to encourage people to work together. It expresses basically the idea of co-operation. In Kenya the word is used in a sociopolitical context to give the people a national ideology of co-operation. By the Harambee ideology, Kenyans are "pulled" together for development work. In the words of Mbinda, Harambee has become "a national cry for unity, co-operation, development and nation building . . . the driving force behind all our nation-building activities."⁴⁸ This ideology, Mbinda maintains, has a religious dimension and can form the basis for a relevant African theology with ecumenical emphasis.⁴⁹ We see in the Harambee ideology a steppingstone to an indigenous approach to liberation theology.

Another example of an attempt to develop an indigenous theology of liberation is to be found in Camilus Lymo's article "Quest for Relevant African Theology: Towards An Ujamaa Theology."⁵⁰ Lymo was a theological student from Tanzania when he wrote the article. Ujamaa in Swahili means "relationship," "brotherhood." In Tanzania this word is used in a sociopolitical context to mean working together as a family. It is used to designate the pattern of socioeconomic and political system in the country. President Julius Nyerere, in the Arusha Declaration following Tanzania's independence, introduced an economic and political system of socialism patterned after the African traditional system. Ujamaa villages were formed, where people live and work in community after the manner of the traditional extended-family system. A one-party system of government is had, in which the president governs with a council of ministers. "Sharing" is a key concept in Ujamaa, which is more an attitude, a way of life, than anything else.⁵¹

Basically Ujamaa is an endogenous system of socioeconomic development and of government. It is based on the African ideals of community and co-operation and is geared to the liberation of man and woman from hunger, poverty, and disease, and from the oppressive tendencies of capitalism and communism. It emphasizes and encourages participation at the grassroots in decision-making and in the execution of projects. Within this system are to be observed the processes of a structural approach to development. Emphasis is not just on the economic but also on the social aspect of development. A Christian reflection on this

⁴⁸ Ibid. 290.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 292-94.

⁵⁰ *AFER* 18 (1976) 134-44.

⁵¹ Ibid. 137.

indigenous system in the light of the gospel would make for a truly indigenous theology of liberation.

Latin American approach. Two African theologians, Chukwudum B. Okolo and Zablon Nthamburi, are among the most outspoken of those liberationists who follow the Latin American model. Okolo is a Catholic priest from Nigeria lecturing in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Nthamburi is a Methodist minister from Kenya based in Nairobi. Both apply the basic elements and processes of this theology to the African situation. For them, the African situation to which the liberation ideology is applied extends beyond mere class struggle, which is the main focus of the Latin American liberation movement. It involves the race issue in South Africa. It involves poverty, hunger, starvation, ignorance, and disease found all over Africa. It involves neocolonialism in economic and political spheres in the form of economic control of Africa by transnational corporations and political domination by the superpowers. It involves cultural imperialism, whereby through colonialism the white man's culture has tended to supplant the indigenous African culture to the detriment of the African's personality. It involves imperialism in church structures and even theology.⁵² Following the basic process of Latin American liberation theology, both theologians make the above existential situation the point of departure for their theology. Thus theology must be involved in the effort to create a better society. It must take as its main concern the articulation of the concern of suffering Africans and must be a critical reflection on the concrete African situation.⁵³ These authors do not see much difference between the focus of Cone's American black theology and Latin American liberation theology. Both theologies are, and rightly so, liberation theologies. Cone, however, is not accepted without criticism. Unlike black theology, which in Cone's conception is meant for blacks alone, "African theology," writes Nthamburi, "is not meant exclusively for the African peoples."⁵⁴ Liberation, for these authors, means, as in Latin America, a break with the *status quo*, a search for a new order.⁵⁵ Christianity is seen as bearing the message of hope for the poor and the oppressed. The resurrection of Christ is seen as "a radical liberation from every form of oppression. By death and resurrection, he redeems us from social, economic and political realities

⁵² Cf. Chukwudum B. Okolo, *The African Church and Signs of the Times: A Socio-Political Analysis* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba, 1978) 53, and Zablon Nthamburi, "African Theology as a Theology of Liberation," *AFER* 22 (1980) 233.

⁵³ Cf. Chukwudum B. Okolo, "Diminished Man and Theology: A Third World Perspective," *AFER* 18 (1976) 81; Nthamburi, "African Theology as a Theology of Liberation" 232.

⁵⁴ Cf. Nthamburi, "African Theology as a Theology of Liberation" 237.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 233.

that deny justice and brotherhood which all humanity seeks."⁵⁶

In terms of methodology, while Okolo takes after Gutiérrez, Nthamburi follows the pattern of Segundo. Basically, Okolo uses Marxist analysis in the elaboration of his theology. Thus he devotes a monograph to a comparative study of Marxist and Christian ethics, and brings out particularly Marxist humanistic ideals which make it attractive to the Third World, while disagreeing with Marxist rejection of religion.⁵⁷ Unlike Okolo, Nthamburi reflects directly on the situation in the light of the Bible. He identifies the poverty, humiliation, and sufferings of Jesus with those of Africans today, and justifies liberation theology's solidarity with the poor from the OT and NT.⁵⁸ Both theologians have an ecumenical perspective.

Combined approach. The approach to African liberation theology that combines the indigenous and the Latin American orientations is typified in Laurenti Magesa's approach. Magesa is a Catholic priest teaching in Kipalapala Major Seminary in Tanzania. He takes Latin American liberation theology as a paradigm, but only with regard to the issues treated and the basic processes involved. He uses African socialist principles to analyze the African situation in the light of the Bible and follows the processes of Latin American theology. Unlike Okolo and Nthamburi, Magesa does not focus on the race issue. But apart from this, he broaches the same African issues as the others do. He rejects capitalism and European socialism/communism as being institution-oriented and against the spirit of African socialism, which is person-oriented. He asserts that African socialism has a "redemptive" value. Intrinsically different from capitalism and Marxist forms of economic activity, economic activity in African socialism has man and all men as its final aim.⁵⁹ The person is not regarded or used as a means to an end. Rather, true African socialism recognizes each person's inalienable right to use the goods of this world as is necessary for the sustenance of life. Not that there is no right to private property; rather, acquisitiveness is not given free rein, must be exercised within the context of one's needs and the needs of others. He warns against absolutizing African socialism and "making an idol of the new situation":

African socialism is not an end in itself: it is not the kingdom. Well pursued, it is at best an excellent way towards the partial realization of the kingdom of God here on earth. Everything here considered, our efforts here always remain

⁵⁶ Ibid. 283.

⁵⁷ *Marxian and Christian Ethics* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba, n.d.) esp. 14-18; also "Diminished Man and Theology" 85, 87.

⁵⁸ "African Theology as a Theology of Liberation" 281-82.

⁵⁹ *The Church and Liberation in Africa* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba, 1976) 21.

something like groping in the dark, a painful journey through the desert towards the promised land.⁶⁰

He goes to the Church Fathers and the magisterium (particularly *Populorum progressio*) for justification of the principles of African socialism.⁶¹ He establishes the need for liberation (which implies ushering in a new structure) from the Bible and Christian ethics. The human person was created in the image of God but cannot realize this image if dehumanized. Therefore, man and woman have the responsibility of emancipating themselves from such a situation.⁶²

Magesa has a biblical orientation and goes to the Bible for an understanding of liberation. His approach to the Bible is, however, reductionist. For example, the story of the cure of the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12; Mt 9: 1-8; Lk 5:17-26) is, for him, the model for understanding the history of salvation; it is "a dramatization of the process of liberation."⁶³ Like the other liberationists, he calls for a break with the *status quo* so as to afford the people the chance to realize themselves "in time and history." He advocates a moratorium on "financial assistance; personnel; liturgical and prayer books; theological treatises; orders and directions from abroad—everything."⁶⁴ For Magesa, liberation is synonymous with freedom, and it is not just an element of the Christian message but the framework within which the Christian message is set.⁶⁵

Evaluation

In terms of goals and aspirations, liberation theology certainly shows up as an expression of Christian concern for poverty and oppression, and of Christian commitment to and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. It is built upon a dynamic conception of salvation, a theology in which man in relation to his ultimate end is seen in his entirety and not merely in terms of his soul. Within such a perspective, social liberation is viewed as part and parcel of eschatological liberation.

The presence of three different directions in the expression of this theology shows that African theologians are not yet agreed on exactly where to ground their theology of liberation. This is quite understandable, as this theology came in from outside and is hardly ten years old now. It would hardly be to the credit of African theologians to copy exactly from Latin America; for this is a situational theology, and though the situation

⁶⁰ Ibid. 26-27.

⁶¹ Ibid. 25-26.

⁶² See his "The Ethics of Liberation," *AFER* 22 (1980) 106, 108.

⁶³ *The Church and Liberation in Africa* 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 22, 23, 30.

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.* 2-3, 22.

in Africa agrees in broad outlines with that in Latin America, in details there are enormous differences. Thus even those African liberationists who follow the Latin American model have brought in much of African insight. But it does seem that the basic pattern followed by Magesa may provide the contours of a viable African liberation theology of the future.

African liberation theology ought to be grounded in African socioethical analysis, on Christian theological tradition, and on Scripture. Tanzania provides an excellent take-off point for the analysis of the processes of African liberation revolution. I note here that this revolution is nonviolent, is indigenous, is Christian, and starts with grassroots involvement. I have the impression that some African liberationists do not take sufficient account of these elements. When, e.g., Magesa advocates a moratorium on everything, including finance and personnel, one wonders to what extent this reflects grassroots aspirations. Besides, at first sight such a suggestion may seem desirable, but on close examination, apart from the fact that no constructive alternative is given, one discovers that the suggestion does not touch the structure within which we operate.⁶⁶ It is not the financial assistance we get from abroad that makes Africa poor, but the structure within which this money is given and used. It is not the personnel we get from abroad that obstruct the course of inculturation of the Church in Africa, but rather the church structure in which we exist. Viable proposals must be directed towards structural change, and if that is achieved, we will not need to talk of moratorium. Okolo does talk of the need to change the Church's structure in Africa, but concrete proposals are not proffered. Even if such proposals would eventually end up only in the pages of journals, they would have served a purpose and could represent the first phase in conscientization. Here it must be emphasized that the process of social liberation is not an elitist thing. Liberationists must, therefore, look for ways of involving the grassroots. So far, it would seem that their contribution is confined to the middle class: university lecturers and students and those who can afford to read theological journals.

Finally, liberation theology must take into account the contribution of the theology of development, which is still alive in Africa. One would hope to see a gradual merging of the two.

INTERRELATIONSHIP OF AFRICAN THEOLOGIES

That the above three theologies are different on the basis of the issues they treat seems clear enough from the foregoing discussion. But they

⁶⁶ This is not to deny that there may be individual missionaries who are "bad eggs," but rather to disagree with the idea that the presence of such warrants a blanket condemnation of all missionaries. Are we to assume that there may be no "bad eggs" among the indigenous clergy?

are also related. This is because all these issues have to do with the fundamental concepts of freedom and life. Negatively put, these issues express reactions to negations of freedom and of life's meaningfulness at different levels of the African's existence. Positively, they articulate certain phases in the process of Africa's search for freedom and for meaning in life.

Freedom. Black theology has to do with the black man's search for the freedom to find his identity in being black. What is happening in South Africa today epitomizes in the highest degree what has happened already in a milder way in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Colonization meant segregation on the basis of color all over Africa.

But the issue of color must be seen to go beyond the frontiers of this colonization-segregation framework. It must be seen in a more universal context if it is to form the basis of not just an ideology but a theology. It must be seen as involving discrimination, bias, and hatred of any type on the basis of color—white, black, yellow, or brown. Do blacks in South Africa and in other parts of Africa not often have antiwhite feelings for whatever reasons? Do people all over the world not discriminate against other people simply because they are not of their own color? Are people generally not often biased against those who have a different color? Seen in this light, the issue of color becomes an issue involving all humanity. It involves humanity's search for freedom from discrimination and bias. Thus South Africa represents a microcosm of a universal reality, and this makes black theology something of interest for Christianity as a whole.

African liberation theology has to do with Africa's search for the freedom to express her identity in economic and political terms. What is important to realize here is that Africa's economic and political "poverty" is not the result of single decisions of individuals or groups to oppress or exploit Africa. It is the result of the structures within which economic and political activities take place. On account of these structures, people become either the oppressed or the oppressors. Such structures are seen to be unjust and therefore call for a change. Liberation theology is a Christian reflection on the search for alternative structures to bring about economic and political freedom. Such freedom will be not only for the oppressed but also for the oppressors, indeed for all humanity. Though social in nature, such freedom is essentially connected with our eschatological freedom. To strive for it, therefore, means participating in spiritual freedom.

Inculturation theology has to do with Africa's search for the freedom to find her cultural identity in Christian expression. There exists in the life of the African Christian a dichotomy between the demands of European forms of Christian expression and the demands of the indige-

nous forms of religious expression. The African's search at this level, therefore, is for freedom to attain a harmonious religious personality through a judicious integration of Christianity with indigenous forms of expression.

Life. The distinction between natural and supernatural life does not imply a separation of the two realities; it expresses life as one reality experienced at two different levels. Neither are these two levels disparate realities; both must be seen as having relevance one for the other. By the Incarnation, natural life has become orientated to the supernatural, such that it cannot be properly regarded as outside the sphere of the supernatural. It belongs to the very process of the realization of the supernatural. The human person thus becomes the center of the unity of the natural and supernatural. We may, therefore, talk of only one life experienced by the individual on two different planes, and of the natural and supernatural making up the totality of life properly so called. Natural life must, therefore, not be treated as an object or appraised only in terms of its utilization value. It is not even to be regarded merely as a means to an end. Natural life must be recognized as the subject of rights and duties, and both as an end (relatively) in itself and as a means to an end. As an end, though only relatively so, natural life expresses the creaturehood and the finiteness of man; it points to people as masters of their own destiny and expresses a positive value in created reality. Natural life is also a means to the supernatural life; it finds its fulfilment in God's self-communication to man (grace) and opens up to that final realization of life itself (eternal life). Natural life, therefore, including our coporeality, is an essential constituent of the one reality, life.⁶⁷

Black theology affirms life at the social level for the African. Life has no meaning unless lived out freely in all spheres available to us through creation. One of these spheres is the social, and the gregarious instinct in the human person is one of the strongest, such that man/woman are by nature social beings. Their full realization of their life involves, therefore, the actualization of their identity as social beings. Black theology may say nothing directly of supernatural life; yet it makes a significant theological contribution in its affirmation of life on the social/natural plane, for this belongs in an essential way to the supernatural.

Liberation theology has to do with life and the actualization of it in the socioeconomic sphere. Liberation means freeing the human person from unjust socioeconomic structures for a fully developed life. It affirms life in the socioeconomic aspect.

Inculturation theology affirms and expresses life as it should be lived within the cultural context. Life lived outside the proper cultural context is artificial; it is life not fully realized.

⁶⁷ Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM, 1955) 121-27.

African theologies are freedom- and life-oriented, as are also African world view and thought-system. In so far as these realities are universal human ideals, they give a universalistic perspective to these theologies. Thus these theologies may no longer be viewed in their particularistic perspective only. The issues of color, poverty, and culture and the theologies based on them should be seen as involving not only the whole of Africa but also all humanity, and should be of interest to Christianity in general.

AFRICAN THEOLOGIES AND OTHER THIRD WORLD THEOLOGIES

The expression "Third World" is understood not geographically but conceptually; it refers to peoples, wherever they are, who share the fate of being underprivileged.⁶⁶ Third World theologies include African theologies, Asian theologies, Latin American liberation theology, American black theology, even feminist theology. The expression "Third World theology" did not come into use until 1976, when for the first time Third World theologians met at Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, to discuss, exchange views on, and seek ways of promoting their brands of theology. This meeting led to the formation in the same year of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, which seeks to promote and foster the cause of Third World theologies. These theologies have one basic feature that distinguishes them from traditional Western theology: they are a response, in the spirit of the gospel, to the cultural, religious, social, economic, and political concerns of the different Third World peoples today. Apart from feminist theology, all the other Third World theologies are found in Africa with some modifications.

South African black theology, like its American counterpart, appeals for black consciousness and black identity among the blacks as the only way to the rediscovery of their downtrodden humanity, and is concerned with the liberation of the blacks. Unlike some of its American counterpart, however, it preaches love even towards the whites, and its protagonists are much more ecumenically constituted.

African liberation theology has its own characteristics that distinguish it from the Latin American counterpart. Apart from the fact that three liberation currents are found in Africa, there already exists also the Ujamaa structure, which is regarded as ideal for Africa in her liberation struggle. The absence of such a model in Latin America introduces one point of disparity. Another point of difference is the attempt of some

⁶⁶ Walbert Bühlmann, in *The Coming of the Third Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977) 3, uses the expression "third world" to refer to the "South." R. Panikkar sees in the expression "a remnant of unconscious colonialistic attitudes," cited in the Foreword to *Third World Theologies* (Mission Trends 3, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas E. Stransky, C.S.P. [New York: Paulist, 1976]).

African liberationists to fuse elements of the Latin American model with those of the African model.

Compared with liberation theology in Asia, African liberation theology also shows differences. This is mainly due to the difference that exists in the cultural backgrounds on the two continents.⁶⁹

Inculturation theology is also found in Asia, and in general arose there out of similar aspirations that gave rise to the African counterpart. Though certain themes in Asian culture are similar to those found in African culture, e.g., the sense of community, wholeness of life, and an integrated view of reality,⁷⁰ there are significant differences in the religious contexts of the two continents and the peoples' world view within which theology is set. The religious context of Asia, as Aloysius Pieris, S.J., points out, comprises two complementary elements: a cosmic religion as foundation, and a metacosmic soteriology (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism) as main edifice—which have become highly integrated and contextualized into strong historical religious traditions.⁷¹ Besides these, Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist philosophies are to be reckoned with. In Africa, on the other hand, the only other religion is the African traditional religion.⁷² All these make African inculturation theology significantly different from the Asian counterpart.

AFRICAN THEOLOGIES AND WESTERN THEOLOGY

Western theology is basically an attempt to give a systematic presentation of Christian doctrine. It treats, therefore, of the basic Christian concepts, beliefs, and doctrines and presents these in terms of a human thought-system. Thus, scholasticism uses Aristotelian philosophical analysis in the explication and presentation of Christian doctrines and aims at supplying basic standard Christian answers. Traditional textbook presentation of Western theology starts with the concept of the Deity one and three, then goes on to creation, and ends with eschatology. In the presentation, both Western symbols and Western cultural forms of expression are used.

African inculturation theology is also concerned with the presentation of the basic Christian faith. In its radical form its structure differs significantly from that of Western theology, having as its basic constraints an African world view, an African religious thought-system, and

⁶⁹ "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," *Logos* 19 (1980) 49.

⁷⁰ Cf. Louis Gutheinz, S.J., "Asian Theology Today: Where Is It? What Is It About?" *ibid.* 37.

⁷¹ According to Aloysius Pieris, the two terms "cosmic" and "metacosmic" are borrowed from Buddhism; see his "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation" 53-54.

⁷² Cf. *ibid.* 52-53.

an African way of apprehending reality. A careful study and integration of these dictates the basic framework for its elaboration. In the presentation African symbols and African cultural forms of expression are used. In this way, even though both theologies have the same objective, they differ in their methodologies and forms of expression. The difference is not one of opposition but of complementarity. What one methodology does not regard as important and necessary to emphasize may need emphasis in the other, and what one may indeed totally neglect may be of vital importance to the other.

While African inculturation theology is concerned with basic and essential Christian questions, African liberation theology and African black theology are concerned with social and present Christian questions. They are theologies that seek to give present answers to present social questions in Africa. These theologies naturally depart in context and in the pattern of presentation from the traditional Western systematic theology. They are situational theologies and belong properly in the context of hermeneutics.⁷³ In the Western theological setup they find a parallel in the theology of development and in political theology.

From this it will be clear that while African theologies are new ways of doing theology and a departure from Western theology generally, they are not in opposition to it. They are not meant to replace Western theology but to complement it. In this way these theologies can make a contribution that will enrich universal Christian theological understanding.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion I shall try to highlight certain ways in which African theologies can make a contribution to the entire corpus of Christian theology.

One such way is that through them new approaches to old questions may be discovered. Questioning old questions with insight from African culture and religion is part of the function of African inculturation theology. Through such questioning new ways of posing the question may be revealed or some light may be thrown on new approaches to the issue. Besides, African answers to old questions are bound to provide a broader understanding of the question and the issue involved.

In terms of comparison with Western perspectives and vision, a few basic concepts give a different coloration to the African cultural perspective and in turn to the perspective of African theology. The sense of the community, e.g., is very fundamental in African culture. By it the individual defines himself or herself not in egoistic terms but in terms of

⁷³ Cf. Bosch, "South African Black Theology" 18.

the community to which he/she belongs. For him/her, the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* becomes *cognatus ergo sum*.⁷⁴ They put a premium on the family and on society, and their approach to life is less mechanical and more human and personal. The sense of God and of the spiritual is still very strong within the culture, even if not as strong as it was many years back. These make African theologies which we have discussed here creation-oriented. They take on a perspective that assumes a basic goodness in creation, in the order of nature, and in the social order. They nurture an integrative view of reality whereby even the profane is seen as capable of being subsumed into the supernatural. All this should be a complementary contribution to Western theology's secularizing and individualistic background.

Until recently Western theology has mainly emphasized its systematic character over and above its hermeneutic function, with the result that in Africa, e.g., pressing questions are not given relevant answers, and any answers that are found may be seen to be irrelevant (to some extent) to the questions asked. By posing the issues of color and poverty for theological answers, black theology and liberation theology point to the fact that theology should constantly seek out human problems and give relevant answers to them whenever and wherever they exist.

Also, Western theology, though claiming to be universal, has been rather narrowly focused, limiting its vision to the concerns of Western culture. This has perhaps been inevitable. But we are now entering into the era of world Church, and this also means an era of world theology, that is, an era of theology whose vision will not be limited to the perspectives of a particular culture. The emergence of theologies based on different cultural perspectives must be seen as a first step towards such an era; for the framework of genuine world theology must be developed from insights derived from these theologies arising from different cultural backgrounds. For this reason these theologies must first be allowed their full course of development.

In sum, it is to be hoped that the appearance of these theologies will lead to the recovery of the true nature of theology as *logos* and *sarx* (Jn 1:14), something transcendent and immanent, universal and particular, having a focus that is eschatological as well as present and relevant.

⁷⁴ Cf. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* 49, 88.