

*What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality.* By Laurenti Magesa. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013. Pp. xii + 220. \$30.

Magesa has made it part of his lifelong preoccupation to prove that Africa has much to contribute to the general understanding of what it means to be human. In this book, M. tries to show that what constitutes the spiritual/religious patrimony of Africa, from which Africans themselves draw to make sense of reality, would also be beneficial to the rest of humanity.

M. divides the book into 18 chapters and an epilogue. The book develops four hinge ideas. The first is that African traditions are the bases of the resilience of the African spirit. Africans have been through much trauma in their histories—such as slavery, colonialism, apartheid, bad and corrupt governance, and diseases. However, thanks to the ancestral spiritual and religious heritage that constitutes the core of African traditions, its peoples have been able to survive and even thrive. This is due largely to the fact that this tradition recognizes and celebrates the presence of the transcendent in human life. As M. puts it, for Africans “all existence consists of active and existential powers which consistently interact with and influence one another.” All creatures “participate in the comprehensive power of life” and in “the spirit of existence”; the life force coalesces in varying degrees to serve life (38). Those familiar with M.’s writings will notice a familiar trend in this line of reasoning: African traditions constitute traditions of abundant life.

The second hinge idea follows from the first one. For the African, the universe is a peopled universe characterized by participatory and reciprocal relationships. Africans are aware of themselves as being related to God their maker, to their ancestors (the living dead), to other spirits who govern various aspects of life on earth and help make it humane and livable, to other human beings, and to other animate and inanimate creatures. These relationships are at the heart of African spirituality which M. defines as a way of relating to or behaving within this sacred web of relationships. All existence is sacred.

The third hinge idea is that African morality is intrinsically linked to its spirituality. Both African spirituality and morality revolve around the provision of abundant life for human beings. Morality points to the ways life can be enhanced or served both in the daily and consistent interactions among peoples and between individuals, living and dead, on a wide range of issues—from conception to birth, from initiation to marriage, from adulthood to ancestorhood, from peace to war, from sickness to death, from wrongdoing to repentance and forgiveness. In other words, African morality is all-encompassing and a direct result of the need to maintain community cohesion and harmony.

The fourth hinge idea expresses M.’s ultimate aim, which is to elaborate a Christian spirituality for, of, and from Africans who have been touched by both the Christian and African spiritual heritages. This is therefore a serious work of enculturation. M.’s position here as in his other works is that the interaction between Christianity and African traditions has to be between equal partners and not between a superior and an inferior tradition. Christianity, in M.’s view, cannot come into this dialogue intending to impose its view on the African world. Here, however, is where I have reservations about M.’s approach to enculturation. Let me explain.

I agree with M.'s stance on the need to take African spiritual and religious heritage seriously in religious dialogue. Anyone who has even a faint idea of the African reality can attest to M.'s claims about the richness of the African tradition and about its vibrancy and relevance to Africans and to the rest of humanity. As the late Kwame Bediako pointed out, African primal religions constitute an asset to African theologians that theologians in the West do not have: it provides a living source of rich and alternative insights about what it means to be human. M.'s work is thus important as a source of insights into the richness of the African spiritual and religious patrimony. What I find unacceptable is the somewhat uncritical approach to aspects of this tradition. Like all other traditions, African spiritual and religious traditions have their flaws that need to be noted and critiqued. M. does very little of that here. Speaking as an African theologian myself, I would give pride of place to the gospel's power to enculturate and transform, not to the African traditions, no matter how lofty their insights.

My critical remarks are in no way intended to diminish the importance of this book from one of Africa's foremost theologians currently writing on the issue of the intersection between Christianity and African religions and spiritualities. With this book M. continues to educate us about Africa, religion in general, and how attention to the African religious and spiritual heritage can help restore life and enhance spiritual health, about which Pope Benedict XVI spoke in his homily at the Second African Synod (2009).

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*Gospel of the Family*. By Cardinal Walter Kasper. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014. Pp. 64. \$9.95.

*Gospel of the Family: Going Beyond Cardinal Kasper's Proposal in the Debate on Marriage, Civil Re-Marriage, and Communion in the Church*. By J. J. Perez-Soba and Stephen Kampowski. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2014. Pp. 255. \$17.95.

Cardinal Kasper's proposal for admitting some divorced and remarried Catholics to the sacraments has touched a nerve. He first introduced his ideas in a speech on February 21, 2014, the first day of the extraordinary consistory for the synod on the family. Soon after, the speech was published in a little book, *The Gospel of the Family*. Just months later, Perez-Soba and Kampowski, both of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Rome, published a much longer book by the same title. In a remarkably small window of time, other cardinals and theologians criticized K. in journal articles and edited volumes. At the heart of the debate, which seems unlikely to be resolved in the near future, is the question of mercy.

It may seem that the core question to be resolved is what Scripture and church tradition allows. In fact, K. assumes the official Catholic position on NT divorce texts. Sidestepping significant scholarly debate, he holds that indissolubility is a reality rather than a command or ideal. His opponents agree on the nature of Jesus' teaching.