

## Chapter Eighteen

# Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century

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The topic of this essay is an ambitious one; I cannot and do not mean to satisfy it. Proceeding topically rather than chronologically, I wish to highlight certain themes and sub-themes with which African theology has been occupied in the twentieth century. From these, I hope to sketch an outline of the emerging face of African Christian theologies in the next century.

### I. DYNAMISM AND INNOVATION

From the early 1980s, calls for African theologies and African churches to either recognize the “paradigm shifts”<sup>679</sup>—which are occurring before their own eyes—or to effect some “paradigm shifts” themselves, have increased.<sup>680</sup>

<sup>679</sup> David J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), uses the idea of paradigm shifts to explain the manner in which theologies of mission have changed over the centuries. It is an idea borrowed from the scientist Thomas Kuhn.

<sup>680</sup> Cf. e.g. David B. BARRETT et al, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World AD 1900-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); John S MBITI, *The Bible in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986); Charles VILLA-VICENCIO, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Cape Town, Cambridge: David

More significantly, major works on African theology during the 1990s indicate that African Christian Theology will not be allowed to degenerate into an immutable museum ornament. It is a dynamic, growing, multifaceted and dialectic movement built diachronically and synchronically upon contextualization and constant introspection. Rightfully, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) has taken a leading role in providing direction to the burgeoning suggestions for new forms of African theology and Christianity.<sup>681</sup>

One of my operating assumptions is that, in order for African theology to grow and effect meaningful paradigm shifts, a careful note of the ground already captured must be made. This may prevent an unbridled manufacturing of an infinite number of supposedly “new” and “projective” African theologies that are not thoroughly informed by what has been done before. Kwesi Dickson<sup>682</sup> makes the same point:

“... the present stagnation may be accounted for by reference to the fact that recent discussants often seem to be unaware of past discussions on the subject. Again and again contributions made at conferences have not been such as to build upon the insights which have already been gained into the subject...”

Construction, innovation and contextualization in African theology/Christianity should not be left entirely in the hands of each generation of African theologians as if African theology was a frivolous

Philip, Cambridge University Press, 1992); Lamin SANNEH, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989); J.N.K. MUGAMBI, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995); Kwame BEDIAKO, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995); A. KARAMAGA, *Problems and Promises of Africa: Towards and Beyond the Year 2000* (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991); Mercy Amba ODUYOYE, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995); M.A. ODUYOYE “Christianity and African Culture”, in *International Review of Mission*, 84, 332/333 (January/April 1995), 77-90; Allan ANDERSON & Samuel OTWANG, *Tumelo: The Faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1993).

<sup>681</sup> KARAMAGA, *Problems and Promises*; José CHIPENDA, “The Church of the Future in Africa”, in Douglas WARUTA (ed.), *African Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Challenges and Promises* (Nairobi: AACC, 1995), 16-36.

<sup>682</sup> Kwesi A. DICKSON, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 8.

and merely cerebral activity that is unconnected either to African Christian life or previous African theologies.<sup>683</sup>

For nearly half a century, Africans have attempted to articulate their own brands of Christian theologies consciously and deliberately. Generally this production has been ecumenical in nature, consultative, and in written form. Before the 1950s, African Christian theologies (henceforth referred to only as African theologies) had existed largely in less deliberate, consultative, ecumenical, organized, and written forms. Without discounting or doubting the value of unwritten forms of African Christian expressions prior to the 1950s, we shall focus on those articulations of African theologies since the 1950s.<sup>684</sup> Most of these have either been expressed as self-conscious theologies, or at least been documented as ecclesiastical, ecumenical or theological events. Yet even this apparently well-delimited focus on consciously constructed and written forms of African theology has become a vast and dynamic field that defies easy classification and simplistic analysis.

## II. "AFRICA", "AFRICA CHRISTIANITY" AND "AFRICAN THEOLOGY"

I assume that the phenomena of African Christianity and African theology are so closely related that the two terms may be used interchangeably. African theologies exist because of African Christianities, and without African theologies we would not have any sustainable African Christianities. African Christianities are therefore expressions of African theology.

<sup>683</sup> Cf. Tinyiko Sam MALULEKE, "Black and African Theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink From Our Own Wells", in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 96 (November 1996), 3-19; T.S. MALULEKE, "Recent Developments in the Christian Theologies of Africa: Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", in *Journal of Constructive Theology*, 2, 2 (December 1996), 33-60.

<sup>684</sup> In this recent work on African theology, Josiah U. YOUNG, *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 6f., identifies those whom he calls "the ancestors of African Theology" such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine of Hippo and Kimpa Vita or Dona Beatrice. See also John PARRATT, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Marie-Louise MARTIN, *Kimbangu, an African Prophet and His Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); David J. Bosch, "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Black Theology", in Gayraud S. WILMORE & James H. CONE (eds), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979); Kwame BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

However, while these terms have become common today, their meaning (or even the fact that they have meaning) has not always been taken for granted. Oduyoye speaks of those who still question whether there ever can be “such an animal as African Christianity”.<sup>685</sup> During our own times, African philosophers such as Anthony Appiah and Mudimbe also appear to be questioning the usefulness of the concept “Africa” beyond a reductionist conceptual level. Appiah seems to argue that while Africa is a physical and geographical reality with some shared experiences (such as slavery and colonialism), it is still precarious to believe that expressions such as “African Christianity”, “African philosophy”, “African literature”, or even simply “African”, have intrinsic meaning. He also points out the irony of the fact that African intellectuals need the languages of their former colonial masters in order to construct “African literature”, “African philosophy”—and, we may add, “African theology”. However, as Oduyoye says, while African intellectuals debate whether “African Christianity” or “African theology” either exist or make sense at all, Africans everywhere are fashioning theologies and Christian forms with which they can identify.

It is important to be conscious of the vastness, divisions, affinities, and diversities of Africa. To that extent, there is some truth in the suggestion that “Africa” does not exist as such, but rather to the extent that people articulate a shape and form for the Africa they desire.<sup>686</sup> There are several other possible reasons why it took so long for the phrases “African Christianity” and “African theology” to be accepted as valid expressions. The most basic is simply the strong grip of the West’s tutelage of African Christianities in the twentieth century. Neither westerners nor Africans risked a hasty qualification of the term “Christian” with “African”. This was part of the reason why Africa was at one time full of “missions” as opposed to churches. The adjective “African” would only gradually and with care be placed alongside terms such as “church”, “Christian”, “Christian”, or “theology”.

“From 1854 onwards”, we may confidently say, “West African Christian leaders, lay and clerical had felt and indeed initiated schemes to indigenize the Christian faith.”<sup>687</sup> However, among many African

<sup>685</sup> ODUYOYE, “Christianity and African Culture”, p. 8.

<sup>686</sup> The same could be said of places like Jerusalem or Israel.

<sup>687</sup> Harry SAWYERR, *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr*, John PARRATT (ed.), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 87.

theologians, the idea of African theology or an African Indigenous Theology<sup>688</sup> started rather tentatively.<sup>689</sup>

Less tentative was Bolaji Idowu's call for an indigenous African church with its own theology.<sup>690</sup> John Mbiti expresses concern over the use of the term "African theology" as a big banner under which could be placed "all sorts of articles and references ... the substance [of which] often turns out to be advice on how African theology should be done...."<sup>691</sup> For himself, however, Mbiti<sup>692</sup> confidently declares that "I will use the term 'African theology' ... without apology or embarrassment, to mean theological reflection and expression by African Christians."<sup>693</sup> According to Mbiti, the chief yardstick for determining the validity of any Christian theology purporting to be African is its "Biblical basis".<sup>694</sup> For him "nothing can substitute for the Bible". For this reason, Mbiti has tended to be suspicious (to say the least) of what he sees as "theological debates.... propagated without full or clear grounding". Such theologies would include "theologies of liberation", the moratorium debate of the 1970s, and South African Black theology—which he sees as "primarily [a] ready-made European theology turned into a consumption commodity for Africans."<sup>695</sup>

We can thus see that even after the term "African theology" and/or "African Christianity" had found general acceptance, the debate on the

<sup>688</sup> Edward W Fashole-Luke, *An African Indigenous Theology: Fact or Fiction?* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Press).

<sup>689</sup> Both Sawyerr (SAWYERR, *The Practice of Presence*, pp. 93-99) and Fashole-Luke—in heavily qualified terms. Indeed they use it almost reluctantly. See, Edward W. FASHOLÉ-LUKE, "An African Indigenous Theology: Fact or Fiction?", in *Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion* 11 (1971).

<sup>690</sup> Bolaji IDOWU, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>691</sup> John S. MBITI. "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology", in Kofi APPIAH-KUBI & Sergio TORRES, *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians. Accra. December 17-23, 1977* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 90.

<sup>692</sup> MBITI, "The Biblical Basis", p. 83.

<sup>693</sup> The approach of Kwesi A. DICKSON, "The African Theological Task", in Sergio TORRES & Virginia M.M. FABELLA (eds), *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History: Papers from the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar es Salam, August 5-12* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 46, is similar if not slightly more radical in that he rejects the notion of universal theology and thus argues for the validity of African Theology. For a fuller discussion of the merits of an 'African Theology' see one of his other works: DICKSON, *Theology in Africa*, 1-10.

<sup>694</sup> MBITI, "The Biblical Basis", p. 90. Cf. MBITI, *The Bible in African Christianity*.

<sup>695</sup> MBITI, "The Biblical Basis", p. 90.

sources and criteria for truly African and truly Christian theology has continued to our times. Henry Okullu attempts to cut through the arduous process of debate about the criteria and sources of African theology:<sup>696</sup>

“... when we are looking for African theology we should go first to the fields, to the village church, to the village church, to Christian homes to listen to those spontaneously uttered prayers before people go to bed. We should go to the schools, to the frontiers where traditional religions meet with Christianity. We must listen to the throbbing drumbeats and the clapping of hands accompanying the impromptu singing in the independent churches ... Everywhere in Africa things are happening. Christians are talking, singing, preaching, writing, arguing, praying, discussing. Can it be that all this is an empty show? It is impossible. This then is African theology.”

### III. THE WIDE-RANGING AGENDA AND TASKS OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY:

#### ENABLING THE CHURCH, ARTICULATING AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

The more basic issue that caused differences in degrees of acceptance of the term “African theology” was and still is the use for which African theology is constructed. That African Christian theology ought to be at the service of the church in Africa is seldom in doubt. In other words, its chief task is that of enabling the church to develop her own theologies so that she may cease depending on “prefabricated theology, liturgies and traditions,”<sup>697</sup> to be “not an exotic but a plant become indigenous to the soil.”<sup>698</sup> Thus from the earliest times, written African theology was inspired by the conviction that “the opportunity for evangelism has never been greater ... but it will take a church which is alive and vigorous”<sup>699</sup> to muse of such an opportunity. While this basic church-enabling task of African theology has never been seriously disputed, other voices within African theology, at least in recent times, have called for theologies that are more critical of both received traditions within the church and of the church

<sup>696</sup> Henry OKULU, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1974), 54.

<sup>697</sup> Idowu quoted by SAWYERR, *The Practice of Presence*, p. 85.

<sup>698</sup> James Johnson quoted by SAWYERR, *The Practice of Presence*, p. 86.

<sup>699</sup> SAWYERR, *The Practice of Presence*, p. 85.

itself—enabling the church to be both prophetic and self-critical. One of the early criticisms leveled against the then emerging African theology was that it threatened the catholicity of both the global church and Christian theology. The response of Kwesi Dickson<sup>700</sup> to this criticism is one of the most lucid offered by an African theologian in defense of African theology.<sup>701</sup> Yet, as indicated above, African theology has from the 1950s on always been connected to the (African) church. To that extent, we could say that it has largely been church theology done by church people for the sake of the church and its missionary task. It was by no accident, therefore, that issues of selfhood and the moratorium have loomed large in the African theological agenda. Incidentally, the questions of (in)dependence and ownership inherent in the moratorium debates do connect to issues of negritude, “African identity”, and inculturation.

In connection with African theology’s church-enabling task, we can and should inquire about the form and shape of the African church or African Christianities which African theology was meant to enable and bring about. Was it (and is it) the whole Christian church in Africa? What visions of the church should and do inspire African theology? The church is not the sole and primary subject of God’s mission. It is itself a product of God’s mission and that mission encompasses more than the churches we see and dream about. African theology may therefore need to explore ways in which to speak not only to, about, and for the church, but for the larger African society. After all, the church, in some parts of Africa at least, has grown to be one of the important players in society—sometimes too important a player. The Christian theology of Africa does, therefore, almost by definition, have a public function beyond its magisterial one. This means that it may have to do and articulate things that are not always comforting or acceptable to (sections of) the African church. South African Black theology has certainly fulfilled this particular task, because, according to Mosala:<sup>702</sup>

“... it [Black theology] has never been co-opted by the Establishment. No church has ever officially affirmed black theology as a legitimate and correct way of doing theology in South Africa. Not even the South African Council of Churches

<sup>700</sup> DICKSON, *Theology in Africa*, pp. 1-10.

<sup>701</sup> See also Ngidi MUSHETE, “Unity of Faith and Pluralism in Theology”, in TORRES & FABELLA, *The Emergent Gospel*, pp. 50-75.

<sup>702</sup> Itumeleng J. MOSALA, “Spirituality and Struggle: African and Black Theologies”, in TORRES & FABELLA, *The Emergent Gospel*.

has given official recognition to black theology.”

What cannot be denied, however, is that by and large, church and theology have been related in Africa. Even South African Black theology originated and flourished in church caucuses, movements, and organizations.<sup>703</sup> Indeed, the bulk of Africa’s ecumenical and theological consultations have been initiated by churches or church organizations and Christian councils.<sup>704</sup> However, all is not well in the “African church” itself. It faces challenges such as “denominationalism and religious competitiveness,<sup>705</sup> the reduction of Africa into a “dumping ground” for curious forms of North-American Charismatic and Pentecostal groups, the rise of church independentism and the concomitant decline in “historic mission church membership”,<sup>706</sup> growing urbanization,<sup>707</sup> as well the cultural, political, economic, sexual, and ecclesiastical oppression of African women.<sup>708</sup>

<sup>703</sup> Tinyiko Sam MALULEKE, “*A Morula Tree Between Two Fields*”: *The Commentary of Selected Tsonga Writers on Missionary Christianity* (DTh dissertation, University of South Africa, 1995).

<sup>704</sup> Cf. J.N.K. MUGAMBI, “The Ecumenical Movement and the Future of the Church in Africa”, in J.N.K. MUGAMBI & Laurenti MAGESA, *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology* (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1990), 14-20; Margaret S. LAROM (ed.), *Claiming the Promise: African Churches Speak* (New York: Friendship Press, 1994).

<sup>705</sup> D.W. WARUTA, “Towards an African Church: A Critical Assessment of Alternative Forms and Structures”, in MUGAMBI & MAGESA, *The Church in African Christianity*, p. 33.

<sup>706</sup> BARRETT, *World Christian Encyclopedia*; ANDERSON & OTWANG, *Tumelo*.

<sup>707</sup> Aylward Shorter, *The Church in the African City* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991).

<sup>708</sup> Cf. Virginia M.M. FABELLA & Mercy Amba ODUYOYE (eds), *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988); Mercy Amba ODUYOYE & Musimbi R.A. KANYORO (eds), *Talitha, Qumi!: Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians 1989* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1990); Mercy Amba ODUYOYE & Musimbi R.A. KANYORO (eds), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992); ODUYOYE, “Christianity and African Culture”, pp. 77-90; Aruna GNANADASON, Musimbi R.A. KANYORO & Lucia Ann MCSPADDEN (eds), *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy: Women, Violence and Non-Violent Change* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1996); Denise ACKERMANN, Jonathan A. DRAPER & Emma MASHININI (eds), *Women Hold up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991).



## IV. INCULTURATION ISSUES

African culture and African Traditional religions (ATRs) have long been acknowledged as the womb out of which African Christian theology must be born. From various fronts, African Christians insisted that the church of Africa and its theology must bear an African stamp. This insistence went beyond theological and ecclesiastical matters as other African thinkers also attempted to construct “African philosophy”, “African literature”, “African art”, and “African architecture”. The question we asked earlier about Africa, African Christianity, and African theology can and has indeed been asked of African culture and ATRs, namely: “are there such animals?” Given the vastness and diversity of the continent’s peoples, this is justifiable. However, African church leaders and theologians have not allowed this question to dampen their spirits. Unlike European imperial historians, explorers, and missionaries of the previous centuries, African theologians have generally been wary of generalizations about “Africa” and African culture. Special efforts have been made to speak in contextualized and specified terms, such as “the Akan Doctrine of God”, “the image of God among the Sotho-Tswana”, “Oludumare”, and “West African Christianity”. In her book on African women and patriarchy, Oduyoye<sup>709</sup> is at pains to demonstrate that the primary context of her reflections is the Akan of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria. Even Mbiti, who has been accused of making generalizations and reductions about “Africa”, is careful to contextualize his research and findings in terms of tribes—at least in his work *Concepts of God in Africa*. Generalizations are still made, but mostly on the basis of well-focused contexts of research. In that way, therefore, serious attempts have been made to ensure that the terms ATRs have not been allowed to degenerate into meaningless generalizations and clichés.

However, references to both African Traditional Religions and to African culture remained a hazardous exercise in African theological construction. It has been the source of much tension, both within and without African theology. The central bone of contention may be summarized this way: African Christian theology needs to decide not only how to refer to African culture and ATRs but to carefully weigh the objectives of such references. Various proposals have been made. Those who advocate the position that both African culture and ATRs are part of the *praeparatio evangelica* have been highly critical of the two. Many

<sup>709</sup> ODUYOYE, “Christianity and African Culture”, pp. 77-90; ODUYOYE, *Daughters of Anowa*.

missionary councils have wholly condemned ATRs as something to be converted from.<sup>710</sup>

Scholars like Bediako and Turner actually argue that the “phenomenal growth” of Christianity in Africa cannot be understood without reference to ATRs as an excellent preparation for the gospel. However, the granting of *praeparatio evangelica* status to ATRs and African culture may be a veiled refusal to accept the latter on its own terms.<sup>711</sup> This is the theological practice which Okot p’Bitek characterized in 1970 as “intellectual smuggling”. Thus, other African theologians, such as Setiloane, Christian Gaba, Bolaji Idowu, and Samuel Kibicho, have called for the suspension of any evangelical or “missionary” motives when African theology refers to ATRs. In any case, it is probably bad research methodology to mix what purports to be objective research with a hidden proselytizing agenda. If ATRs are such a fertile ground waiting to be “fulfilled” by Christianity, other African theologians have asked, why are ATRs so resilient? Indeed, some African thinkers, both Christian and non-Christian, have argued that, not only has Christianity brought nothing “new”, but that ATRs are “superior” to Christianity. These types of assertions have greatly troubled some African Christian theologians—especially Evangelicals, who tend to feel that if the theology being constructed intends to be Christian theology, ATRs should not be viewed as equal to Christianity, let alone “superior”.<sup>712</sup>

What this debate demonstrates rather clearly, however, is that theological reference to ATRs and African culture comes at a price—as with other religions, ATRs must be taken seriously in their own right, beyond the *praeparatio evangelica* framework. Some among the first generation of African theological writers made admirable attempts to take ATRs seriously, in their own terms, without relinquishing their own belief in the “superiority” of Christianity. These are examples worthy of being followed. In fact, it is possible to argue that the increasingly pluralistic context in Africa demands that we “listen” to other religions more carefully and more respectfully, without ceasing to be committed Christians

<sup>710</sup> Cf. BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*. For a contrary view, see J.S. FRIESEN, *Missionary Responses to Tribal Religions at Edinburgh, 1910* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996).

<sup>711</sup> MALULEKE, “Black and African Theologies”.

<sup>712</sup> K. BEDIAKO, “Understanding African Theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, in *Themelios*, 20, 1 (October 1994), 14-20; K. BEDIAKO, “Five Theses on the Significance of Modern African Christianity: A Manifesto”, in *Transformation*, 13 (1996), 21-29.

ourselves and yet without a hidden evangelistic motive. We should, in the words of the late David Bosch.<sup>713</sup>

“... Regard our involvement in dialogue and mission as an adventure [and be] prepared to take risks ... Anticipating surprises as the Spirit guides us into fuller understanding. This is not opting for agnosticism, but for humility. It is, however, a bold humility—or a humble boldness. We know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers, but as envoys of peace; not as high-pressure salespersons, but as ambassadors of the Servant Lord.”

### 1. Christianisation or Africanisation?

Kwame Bediako has identified as a distinct but no longer crucial emphasis in African theology what he calls “the Christianisation of the African past”. This task, he argues, served its valuable purpose of providing Africans with “cultural continuity”, which in turn helps to clarify African Christian identity. But it is now a task whose time has passed. Therefore, Bediako is concerned when African theologians appear unable to transcend their African past, so that it continues to dictate an agenda for the present. Bediako (1992) almost blames African theologians’ pre-occupation with identity issues on eighteenth and nineteenth century European perceptions of Africans, based on the slave-trade. It is to this legacy that African theologians are supposed to be reacting when they harp on past traditions and religions. My feeling is that this may be a simplistic view of African theology’s reference to African traditions and the African past. To view it as a “tendency” from which African theology is supposed to graduate may be shortsighted.

What is needed now, Bediako argues, is the Africanization of Africa’s Christian present.<sup>714</sup> Without unquestioningly accepting Bediako’s reduction of decades of African theologies into a “quest for Christianizing the African past”, he puts his finger on an element that provides a fruitful

<sup>713</sup> Quoted on the title page: Willem SAAYMAN & Klippies (J.J.) KRITZINGER (eds), *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch’s Work Considered* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996).

<sup>714</sup> Cf. BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*.

angle into the wide-ranging agenda of African theology during the past forty years. But, “Christianizing the African past” is only one perspective on the agenda of African theology, and it is therefore reductionistic to analyze, evaluate, and classify African theologians mainly and only on this criteria—which is virtually what Bediako does.<sup>715</sup> Juxtaposing Christianization and Africanization appears to rest on too rigid a separation between that which is Christian and that which is African. Besides, many African theologians understood and still understand themselves to be “Africanizing” Christianity when they appear to be “Christianizing” their past and vice versa! To posit the Africanization of Christianity as the new task facing African theology may not, in reality, be as groundbreaking as it appears. For African Christian theologians, the two processes—Christianization and Africanization—have not and cannot be artificially separated.

## 2. Beyond Christian Theology

There is a deep sense in which African theology has never been just Christian theology. From its earliest times, written African theology has always sought, not merely to dialogue with ATRs and African culture, but also to make sense of the complex world of ATRs.<sup>716</sup> Strictly speaking, therefore, there has been, up to now, no such thing as a purely “African Christian theology”. Therefore, the majority of African theologians have not been highly concerned with a specifically “African Christian identity” either for themselves or for the church. Is this a weakness? Bediako and probably other evangelical theologians seem to think so. Therefore, a significant concern in his theology is the quest for a truly Christian African identity. However, it is possible to see the non-Christian concern as a sign of realism and maturity. African theology has always been inter-religious, seeking to be more than a proselytizing theology without denigrating Christianity. In other words, it is with good reason that African Christian theologians have had to ask themselves and to be asked by others “why do we continue to seek to convert to Christianity the devotees of African traditional religion?”<sup>717</sup> This is a crucial question for all African theologies

<sup>715</sup> BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*.

<sup>716</sup> Bolaji IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973); SAWYERR, *The Practice of Presence*.

<sup>717</sup> Gabriel SETILOANE, “Where Are We in African Theology?”, in K. APPIAH-KUBI & S. TORRES, *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of*

as we move into the twenty-first century. It seems to me that we will have to redefine the role of our theologies beyond seeking either to “convert” unreached Africans or support those who carry out such a task. For himself, Setiloane answers this question thus:<sup>718</sup>

“I am like someone who has been bewitched, and I find it difficult to shake off the Christian witchcraft with which I have been captivated. I cannot say I necessarily like where I am. Second, I rationalize my position by taking the view that to be Christian I do not have to endorse every detail of western theology.”

There may be some leads for African theology to follow in our times from this. Will it be possible to do exclusively Christian African theology—any more than it was possible for the first generation of African theologians? I doubt it. If anything, the growing plural situation in Africa demands an even broader and more rigorous inter-religious approach. African Christian theologians and their churches have to learn new ways of speaking to and relating to other religious people. We have to listen anew to the critiques that have been leveled against African Christian theology by (apparently) non-Christian Africans such as P’Bitek and others.<sup>719</sup> This listening and dialogue must not be done on a basis of a rigid separation between “African Christian” theologians/ intellectuals as opposed to “non-Christian African” intellectuals—as Bediako sometimes seems to imply.<sup>720</sup> In reality, such a distinction is, strictly speaking, very difficult to sustain. There is, therefore, a sense in which African theology, even African Christian theology can only be truly African if it abandons artificial identity boundaries—including the tag “Christian” when and where it is used merely as a boundary marker.

### 3. The Bible

As with ATRs and other aspects of African culture, the Bible has enjoyed a respected status and place in African theology. “Any viable

*Third World Theologians. Accra. December 17-23, 1977* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 64.

<sup>718</sup> Cf. J.N.K. MUGAMBI, *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992).

<sup>719</sup> Cf. MUGAMBI, *Critiques of Christianity*.

<sup>720</sup> BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*.

theology must and should have a biblical basis,"<sup>721</sup> Mbiti declares. Similarly, Fashole-Luke declares that "the Bible is the basic and a primary source for the development of African Christian Theology."<sup>722</sup> To underscore the significance of the Bible in the construction of African theology, Mbiti also says:<sup>723</sup>

"Nothing can substitute for the Bible. However much African cultural-religious background may be close to the biblical world, we have to guard against references like "the hitherto unwritten African Old Testament" or sentiments that see final revelation of God in the African religious heritage."

We have already mentioned that Mbiti's basic criticism of Black and Latin American liberation theologies has been that these "theological debates have been propagated without full Biblical grounding." However, even those who, according to Mbiti, made exaggerated connections between the Bible and African heritage still underscore the significance of the Bible in African theology. The very fact that theologians felt the need to make such outrageous connections between the world of the Bible and the African world is proof of the esteem with which the Bible was held. The emerging African Feminist or Womanist theology has also underscored the importance of the Bible. The very titles of some of the books on African Feminism emphasize this reality: *Talitha, qumi, Who Will Roll Away the Stone* and *The will to Arise*.

What has, in my opinion, been lacking is a vigorous debate on biblical hermeneutics akin to the vigorous debate that African (and non-African) theologians have held on culture, politics, and ATRs. In fact, for a long time the very notion of "biblical hermeneutics" would not be mentioned even by trained biblical scholars such as Mbiti. Instead, it is the authority of the vernacular Bibles that seems to be emphasized.<sup>724</sup> It was almost as if some of these theologians were afraid to alert African Christians to the fact that the Bible can and needs to be interpreted. Those who attempted to interpret the Bible creatively and boldly would be accused of extravagance, as we have illustrated above. Indeed, "fidelity to the Bible" or "biblical

<sup>721</sup> John S. MBITI, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1979), 90.

<sup>722</sup> Edward W. FAHOLE-LUKE, "The Quest for African Christian Theologies", in G.H. ANDERSON & T.F. STRANSKY (eds), *Mission Trends No 3: Third World Theologies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 141.

<sup>723</sup> MBITI, *Concepts of God in Africa*, p. 90.

<sup>724</sup> Cf. SANNEH, *Translating the Message*; MBITI, *The Bible in African Christianity*.

grounding” have remained the chief control mechanisms with which to regulate the pace and scope of African theology particularly in its reference to socio-political liberation and to ATRs.

Unfortunately, this has led to a situation in which, throughout Africa, the Bible has been and continues to be absolutized: it is one of the oracles that we consult for instant solutions and responses.<sup>725</sup> What makes the situation worse is that any unconventional reading of the Bible quickly earns one the charge of not being respectful of the authority of scripture. There are other socio-religious reasons for the almost fanatical attachment to the Bible—especially in Protestant Africa. Bereft of the rituals and symbols of ATRs, Roman Catholicism, and African Independentism, African Protestants have nothing but the Bible—*sola scriptura*. Once their attachment to “the big black book” is attacked they have nothing else to hold onto. However, on the whole, and in actual practice, African Christians are far more innovative and subversive in their appropriation of the Bible than they appear. Developments within South African Black theology, Latin American-type liberation theologies and African theology in the area of Biblical hermeneutics since the early eighties give us hope.<sup>726</sup> Here attempts are being made not only to develop creative Biblical hermeneutic methods, but also to observe and analyze the manner in which African Christians “read” and view the Bible.

In an illuminating article, Nthamburi and Waruta propose a set of common themes that would characterize the Biblical hermeneutics of African Christians:<sup>727</sup> a quest for salvation/healing and wholeness, a keen awareness of human alienation, an appreciation of God’s promise to “put things right”, a desire to know how to deal with the spirit world, attaching importance to initiation rites, an awareness of God’s advocacy for the down-trodden, a sense of belonging in and to a visible community, commitment to social morality, and an intense concern for death and life beyond it. The biblical hermeneutical “principles” of South African Black theology could be summarized in this way: a “suspicious” and critical view of the status, contents, and use of the Bible, a commitment to a materialist reading of the Bible (“behind the text”), a commitment to the cultural

<sup>725</sup> ODUYOYE, *Daughters of Anowa*, p. 174

<sup>726</sup> Here attempts are being made not only to develop creative biblical hermeneutic methods, but also to observe and analyze the manner in which African Christians “read” and view the Bible.

<sup>727</sup> Zablun NTHAMBURI & Douglas WARUTA, “Biblical Hermeneutics in African Instituted Churches”, in J.S. MBITI (ed.), *The Bible in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 40.

struggles of black workers and women, and finally a view of the Bible as (or a need for it to become) a “weapon of struggle” in the hands of blacks, workers, and women.

#### 4. Rethinking Distinctions within African Theologies

As with the Bible and African Culture, socio-economic and political issues have been on the agenda of African theology, especially what has been termed the African theology of liberation and South African Black theology. However, as we shall see in the next section, the conventional distinctions of “Black” from “African” theologies as “siblings”, “distant cousins”, “old guard”, or “new guard”,<sup>728</sup> “soul mates or antagonists”,<sup>729</sup> theologies of “inculturation and liberation”<sup>730</sup> are no longer adequate. They do not sufficiently account for either the supposed similarities, or differences between the various, dynamic, and emerging strands of African theologies. With the changing ideological map of the world and the sweeping changes on the African continent itself, the agendas of what has been termed “African theologies of inculturation” as opposed to “African theologies of liberation” plus South African Black theology are moving closer together.<sup>731</sup> Having been cautious to speak about “African culture”—due probably to the apartheid state’s manipulation of African culture into the Bantustan system—South African Black theologians are now beginning to speak more freely about culture.<sup>732</sup> This is illustrated by the increasing references being made to the concept of ubuntu (African personhood) in numerous South African intellectual debates.

The coming together of agendas of African theologies does not, and should not, be interpreted to mean that some forms of these theologies are becoming redundant and are about to be phase out. This is a common, hasty judgment often made in the zeal to construct ever and more definitive

<sup>728</sup> Josiah U. YOUNG, *Black and African Theologies: Siblings or Distant Cousins?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986); YOUNG, *African Theology*.

<sup>729</sup> Desmond TUTU, “Black Theology and African Theology: Soulmates or Antagonists?”, in Dean William FERM (ed.), *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 256-264.

<sup>730</sup> Emmanuel MARTEY, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

<sup>731</sup> Mokgethi G MOTLHABI, “Black or African Theology? Toward and Integral African Theology”, in *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, 8, 2 (November 1994), 113-141.

<sup>732</sup> Tinyiko Sam MALULEKE, “African Culture, African Intellectuals and the White Academy in South Africa”, in *Religion and Theology*, 3, 1 (1996), 19-42.



African theologies or theological paradigms. First generation African theologians responded to the charge that African theology—and calls for the selfhood of the African Church—were a threat to Christian catholicity, by debunking the myth of a uniform and universal theology. In like manner, we must respond to those who are either trying to exaggerate similarities between various African theologies, or to replace all previous African theologies with one all-encompassing theological paradigm, by indicating that African Christianity need not have “one” Christian theology in order to be valid and authentic.

What the coming together of different agendas does mean is that we can no longer rigidly separate the various African theologies from one another. The established “cleavages” of African theologies are, furthermore, no longer an adequate indication of the variety and lively ferment that is taking place within African Christianity and between African Christian theologies. So we have to begin to “speak” and “do” African theology differently; in more dialogical, consultative, and open-ended ways. I now sketch a few emerging models of African theology. These merely illustrate some new currents, and are by no means comprehensive. I regard these new currents as indicators of the possible directions into which African theologies will move in future.

## V. EMERGING THEOLOGIES

### 1. Theologies of the AICs

A few scholars deserve special mention for their pioneering role in the irruption of AIC studies and the subsequent exposure of the significance of these churches for African Christianity and African theology: Bengt Sundkler, who wrote one of the earliest in-depth studies of AICs,<sup>733</sup> Christian Baeta,<sup>734</sup> David Barrett,<sup>735</sup> Martinus Daneel,<sup>736</sup> and Harold

<sup>733</sup> Bengt G.M. SUNDKLER, M., *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948); B.G.M. SUNDKLER, *The Christian Ministry in Africa* (Liverpool: Charles Birchall, 1962); B.G.M. SUNDKLER, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>734</sup> C.G. BAËTA, *Prophetism in Ghana* (London: SCM Press, 1962).

<sup>735</sup> David B. BARRETT, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968); BARRETT, *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

<sup>736</sup> M.L. DANEEL, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1971); M.L. DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987).

Turner.<sup>737</sup> Following the work of these scholars, a flood of theses and books on AICs has occurred.<sup>738</sup> The basic proposal of many AIC “theologians” is that the praxis of these churches must now be regarded not only as the best illustration of African Christianity, but also as “enacted”, “oral”, or “narrative” African theology—a type of theology that is no less valid than written African theologies, they would add. In this way, AICs are adding to and becoming a facet of African theology at one and the same time. Furthermore, the numerical growth of these churches<sup>739</sup> means that they have, in many parts of Africa, become, the mainline churches.

These churches, together with similar Christian movements among other primal societies may indeed be seen as the fifth major Christian church type, after the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation, and the Pentecostal Churches.<sup>740</sup>

African theologies will no longer be able to ignore or dismiss the theological significance of the AICs in African Christianity. However, these churches must neither be romanticized nor studied in isolation from other African churches—including the so-called “mainline churches”. In the same way that an African theology based only on a reference to mainline churches is inadequate, so too will any African theology based exclusively on African independent churches.

The tendency to regard AICs as the most authentic, if not as the only authentic African churches, has often created some unhealthy theological rivalry—notably between theologians rather than African Christians—wherein AIC praxis is supposed to be more African, more grassroots-based, more local, and more genuine than so-called written African theologies. I have found such distinctions and theological rivalries to be generally unreliable and artificial—at least in the South African context.<sup>741</sup> The issues are further complicated by the fact that, by and large, authoritative AIC scholars in the twentieth century have been overwhelmingly white (missionaries), with Africans themselves taking a back seat. But African silence on AICs may be a loaded and eloquent one, needing to be decoded and reflected upon. The white missionary domination of AIC studies may

<sup>737</sup> H.W. TURNER, *History of an African Independent Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

<sup>738</sup> Cf. Tinyiko Sam MALULEKE, “Theological Interest in African Independent Churches and Other Grass-Root Communities in South Africa: A Review of Methodologies”, in *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, 10, 1 (May 1996), 18-48.

<sup>739</sup> Cf. BARRETT, *World Christian Encyclopedia*; ANDERSON & OTWANG, *Tumelo*.

<sup>740</sup> Bosch in DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging*, p. 9.

<sup>741</sup> MALULEKE, “Theological Interest”, pp. 18-48.

be attributable to the fact that the emergence of AICs, almost without exception, was initially viewed as a “problem”, “reflection”, or “failure” of missionary work. In many colonial African countries, AICs were supposed to either be political movements (Ethiopianism) or ecclesiastical movements with a political agenda. The call for a distinction between African Christianity, on the one hand, and literature on African Christianity on the other,<sup>742</sup> may help clarify here. Reflection and research on AICs, however excellent and authoritative, must never be equated with the actual praxis of AICs. Yet at the end of the day no serious African theology can ignore either the studies mentioned or the African Christianities displayed in AICs—for research and reality always mirror one another, albeit imperfectly.

## 2. African Charismatic/Evangelical Theology

Not only is African Christianity generally evangelical, if not Pentecostalist in orientation, but there is a sizable body of literature and events that could be said to be representative of a theological strand of African theology. We remember, without necessarily discussing it, the debate between Byang Kato’s evangelical and “biblical” theology and John Mbiti’s alleged “universalist” theology in the 1970s.<sup>743</sup>

Without joining this debate we need to recognize that it demonstrated the existence of a different theological orientation from that which we normally assume when we speak of African theology. All over Africa, evangelicals exist in organized and confessional communities. They are, of course, no less heterogeneous in theological outlook than “ecumenical” African Christians. Within South Africa, one may think of Ray McCauley’s Rhema Church and its affiliates, Michael Cassidy’s Africa Enterprise, and a grouping which has until recently been called “the Concerned Evangelicals”. We must take note of a movement such as the Pan African Leadership Assembly (PACLA).<sup>744</sup> Indeed, there have been tensions and probably justifiable suspicions between PACLA and the AACC,<sup>745</sup> and tensions remain between many sectors of evangelicalism and ecumenism

<sup>742</sup> Bediako, “Five Thesis”, p. 264.

<sup>743</sup> Cf. Byang KATO, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu: Kenya Evangelical Publishing House, 1975); MBITI, *The Bible in African Christianity*, 48f; BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*, 386f.

<sup>744</sup> Michael CASSIDY & Gottfried OSEI-MENSAH, *Together in One Place: The Story of PACLA, December 9-19, 1976* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1978).

<sup>745</sup> CASSIDY & OSEI-MENSAH, *Together in One Place*, p. 31.

all over Africa. But the twenty-first century will not allow us to either ignore or smooth these over. One of the challenges we face, is to seek out all expressions of African theology and Christianity, however inadequate and suspicious, so that we may expose them to serious and dialogical theological reflection. I am not calling for superficial confessional and theological unities. We are better off without those, even if we suffer the terrible situation of denominationalism. My feeling is that in as much as we have seen tensions between evangelicals and ecumenicals in Africa, there are also cases of solidarity in action and theological dialogue between these groups in many African countries. These may serve as a framework for further theological dialogue and partnership. At the end of the day, African theology may be the richer for it.

### 3. Translation Theologies

Elsewhere,<sup>746</sup> I have linked translation theologies to the names of Lamin Sanneh<sup>747</sup> and Kwame Bediako.<sup>748</sup> This, however, must not be taken to mean that Sanneh and Bediako present us with exactly the same agenda. Both of them are important, innovative voices whose thinking bear significant implications for African theology. In a series of works spanning a decade and culminating in his *Translating the Message*, Lamin Sanneh has mounted a passionate argument in defense of both African Christianity and the twentieth century missionary enterprise.<sup>749</sup> The gist of his argument is that the clue to the tremendous growth of African Christianity during this century was the logic of the translatability of the Christian message or gospel into African vernacular languages. This is signified most potently in the historic necessity of translating the Bible into vernacular languages. It is this translatability of the Gospel rather than the agency of missionaries that accounts for African Christianity. Therefore, focus must shift from a preoccupation with missionary omissions and the supposed link between Christianity and colonialism to the “heart of the matter”, namely gospel translatability.

Bediako shares with Sanneh the conviction that it is the translatability of the gospel more than anything else that made large parts of Africa so vastly Christian. He therefore argues that African Christians and

<sup>746</sup> MALULEKE, “Black and African Theologies”, pp. 3-19; MALULEKE, “Recent Developments”, pp. 33-60.

<sup>747</sup> SANNEH, *Translating the Message*.

<sup>748</sup> BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*; BEDIAKO, *Christianity in Africa*.

<sup>749</sup> Cf. MALULEKE, “Black and African Theologies”, pp. 3-19.

theologians alike must let the gospel speak to the African situation, “in its own right”. For this reason Bediako is highly critical of a section of African theologians who insist on assuming that Christianity is foreign to Africa almost as a fundamental datum. Since the gospel is essentially translatable, it no longer makes sense to speak of Christianity as “foreign”; hence he confidently calls African Christianity a “non-western” religion. Bediako admits that the task of African theology is not finished simply because the gospel is translatable. But its essential task is to assist African Christians, theologians, and non-Christian intellectuals alike to exorcise the phantom foreignness of Christianity. While understanding it, Bediako sees African theology’s decades-long preoccupation with both the foreignness of Christianity and the African past as ultimately no longer necessary.

The boldness and projectiveness of Bediako and Sanneh’s proposals are indisputable. But their reliance on dubious distinctions (e.g. gospel versus Christianity) and equations (e.g. Bible equals Word of God) are a serious drawback.<sup>750</sup> Also, the translatability of the gospel does not eliminate the significance of the role of the missionary enterprise or colonialism. While the gospel may indeed be eminently translatable, human intervention can affect the pace and quality of such translation—even arresting it into all sorts of orthodoxies.

#### 4. African Feminist/Womanist Theologies

We have seen an explosion of African women’s theological events, organizations and publications since the mid-eighties. In reality, women’s issues have been on the agenda of such organizations as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), the AACC, local Christian councils, and in para-church organizations since the early 1980s. However, it is a serious indictment of African male theologies that women’s issues have not received immediate and unreserved acceptance.

Within South Africa, the first feminist conference that was predominantly black, was held at Hammanskraal in 1984; immediately followed by a predominantly white feminist conference at the University of South Africa. The Hammanskraal conference noted that, “whereas women form the majority of the oppressed, we note with regret that Black theology has not taken women seriously, but has seen theology as a male domain.”<sup>751</sup> Participants in a Black theology conference held in Cape Town that same

<sup>750</sup> See MALULEKE, “Black and African Theologies”, pp. 3-19.

<sup>751</sup> D. RAMODIBE, “Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa”, in FABELLA & ODUYOYE, *With Passion and Compassion*.

year concurred, albeit cautiously, in their final statement: “There are evidently structures oppressive of women inherent in both the Black community and the Church.”<sup>752</sup> From these tentative beginnings African Feminist/Womanist theology has grown in South Africa.<sup>753</sup> Continentally and internationally one of the significant catalysts for African Feminist/Womanist theology was EATWOT. From its inception, EATWOT has always had a strong contingent of women in its ranks. But the women felt that “our voices were not being heard, although we were visible enough ... We demanded to be heard.” The result was the creation within EATWOT of a Women’s Commission.<sup>754</sup> Within the World Council of Churches (WCC), Oduyoye<sup>755</sup> notes that “it took seven years from its founding for the WCC to establish a department to deal with the issue of cooperation of women and men in church and society”—in the establishment of a Department of Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society. Special note must be taken of the WCC’s “Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women”, which officially ended in August 1998. Some of the “target areas agreed upon [for the Decade] in 1987 were church teachings about women, women and poverty, women and racism, and violence against women.”<sup>756</sup> These ecumenical conferences and events have resulted in chains of local consultations, events, and publications all over the world. A significant consultation of Third World Women took place under the auspices of EATWOT in 1986 at Oaxtepec, Mexico. One of the results of this event was the publication of *With Passion and Compassion*. On the African continent, the Circle of Concerned Women in Theology, as well as its Biennial Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, was established in 1989 in Accra, Ghana.<sup>757</sup> Some of the papers read at the Accra meeting were published in the book *The Will to Arise*. Since then several regional circles have been formed. One specific

<sup>752</sup> RAMODIBE, “Women and Men”, p. 20.

<sup>753</sup> A recent issue of the *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Southern Africa & Africa*, 4, 2 (July 1997) has been devoted to Feminist/Womanist theology in South Africa. It also contains an annotated bibliography on South African Feminist/Womanist works. Cf. also Christina LANDMAN, *The Piety of Afrikaans Women: Diaries of Guilt* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1994); ACKERMANN et al, *Women Hold Up Half the Sky*.

<sup>754</sup> FABELLA & ODUYOYE, *With Passion and Compassion*, p. x.

<sup>755</sup> Mercy Amba ODUYOYE, *Who Will Roll the Stone Away? The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1988), 3.

<sup>756</sup> ODUYOYE, *Daughters of Anowa*, p. 187.

<sup>757</sup> Cf. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The Circle”, in ODUYOYE & KANYORO, *Talitha*.

objective of the circles has been the production of African feminist literature. More recently, the circle has produced the book *Groaning in Faith*.<sup>758</sup> However, it would be a mistake to limit the influence of the Circles, EATWOT, the WCC, or local Christian councils to publications linked directly to their consultations. What these organizations have managed to do is to create space for Feminist/Womanist theology to grow and blossom, not only in Africa but in the wider Third World.

One of the most peculiarly African publications on Feminist theology is Mercy Oduyoye's recent work *Daughters of Anowa*. Whereas Black and African theologies have for the past half-century argued for the validity of African Christianities and the legitimacy of African culture, African Feminist/Womanist theology is charting a new way. This theology is mounting a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways that previous African theologies have not been able to do. From these theologies, we may learn how to be truly African and yet critical of aspects of African culture. African womanist theologians are teaching us how to criticize African culture without denigrating it, showing us that the one does and should not necessarily lead to the other. My prediction is that the twenty-first century is going to produce an even more gendered African theology. All theologians and African churches will be well advised to begin to take heed.

## 5. Theologies of Reconstruction

Leading the pack in the theologies of reconstruction are Kenya's Jesse Mugambi<sup>759</sup> and South Africa's Charles Villa-Vicencio.<sup>760</sup> Although Villa-Vicencio's work was published first,<sup>761</sup> Mugambi had already been propagating the idea of a Theology of Reconstruction in 1990 in the context of AACC consultations.<sup>762</sup> It was, of course, Gorbachev's

<sup>758</sup> Musimbi R.A. KANYORO & Nyambura J. NJOROGE (eds), *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996).

<sup>759</sup> MUGAMBI, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*.

<sup>760</sup> MALULEKE, "Recent Developments"; T.S. MALULEKE, "Review Mugambi, J N K 1995. From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers", in *Missionalia*, 24, 3 (November 1996), 472-473; "African Culture, African Intellectuals and the White Academy in South Africa". MALULEKE, "Recent Developments".

<sup>761</sup> VILLA-VICENCIO, *A Theology of Reconstruction*.

<sup>762</sup> Cf. KARAMAGA, *Problems and Promises*; J.N.K. MUGAMBI, "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future Africa", in J. CHIPENDA, A. KARAMAGA, J.N.K.

“*perestroika*” (reconstruction), which led to the break-up of the old USSR, which helped to popularize the notion of “reconstruction”. For Mugambi, both the inculturation and liberation paradigms within which African theologies had been undertaken were no longer adequate frameworks for doing African theology after the cold war. Both inculturation and liberation responded to a situation of ecclesiastical and colonial bondage. In the place of the inculturation-liberation paradigm, which was, according to Mugambi, mainly “reactive”, we should install a “pro-active” theology of reconstruction. Mugambi’s originality lies in that, instead of calling for the ascendancy of liberation over inculturation or vice-versa (a “game” well-rehearsed in African theologies), he calls for an innovative transcendence of both. For this part, Villa-Vicencio appeals for a post cold-war (African) theology to engage in serious dialogue with democracy, human rights, law-making, nation-building, and economics in order to ensure that these do indeed improve the quality of human life.

My main critique of both Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio is in their assumption that the end of the “cold war” has immediate significance for ordinary Africans and that the so-called “New World Order” is truly “new” and truly “orderly” for Africans. Yet, as Mugambi himself rightly points out, Africa’s problems of poverty, war, dictatorships, and American bully-boy tactics are unlikely to decrease. In fact, the New World Order is not only likely to relegate Africa into a “fourth world” but it will also impose its own prescriptions on African countries. One such prescription is “democracy” or its semblance. I am also critical of the fact that both Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio appear to minimize the value of previous African theologies of inculturation and liberation. Formations such as EATWOT and l’Association oecuménique des théologiens africains (AOTA) in Francophone Africa have done a tremendous amount of theological reflection and construction. Weaknesses notwithstanding, twenty-first century African theologies cannot afford to simply abandon them. We must look for ways in which to move on without despising what has already been achieved. Otherwise we might think we have progressed forward when in reality we have moved backwards.

MUGAMBI & C.K. OMARI (eds), *The Church of Africa: Toward a Theology of Reconstruction* (Nairobi: AACC, 1991); Tinyiko Sam MALULEKE, “The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction: A Critical Appraisal”, in *Missionalia*, 22, 3 (November 1994), 245-258.



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Firstly, I want to restate my basic thesis, the contours of the emerging face of the twenty-first century African theologies must be sought in a thorough grasp of the ground captured so far, plus a keen awareness of new and emerging currents. African theologies are already reassessing their objectives and redefining their agendas. I have tried to indicate some of the ways in which the “traditional agendas” of African theologies may need to be altered. I have also indicated how many of the tags and categories used to describe and differentiate African theologies have become dated. Finally, new African theologies, capable of dealing with the New World Order can only be fashioned out of a vigorous interrogation of such emerging theologies as I have sketched above. What about previous theologies? Am I suggesting that their usefulness consist only in terms of “the ground that they have captured” so that they are of no direct relevance now? No. The issues that were being addressed by these theologies are far from finished. South African Black theology needs to continue its anti-racist critique of African Christianity. It must also develop its tremendous strides in biblical hermeneutics further. Nor have issues of Africanization, enculturation, and identity expired. African theology needs to continue addressing these issues. What I am saying is that in addressing these established and still relevant agendas, Black and African theologies will need to do so in consultation with insights from such emerging theologies as I have sketched above.