

The Quest for African Theology: From Theology as a mere Intellectual Enterprise to Theology as Lived Experience

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-20th century, African theologians have been working to develop what can truly be called African Theology, a theology that is contextual and founded on the African cultural worldview.

A major challenge that affects this enterprise towards an articulation of an authentic African theology is the fact that although a lot has been done already to develop this theology that speaks to and addresses contextual African situations, most of all these efforts has remained at the intellectual level among the theologians and hence has not been translated into the everyday lives of the African Christians. African Theology seems to be merely a classroom theology, a theology that is limited to the walls of academic institutions, an engagement popular only among a small group of intellectuals whom Orobator would call professional Christians.

It is only when African Theology leaves the shelves of academic libraries to enter the homes and hearts of the majority of African Christians today that it can be said to truly impact on the lives of African Christians. The task that lies behind this article is, therefore, an attempt to articulate some reflections on how African theology can leave the classroom as its place of confinement and become expressed in the daily lives of the African Christians.

2. THE QUEST FOR AFRICAN THEOLOGY: TOWARDS A DEFINITION

The African Synod of 1994 asked a very important theological question: how can African Christians become more faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ?¹In the context of this article, that question may be put differently: how can Christian Theology be made more meaningful to an African Christian today? For unless God is talked about (theo-logia) in a way that an African Christian understands - in symbols and language that are not foreign to him/her - that God will remain a strange and far-away God. And how can Africans become faithful witnesses to a stranger God, a God they cannot understand? The result may be a Christian faith that is not only

¹Cf. J. PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 35.

shallow, but that lacks true meaning. This is the background against which African Theology is born.

2.1 What is African Theology?

The African theologian, J.Mbiti, defines African Theology as: “A theology based on the Biblical faith of Africans, and which speaks to the African soul. It is expressed in categories of thought which arise out of the philosophy of the African people. This does not mean it is narrow in outlook (syncretistic). To speak of African Theology involves formulating clearly a Christian attitude to other religions . . .”² One may say, therefore, that African Theology is a reflection about God with an African face, a theological reflection that, though essentially Christian, is done from the perspective of the African context and cultural heritage. It is an attempt to engage in theological reflections that not only uses the language and symbols that an African understands, but most importantly, speaks to and addresses contextual African situations in the light of the Gospel. Since African Theology is rooted in the African cultural heritage, at its core therefore is an African spirituality, the African experience of God’s presence in the universe and its relationship to us his creatures.³ According to Orobator, this spirituality is much older than Christianity. He says succinctly that “when we talk about African Christian spirituality, we need to understand that it is Christianity which is a ‘stranger’ to Africa, not spirituality.”⁴ It is true that for long before the arrival of missionaries, Africans already had their various ways of expressing and celebrating their experience of God. They had priests and priestesses, prayers and forms of worship, shrines, sacred places, sacrifices, taboos, and respect for ancestors.⁵ Africans have always been a very religious people, with a deeply religious consciousness. As such, what African Theology does is to tap into the richness of the African spiritual and cultural heritage. African Theology then explores and taps into the resources of African arts, literature, culture, sculpture and all human academic disciplines. Its reflections stretch beyond the Church’s walls to the office, farm, market, street, and household of the African Christian.⁶ As Orobator metaphorically puts it as the title of his book, it is a “theology brewed in an African pot.”

2.2 Why African Theology?

Since the mid 20th century, African theologians have done a lot to insist that there is a necessity for an African theology. J. Mbiti for example observes clearly that African Christians still feel terribly foreign within the churches to which they belong.⁷ A. Orobator again insists that it is

²Cf. A. SHORTER, *African Christian Theology*, 23.

³Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 128.

⁴A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 129.

⁵Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 129.

⁶Cf. K. APPIAH-KUBI, s. TORRES, ed., *African Theology en route*, viii.

⁷Cf. J. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 19.

⁸Cf. P.W. MPAGI, *African Christian theology*, 19.

not God who is strange to Africans, but the way through which God has been taught to Africans.⁹What these theologians are saying is in short that there is a need for a theology that is deeply rooted in the African cultural context.

Undoubtedly, the desire for African Theology is partly born from the fact that African cultures were not always respected during the early periods of evangelization, especially during the 19th century missionary expansion across Africa. According to the Church historian John Baur:

Perhaps the most fatal mistake of the missionaries was the adoption of the principle of *tabula rasa*; that means that the Europeans thought that the Africans had no proper religion, their hearts were blank pages... This *tabula rasa* concept combined with the strong conviction of the unique rightness of their own faith, lead the missionaries to the method of assimilation that is the implantation of the faith in the form in which they knew and lived it themselves, without any adaptation to the pre-existent religious notions of the people to be evangelized. Therefore, Christianity was not integrated into African life and culture.¹⁰

Of course it is not to be doubted that the efforts, hard work and dedication of many early missionaries towards the spread of the gospel, as rightly described by the Second African Synod (2009), were, indeed, heroic.¹¹ Their fidelity to mission has led to a flourishing African Church today — a reality that must be celebrated.¹² However, it must, also, be said that missionary activities up to Vatican II did not always pay enough attention to African cultures and spirituality. For a long time many African values were often considered satanic and so not to be associated with Christianity. African converts were required to abandon their tradition and the whole of their culture. David Bosch notes that “just as the West’s religion was predestined to be spread around the globe, the West’s culture was to be victorious over all others.”¹³ According to him, the missionaries had a mentality that every nation was *en route* to one world culture and that this culture would be essentially Western, and this was a development all should applaud. Like all other westerners in the Third World, missionaries were to be conscious propagandists of this culture.¹⁴ In many places, even liturgical usage of African drums and local hymns in churches was forbidden. Dancing and clapping were a liturgical taboo.¹⁵ These are some examples of how African cultures were often neglected in the process of evangelization. African theologians argue

⁹Cf. A.E. ORABATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African pot*, 28.

¹⁰ J. BAUR; *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 39,103.

¹¹Cf. *Message of the Second African Synod*, 13.

¹²Cf. *Message of the Second African Synod*, 13.

¹³D. J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission*, 292.

¹⁴D. J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission*, 292.

¹⁵Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 134.

that a theology that truly speaks to an African soul cannot separate an African from his/her Africanness.¹⁶

Orobator on his part insists that being an African, one is not just a Christian but an African Christian. Being an African Christian has serious religious implications.¹⁷ It means that the understanding and living of the faith is unique and different from that of a European or an American or an Asian. And it would be naive to think of separating African religious heritage from who an African is.¹⁸ The fact is that as a people, Africans have embraced something new, a new religion: Christianity. However that does not take away their Africanness.¹⁹ The reality whereby many Africans have one foot in the Christian Church and another in African traditional shrines, where Christians immediately run from their beautifully decorated churches to traditional herbalists and screams at encountering problems, poses an important point to contemplate. It is a clear exposure of the need to make Christianity more meaningful to the African mind. It is such a schizophrenic attitude that Archbishop Peter Akwasi Sarpong (of Ghana) observes, when he writes,

The church does not appear to be speaking to the ordinary African. She has not got the same grip on the African that the traditional religion had. She appears to have become 'a status symbol. In time of crisis many Christians do not hesitate to fall back on their traditional magic or ritualistic devices for assistance... many outmoded customs prevail.²⁰

It is, therefore, hoped that African Theology, if properly done and embraced, should deeply enhance the needed harmony in the life of the African Christian. African theology is to help the African Christian deepen his understanding of the Christian faith, so as to become a more effective witness to the Gospel. The year 1976 saw the foundation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (AOTA) was created within the framework of EATWOT. From their first meeting, the African theologians have expressed their intention to advance theological research in their continent, theological research that will lead to a Christianity that is deeply rooted in the African cultural milieu.²¹

2.3 Sources of African Theology

¹⁶Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 18.

¹⁷Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 18.

¹⁸Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 18.

¹⁹Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 18.

²⁰PETER SARPONG "A View of Africa: the Content and its Church", 2.

²¹Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 261.

The following have been identified by the African theologians as sources of African theology: the contextual African situation of poverty; African Traditional Religion; The Bible; African Independent Churches; and The Christian Tradition.²²

2.3.1 The Contextual African Situation of Poverty

African theology has to be a theology that addresses practical African situations, a theology which tries to relate the Gospel message to the situations in which Africans live and work.²³ One such situation that characterizes Africa today is poverty. The gap between the rich and poor in Africa continues to widen. Terrible diseases thrive in the continent. HIV/AIDS has killed many Africans more than any other disease has. In many places around Africa, people suffer from lack of basic necessities: good roads, healthcare, education, good water, employment, etc. At the same time, we have super— rich Africans who literally waste money and live extravagant lives. We have corrupt governments who make empty promises to the populace, but end of looting government funds. Africa is a continent blessed with so many resources that could have enriched every African. Yet such resources are being constantly mismanaged by the elites. Apart from material poverty, there is the spiritual, moral, cultural, and sociological poverty.²⁴ There are places in Africa where citizens are deprived of their own freedom of speech, religion, their human dignity, etc. People's lives in many parts of the continent have been abused by wars and conflicts. Families and communities have been torn apart by these events.

African Theology therefore has to enter into the world of the oppressed and marginalized of society. It is a theology that embraces the realities of slums, ghettos, prisons, refugee camps, etc. It is a theology that should emphasize and work practically at community building and development.²⁵ This would include a strong affirmation of the individual and his/her dignity and freedom as a human person, irrespective of color, ethnic or religious origin, etc.²⁶ There is great belief in witchcraft today among Africans. This leaves many devastated and terribly afraid. As Peter Sarpong notes, “a witchcraft mentality persists.”²⁷ African bishops also affirm this when they note that “witchcraft is tearing villages and urban societies apart.”²⁸ African Theology must get fully involved in these issues. African Theology must be a theology that challenges the powerful, the elites, the governments and even religious powers around Africa towards their respect and justice for the poor and marginalized of society. It must also be a theology that will not only identify and empathize with the poor, but goes as far as helping and teaching the poor to work hard in order to get out of their difficult situations. More importantly, African Theology must challenge the corrupt and sinful structures which create this unjust division in society.

²²Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 56.

²³Cf. A. CHEPKWONY, “Theological Trends in Africa”, 10.

²⁴Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 61.

²⁵Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 70.

²⁶Cf. M. AMALADOSS, “Cross-inculturation of Indian & African Christianity”, 167

²⁷PETER SARPONG “A view of Africa: the Content and its Church”, 2.

²⁸ Second African Synod, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 32.

2.3.2 African Traditional Religion

Many scholars have argued that among the important foundations on which African Christian Theology must be based, African Traditional Religion is among the prominent ones. The main material for African Theology must come from Africa and its traditional religions.²⁹ Africans are traditionally a deeply religious and hence morally conscious people. Differently put, an African has a great sense of the Sacred.³⁰ It is that sense of the Sacred that leads him/her to great respect for life; life in all its forms — in family, ancestors, parents, community, sexuality, marriage, etc. The respect and dignity for life, therefore, sum up the great values inherent in the African morality. Africans have to recognize their rich religious heritage and tap from them.³¹

2.3.3 The Bible

Because God's revelation in Jesus Christ is contained in the Bible, the Bible must be a great source of African “theology.”³² The Bible is not simply an historical book. Through the Scripture, God speaks to us in our situation. Many scholars have argued that in Africa many are enthusiastic about the word of God.³³ Indeed one of the African scholar Mpagi carried out a research a few years ago from which he realized that in most instances at least more than 90% of the preaching both in churches and the street was based on the Bible.³⁴ It is therefore true that African Theology must be solely built on an African understanding of scripture as the only true and infallible Word of God.³⁵ Having the Bible as a main source of African Theology would entail proper and careful translations of the Bible to African languages for the understanding of African peoples.

2.3.4 African Independent Churches

One cannot overlook the influence and flourishing of the so-called Independent Churches in Africa. They are everywhere! Some African theologians have therefore suggested that looking into these churches may yield positive fruits for African Theology. Many have given reasons why African Independent Churches should be a major source of African theology: they show the way through which the Christian worship can be adapted to suit the African worldview; they incarnate African Christianity to suit our strong sense of community as obvious in

²⁹Cf. A. CHEPKWONY, “Theological Trends in Africa”, 4.

³⁰Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 54.

³¹Cf. A. CHEPKWONY, “Theological Trends in Africa”, 2.

³²Cf. A. CHEPKWONY, “Theological Trends in Africa”, 4

³³Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 89.

³⁴Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 90.

³⁵Cf. A. CHEPKWONY, “Theological Trends in Africa”, 12.

congregational participations; they emphasize on the scriptures, etc.³⁶ Consequently, proper dialoguing with African Independent Churches would give some valuable insights into the needs of African Christians.³⁷

2.3.5 Christian Tradition

It is simply not possible to talk about an African Christian Theology without the Christian tradition. Christian Tradition is, therefore, an important source of African Theology. Mbiti notes that Christian Tradition will provide African theologians huge insights into their apostolic heritage, the catholicity of the Church and ecumenism.³⁸ Hence, there is need for honest dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion.³⁹ Through Christian Tradition, African theologians will also be able to understand Christ and the Christian teaching from the Western perspective. The importance of Christian Tradition to African Theology is also born from the fact that a lot of the Christian Tradition was shaped by early African theologians like Augustine Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, and Athanasius etc. Thus, Africa has its own theological heritage in the Christian Tradition.⁴⁰

2.4 Possibility of African Theology in a Modern, Secularized Africa

A big question that has been posed to African Theology is: is African Theology possible in an ever-growing secular and modern African society? Is the talk about African cultural heritage not merely a matter of cultural romanticism? It is true that a contemporary African society is characterized by both a breakdown in traditionalism, and an ever-growing modernity. There is, no doubt, the reality of growing cities, technology, mobile phones, internet, etc. Modern civilization has also ushered in a new socio-cultural cum political reality that is characterized by secular realities like science and technology, democracy, liberalism, to mention but a few. These realities now, to a significant extent, do affect many African societies today. However, despite all these, what I see are a people who are definitely not shedding off their deep cultural roots, people who still hold tightly to their hearts their cultural heritage while accepting and using different aspects of modernity. Bénédet Bujo offers his assessment thus:

Sub-Saharan Africa is in a process of change. Modern technology has influenced the African people to an extent that seems to make the breakdown of traditional values obvious. Contrary to this impression, however, the African religious tradition continues to survive. In existentially critical situations, even the intellectual elite and the loyal church-goers return to their forefathers' practices. Apparently, to them the challenges to existential problems cannot be solved within a technologically oriented society or within the churches of foreign origin. Considering this, it seems right to admit that the ancestral tradition still influences the African down to his very roots. If this is ancestral tradition is indispensable for the

³⁶Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 100-103.

³⁷Cf. M. AMALADOSS, "Cross-inculturation of Indian & African Christianity", 167

³⁸Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 105.

³⁹Cf. A. CHEPKWONY, "Theological Trends in Africa", 14.

⁴⁰Cf. P. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 109.

announcement of the Christian message as well as for coping with conflicts that result from the modern world of technology.⁴¹

Despite the unfortunate cultural invasion caused by colonialism, African cultures are still alive. This vitality is seen in the revival of African languages, dances, music and literature and in its contribution to human sciences and to the human ' ' stalia for an experience.⁴² The purpose of African Theology, therefore, is not Just no g African past or a wishful cultural romanticism. As Bujo notes, it is no dream of recreating a “Paradise Lost” in modern Africa. Neither is it an idealizing of the past or treating it as an idol simply because one is African. No! “Africans want to bring the world of their ancestors to new life in their world, for only thus can they find true life for themselves and for their children?”⁴³ What is, thus, needed is a new synthesis. It is not a question of replacing the God of the African but rather of enthroning the God of Jesus Christ, not as the rival of the God of the ancestors, but as identical with him.⁴⁴

2.5 African Theology as a Contextual Theology

In his book, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Stephen B. Bevans defines contextual theology as a way of doing theology in which one takes into account the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the church; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change within that culture.⁴⁵ According to Bevans, contextual theology is a way of understanding the Christian faith not only on the basis of Scripture and tradition - the two main theological sources of reflection of classical/traditional theology — but also on the basis of concrete culturally conditioned human experience. Bevans notes that this is not to say that contextual theology is anti-Scripture; neither is it anti-tradition. In fact, it is nourished by Scripture and appropriates the teachings of the Church in a critical manner. Through concepts, symbols, stories and other forms of expression it has received from the Church it reflects on the “raw experience” of people.⁴⁶ African Theology is a contextual theology, a theology that is deeply rooted in the African perspective and worldview. As Bénézet Bujo puts it, African Theology must take into full account the actual African situation.⁴⁷ Consequently, inculturation and liberation become the two foci of a contemporary African Theology.

2.6 Inculturation and Liberation as two sides of African Theology

Until the 1990s, African Theology was largely divided into three different currents: African theology, Black theology in South Africa, and Liberation theology.⁴⁸ African Theology (i.e. the

⁴¹B. BUJO, *The Ethical Dimension of community*, 15.

⁴²Cf. B. BUJO —J. ILUNGA, *African Theology*, 268.

⁴³Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 55.

⁴⁴Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 16.

⁴⁵Cf. S. BEVANS, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 1.

⁴⁶Cf. S. BEVANS, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 1.

⁴⁷Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 71.

⁴⁸Cf. K. APPIAH-KUBI, s. TORRES, ed., *African theology en route*, 192.

first current) was focused on culture, seeking to give African expression to the Christian faith. Black theology focused on politics and the issues of race and color, particularly in South Africa. Liberation theology, influenced by the Latin American model, focused simply on poverty and other economic realities of the people.⁴⁹ Today, however, African Theology seems to have merged the above currents into two main foci: Inculturation and Liberation.⁵⁰ Understandably, the end of apartheid in South Africa has led to a lessening of emphasis on Black theology.

2.6.1 Inculturation

Inculturation, as an aspect of African Theology, focuses on the African cultural heritage. This is against the background of a Christian evangelization that did not always take into account the local realities and cultures of the African people. Some African theologians strongly feel that the neglect of African cultures in early Christian evangelization led to a huge anthropological poverty among African Christians, and any attempt to incarnate the Christian message in Africa may never be successful without taking African heritage into account.⁵¹ According to J. Ukpong, it is the task of theologians to re-think and re-express the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu so that there is inter-penetration to both, a genuine integration of faith and culture.⁵²

Different documents of Vatican II Council reveal not only a deep respect for cultures, but deeper ways of incarnating the Gospel in them. *Gaudium et Spes* (53) rightly notes that people come to a true and full humanity only through culture; and as such, nature and culture can never be separated. Other documents of the council note that traditions (of non-Christians) do have “seeds of contemplation” (A G, 18), “rays of truth” (NA, 2), “elements which are true and good” (LG, 16), and have also “spiritual and moral good” (NA, 2). The main emphasis of Vatican II, therefore, is on the need to let the revealed Word be incarnate in every culture.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the same Pope Paul VI asserts that the gospel which is proclaimed is lived by people who are deeply linked to culture. As such “the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements of human culture and cultures” (EN, 50). In *Centesimus Annus* (51), John Paul II notes that all human activity takes place within a culture and interacts with culture. Consequently, “if the Gospel does not penetrate human nature, man will not believe with all his humanity.”⁵³ In his 1982 Letter for the Foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, John Paul II stated clearly that: “The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a requirement

⁴⁹Cf. K. APPIAH-KUBI, s. TORRES, ed., *African theology en route*, 192.

⁵⁰Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 15-16.

⁵¹ Cf. B. BUJO, *African theology in its Social context*, 7.

⁵²Cf. E. MARTEY, *Africa Theology Inculturation and Liberation*, 68.

⁵³Cf. E. PACELLI, ed., *The Good Earth*, 167.

of culture but of faith too. A faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully accepted, entirely thought through and lived faithfully.”⁵⁴

Given all this, there is no way African theology should treat inculturation as no business.

2.6.2 Liberation

Liberation is the struggle against post-colonial oppression and dictatorship, both domestic and foreign.⁵⁵ It is the struggle against the unjust structures that inhibit that true human freedom that Jesus came to bring. If Jesus came that all may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10), then it is not enough to speak of anthropological poverty (which inculturation seeks to address) without confronting the oppression and injustices of the post-colonial era. Theology must inspire and support liberation or it is no effective theology. As Bujo notes, African Theology has a contribution to make to the liberation of people towards life in its fullness. This dimension of liberation persists through all social, political and economic changes.⁵⁶ It is the struggle for emancipation from the forces of domination, oppression, and social injustice - neo-colonialism and internal colonialism. According to Magesa, authentic liberation and emancipation in Africa, consists of cultural, religious, structural and psycho-spiritual liberation.⁵⁷

A key aspect of liberation theology that I must mention is that of Women’s liberation theology. Indeed one cannot talk about liberation theology in Africa without acknowledging African Women’s Liberation Theology as one of the latest theological scenes in Africa, that is, a theological reflection from a female perspective.⁵⁸ Prominent proponents of this theology include: Odudoye, Teresa Okure, Elizabeth Amoah, Louise Tappa, Therese Souga, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, among others.⁵⁹ While African Women’s liberation theologians share (with their male counterparts) the vision for inculturation and liberation in Africa, there is a unique aspect to their approach which is their strong critique of cultural marginalization and oppression of women in African societies. Furthermore, African Women theologians argue that, in their expression of themselves about God, women often model themselves on male theology. They insist that such a male theology cannot fully liberate womenfolk.⁶⁰ Hence, there is a need to do theology from the female perspective, a need to integrate women’s experiences and understanding of the world into theology.⁶¹

3. CHALLENGES FACING AFRICAN THEOLOGY TODAY

⁵⁴Cf. E. PACELLI, ed., *The Good Earth*, 170.

⁵⁵ Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 15

⁵⁶Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 16.

⁵⁷Cf B. BUJO—J. ILUNGA, *African Theology*, 23 7.

⁵⁸Cf F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 176.

⁵⁹Cf F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 176.

⁶⁰Cf F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 179.

⁶¹Cf F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 179.

It has been widely observed that African theology is faced with a lot of challenges today classified as: intellectual, social and cultural challenges. It has been perceived that this discipline has remained far too academic. In other words, it has made little or no impact on the lives of most African Christians today. As BénézetBujo puts it, it only amounts to a lot of talk about African Theology While things have hardly gone beyond a preliminary daring ground.⁶²

3.1 Intellectual Challenges Facing African Theology Today

It is important to note that African Theology as an academic discipline is still very young.⁶³ Consequently, there exist only few committed African theologians today. However, a theology that will and should impact effectively on African minds and hearts can never be achieved only by a few individuals. As an African proverb goes, it takes a bunch (of broom) to sweep. The point here is that it would take many Mbitis, Magesas, Bujos, Orobators — many committed African theologians - to explore, develop and promote African Theology. Therefore, the limited number of theologians interested in and actually doing African Theology today is a significant challenge facing African Theology today. Among the few African theologians doing African theology, there is a concern that they are still far from the vision of incarnating the gospel in the African context. An example may be made of two of such prominent theologians: John Mbiti and Charles Nyamiti. According to Bénézet Bujo, Mbiti's special effort was to try and compare African concepts with biblical message. While the material he collects and the parallels he draws between the biblical and African world views are important, they still call for serious, further, theological research.⁶⁴ On the other hand, according to Bujo, Charles Nyamiti is more ambitious than Mbiti. "He tries to restate in systematic fashion the Catholic dogmatic tradition in terms of African tradition, drawing on ethnological material"⁶⁵ For Bujo, Nyamiti actually goes beyond simple anthropology into genuine theological research, thereby transcending a mere preliminary clearing of the ground and proceeding to tackle the propositions of theology itself.⁶⁶ However, the problem with Nyamiti is that he tries to fashion his African theology on the model of the European speculative tradition. Bujo accuses him of taking the propositions of European scholastic and neo-scholastic thought as his starting point. It is as though Nyamiti simply will wants to rebuild the scholastic or neo-scholastic edifice using African rather than scholastic or neo-scholastic terminologies.⁶⁷ When you do that, African theology as a contextual theology loses its ground. What the African Church needs is to uncover the vital elements of African culture which are stamped on the African soul.

⁶²Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 73.

⁶³Cf. PW Mum, *African Christian Theology*, 43.

⁶⁴Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 67.

⁶⁵Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 67.

⁶⁶Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 67.

⁶⁷Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 68.

As Bujo notes, “once the African heritage has been clearly understood, then it can be placed alongside the biblical and patristic traditions, and progress will be possible.”⁶⁸ Any academic discipline needs a conducive space in which to grow and develop. African Theology cannot be an exception. In Africa today, there is the challenge of providing a conducive and safe space where African scholars, especially young African minds, can actually do critical and reflective works regarding African Theology. Of course, such space would enhance critical, rigorous researches, and explorations. Arguably, a possible and effective facilitator of such an environment would be academic institutions around Africa. But the question is: how many (African) institutions, colleges, organizations, etc. are willing and able to provide such a space? Perhaps, only a few! As Orobator rightly argues, theology in Africa is still done only by a little group of professional Christians.⁶⁹ If African Theology is left for only a few intellectual elites, how can it be of any impact to the majority of African Christians? There are many seminaries across Africa (places where future African ministers of the gospel are trained) that have little or no interest in promoting African Theology. If future missionaries have no knowledge of African Theology, they will continue to be as Western as possible in their pastoral approaches in ministry across Africa. African Theology needs a persuasive, well thought-out method on which to develop and grow.

The challenge facing African Theology today is that it seems to be still grappling with its foundation: methodology, definitions, and concepts etc. At the moment for instance, there are still wide-ranging debates on the definition of the term African Theology itself. African theologians are still debating on whether they are doing African Theology or African Christian Theology. Some theologians like Philip Turner feel that African theology is not a proper term as it gives the impression of returning to paganism.⁷⁰ Others like John Mbiti, however, favor the term African Theology, seeing it as the best description of the subject.⁷¹ The point here is that there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of laying a good, solid foundation for African Theology to flourish. And if African theologians themselves are not convinced about that project, it would be difficult to convince leaders of the Church and Christians themselves of the value of African Theology. History is important, and it would be naive to ignore the place of history while dealing with African Theology. The fact is that African Theology was partly born from a background of deep-seated dissatisfaction with, and even protest against western (Christian) ideologies that many African intellectuals consider even dehumanizing for Africans.⁷² One may, therefore, argue that African Theology started as a reaction against foreign theologies and ideologies. Two events are worth mentioning: the neglect by some early missionaries of important traditional practices and beliefs in Africa; and the sub-human judgment passed on Africans, especially by some scholars in the Western academic world — a judgment typified by (the philosopher) G.

⁶⁸Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 68.

⁶⁹Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 9.

⁷⁰Cf. P.W. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 31.

⁷¹Cf. P.W. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 32.

⁷²Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology*, 8.

Hegel's argument against the full humanity and moral capacity of Africans.⁷³ The point here is that such history still has an intellectual impact on Africans and especially among African scholars today. To be frank many African thinkers and scholars would still associate Western ideologies with racism or colonialism. This could be easily perceived in the (often angry) writings of some African theologians against the Western method of theology.⁷⁴ We therefore see a situation where such history has either led to rebellion against perceived Western ideologies among some Africans or a sense of inferiority on the part of others. African Theology ought to be done from the perspective of what African traditions offer to the deepening of the Christian faith and not merely as a tool meant to criticize Western-oriented theology.

As Orobator insists, African Theology must be a theology that makes sense even to non-professional Christians - ordinary men and women of faith.⁷⁵ This is a big challenge for African Theology today. African Theology would need theological concepts that speak clearly to the people. Again, not only do African theological concepts need to be clearly chosen and explained, such concepts should be understood even by non-professional African Christians. The challenge is: in a continent where there exist huge differences in cultural values, symbols, languages, etc., how do you explain theological concepts to the understanding of all? Another challenge faced by African Theology is syncretism syncretism is the mingling together of different philosophies and religions, to the point of creating hybrid forms of philosophy or religion.⁷⁶

Syncretism for African Theology would mean a theology which is torn between traditional African beliefs and the Christian faith which would mean a mixture of different religious beliefs and practices into a single theology.⁷⁷ How does African Theology handle this? The reality is that many, especially in the Church's leadership, are simply afraid of syncretism.

3.2 Social Challenges Facing African Theology:

African Theology has to be a theology that is well situated in the African social context. As Mpagi argues, it must be built in the African particular living and social conditions.⁷⁸ African Theology must be a theology that addresses the many questions regarding the contemporary social realities of African people. Fittingly, Orobator defines Theology as faith seeking understanding love and hope.⁷⁹ Perhaps those three important components, understanding, love and hope may help explore well the social challenges facing African Theology in Africa today. An African Christian of today wants to understand! He/she seeks understanding of God and the Christian teachings, amidst the social conditions that he/she faces. How does African Theology

⁷³Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 48.

⁷⁴P.W. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 19.

⁷⁵Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 9.

⁷⁶Cf. A. Chepkwony, "Theological Trends in Africa", 13.

⁷⁷Cf. A. Chepkwony, "Theological Trends in Africa", 13.

⁷⁸Cf. P.W. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 57.

⁷⁹Cf. A.E. OROBATOR, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 16.

help Africans to understand God in today's society? To a great extent, Africa today is a different society from that in which our grandparents and even parents grew up.

Amidst secularism that has impacted on contemporary African minds and living, how can African Theology still help people in their seeking to understand God? Africans need and want the experience of love — true love! For so long, we have witnessed a lot of hatred on the continent. Africa has seen many wars. Many have died through violence and killings. An African Christian, therefore, yearns for love among God's peoples. It is the lack of that love that shocked many people about the 1994 Rwandan genocide - in a predominantly Christian country! It is that love that one fails to see in the conflict situations that cut across African countries today. As Mpagi notes, African Theology is the type of theology that should make the people of Africa true followers of Christ and help them live harmoniously with one another as children of the same Father.⁸⁰ How does African Theology deepen the concept of love and make it more practical and experiential in Africa today?

3.3 Cultural Challenges Facing African Theology

Our society today has greatly moved away from the African traditional settings of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* - a society where traditional cultures and practices still made a lot of sense to people. As a result, many Africans of present generation are removed from the ancient African society- Many, for instance, have moved away from traditional settings to urban settings. Moreover, Western education and influence has impacted hugely on young Africans. Consequently, African stories, traditions, concepts, etc. may sound strange to many young Africans today. How does African Theology explain the concepts of witchcraft, libation, evil, diviner, African proverbs, etc. to the younger generation? The challenge of African Theology will be how to face such a cultural shift; how to impact positively on young African minds and more importantly, how to pass on such knowledge (of an African-oriented theology) to future generations of Africans — generations that may even be more alienated from their African room.

Religious pluralism is a cultural reality that is very significant in Africa today- African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam have all strong influences in Africa As Martey argues, African theology does not Only need to respect the otherness, but also needs to listen to the perspectives of other religions regarding realities in Africa.⁸¹ The question is: to what extent does African Theology allow other religions to influence it? Again how far can it respect the other in such a way that it does not lose its identity as a Christian Theology?

Ethnicity has been a big issue not only in African politics but also in the religious circle today. As such, ethnic pluralism cannot be ignored in African Theology. Ethnicity often raises huge conflicts as clearly typified in the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994. However, as Martey rightly notes, there are also positive sides to ethnic

⁸⁰Cf. P.W. MPAGI, *African Christian Theology*, 2.

⁸¹Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology*, 40.

pluralism, namely the richness that could be tapped from each culture.⁸² The challenge of African Theology is, therefore, to explore both the positive and negative aspects of ethnic pluralism, find ways of tackling the negatives aspects, while using the positives to enhance and promote unity and harmony in Africa.

Inculturation has been one area where a lot of talk has been done by African theologians, but little action. There seems to be great fear not only on the part of church leaders, but even the people around this subject. While the African hierarchy has officially adopted a theology of incarnation as its official policy, there have been more words than actions. This leaves one wondering: how serious is the commitment of the bishops of Africa to a truly effective incarnation of Christianity in Africa?"⁸³ Or perhaps African theologians have not explained and "marketed" enough the essence of inculturation. Also, there is the reality of cultural diversity in Africa. This poses, too, a significant challenge to inculturation. African inculturationists often focus on their particular cultures to express their theological reflections.⁸⁴ While inculturation may be rooted in individual cultures, can theologians dig deeper into common grounds for inculturation amidst diverse cultures and worldviews?

Language pluralism is another challenge facing African Theology today. Language plays an immeasurable role in African cultures. Consequently, theological reflections in Africa would be of less-value if it were only done in foreign languages. However, the lack of a common African language poses a challenge to African Theology.⁸⁵ African Theology - if its works must impact on many. It has to speak the language and idioms that even the uneducated understands.

4. TOWARDS AFRICAN THEOLOGY BECOMING A TRUE LIVED EXPERIENCE

If African Theology must be an effective theology, it has to impact on the lives of the majority of African Christians. Perhaps the biggest challenge for African theologians is to translate the theoretical work into action.

4.1 Practical Implementation of Inculturation

4.1.1 Use of the Bible

African Theology regards the Bible as one of its important sources. This brings home the fact that no theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture.⁸⁶ As Scripture is the

⁸²Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology*, 43.

⁸³Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 71.

⁸⁴Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology*, 43.

⁸⁵Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology*, 45-46.

⁸⁶Cf. K. APPIAH-KUBI, s. TORRES, ed., *African theology en route*, 81.

primary witness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, it is needless to say there can be no Christian theology without the Bible.⁸⁷

For the African Christian, the Bible plays a central role in his/her spiritual nourishment. Statistics show that every year, over 5 million Bibles are distributed across Africa.⁸⁸ There is no doubt, then, that the Bible has been identified as a "major contributor" to the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa.⁸⁹ What this means for African Theology is that while many African Christians may not have the opportunity of reading works by African theologians, there - in their very homes - is that important book: the Bible. And, thanks to the efforts made in translating it, many can now read the Bible in their own local dialects, in languages they can understand. The Bible provides an opportunity that African theologians can use in their bid to contextualize the Christian faith.

While Bibles may well be available in most African Christian homes, a critical question worth asking is: how do African Christians read the Bible? Do African Christians read the Bible with their African context in mind? If they did, at least some vision of African Theology would have materialized. Unfortunately- Justin Ukpong explains that many, if not most, African Christians lack a contextual approach to reading the Scriptures.⁹⁰

Such a dogmatic approach to reading the Bible is simply counterproductive to the realization of the dreams of African Theology. When there is no contextual interpretation of the Bible, one is not able to talk of (biblically-oriented) liberative actions in the socio-political and economic orders of society. As such a dogmatic (fundamentalist) reading of the Bible leads to what Ernest E. Munachi terms a "one-dimensional Christianity".

One-dimensional Christians are those who are very vertically oriented, but have no horizontally bearing: they believe in God, they don't believe in the world that God created; they hope to see God in heaven, they don't work for God's kingdom on earth by a life dominated by love God, humanity and God's creation. For such Christians, the social order, the human community is irredeemably evil, so they should have as little concern for and interaction with it as they possibly can.⁹¹

To deepen the ideals of African Theology, the Bible - as its important source needs to be inculturated. African Christians need to be helped to read the Scriptures contextually, if it is to touch on their socio-cultural contexts as stressed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.⁹² Different local churches are called upon to make every effort to convert this

⁸⁷Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology*, 71.

⁸⁸Cf. A. SHORTER - al., *Towards African Christian Maturity*, 90.

⁸⁹Cf. J MBITI, *Bible and Theology In African Christianity*, 12.

⁹⁰J. S. UKPONG, "Interpreting the Bible in African Contexts," 16-17.

⁹¹EZEUGU, "Essays in African Theology", <<http://www.munachi.com/t/bibleculture1.h1>

⁹²Cf. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 62.

foreign form of biblical inculturation into another form more closely corresponding to the culture of their own land.⁹³

In essence, for African Theology to be truly contextual there is need for an African hermeneutic. And this should be an important task for African theologians. There has to be an encounter between the Biblical text and the African context.⁹⁴ It requires the explicit engagement of the biblical text with a specific context - in this case the African context.⁹⁵ According to Magesa, the understanding and interpretation of the Bible and Christianity in Africa has been so privatized that the majority of the followers of the Word have been deprived of their privilege to “listen to it within the context of their own ⁹⁶situations. African Christians must not read the Bible as an end product, but as a dynamic word of God which speaks and continues to speak to their Situations, As the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians notes:

The Bible is not simply a historical book about the People of Israel; through a rereading of this Scripture in the social context of our struggling for our humanity, God speaks to us in the midst of our troublesome situation. ⁹⁷

4.1.2 Liturgy

The liturgy is certainly a major area in which the impact of African Theology may be practically felt. P. Schineller explains that if a liturgical worship is to be genuine, it ought to reflect the faith experience of the community which celebrates it.⁹⁸ This points to the importance of inculturating the liturgy.

A remarkable achievement of Vatican II was its openness to liturgical reforms. The Council outlined the possibilities of such reforms in three stages: the revision and translation of liturgical texts into local languages (SC 36); adaptations of already established texts according to the needs of local churches (SC 37.40), and a “more radical adaptation of the liturgy” (SC 40) which may include (though not explicitly stated) a new form of liturgical celebration of the Mass for a particular region ⁹⁹ These provide a rich opportunity for African theologians Committed to the inculturation process. However, the big question is: how have these opportunities been utilized fifty years after the Council. Let us evaluate the Progress so far.

Certainly significant steps have been made regarding the first stage of liturgical inculturation in the African churches. The Bible, for instance, has been translated into a number of different African languages across the continent. Local languages are being used in liturgical celebrations. Instruments (drums, gongs, etc), hand clapping, dancing etc. have become part of liturgical

⁹³ PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 2.

⁹⁴ Cf. J.S. UKPONG, “Developments in Biblical interpretation in Africa: Historical and hermeneutic directions”, 3-18.

⁹⁵ Cf. J.N MUGAMBI, J.A. SMIT, ed., *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics*, 24.

⁹⁶ Cf. B. BUJO, I. ILUNGA, ed., *African Theology*, 241.

⁹⁷ Cf. K. APPIAH-KUBI, S. TORRES, ed., *African theology en route*, 81.

⁹⁸ Cf. P. SCHINELLER, “Inculturation of the Liturgy”, 599.

⁹⁹ Cf. F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 122.

celebrations. Efforts have been made, too, to embrace local arts evident in locally-designed vestments, sacred images and paintings.¹⁰⁰ These developments, somehow, have given an African face to our liturgies. But enough has not been done in this area.

There are many African Churches today who still go for Western styled architecture and designs. Why continue to import images from abroad when there are local arts more culturally relevant to the African mind?

The second stage of liturgical reform allowed for adaptations of already established rites according to the needs of local Churches. According to the document, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the Episcopal Conferences were to initiate such adaptations (SC 22; 39). Here, it is important to note some significant adaptations that have been made by some local churches. In many parts of African, liturgical adaptation has been effected in areas like liturgical music, cultural rituals like naming etc. However, there seems to be still too few of such adaptations seen in local churches. And yet areas like Baptism, marriage, confirmation, adult initiation offer a rich soil for inculturation. Take an area like marriage, for instance. Many African Christians today have to celebrate three forms of marriage: customary, civil and religious. Is it not possible to integrate the customary and Christian rites?

Regarding the last stage of the liturgical reform, a few positive steps have also been made in some African churches. Worthy of mention are the Zairean mass and the Ndzon-melen Mass in the diocese of Yaounde, Cameroun. The Zairean mass was approved by the Holy See in 1988. The Ndzon-rnelen Mass has not yet been “approved- even though well received by the local church in Yaounde.¹⁰¹ The Church in Zaire began her research into a possible Zairean rite of mass in 1969. That effort finally led to the approval of the Zairean Eucharistic liturgy by the Holy See. The main elements of the Zairean Eucharistic liturgy can be summarized thus; firstly, the Liturgy of the Word which is made up of the following elements; entrance procession (announced and accompanied with hymns and rhythmic swaying), invocation of the ancestors in the faith, Glory to God or any other song of joy (during which there is dance around the altar), Collect, reading, Gospel, homily, Creed: penitential rite, kiss of peace, and prayer of the faithful.¹⁰² The most innovative part is the invocation of ancestors. As African Theology notes, Africans have a highly deep respect for ancestors.¹⁰³

4.1.3 Catechesis

Catechesis provides another good opportunity for inculturation. It is through catechetical instruction that people learn the “fundamental teachings, the living content of the truth which

¹⁰⁰Cf. F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 121. .

¹⁰¹Cf F. A. OBORJI, *Trends m African Theology Since Vatican II*, 122.

¹⁰²Cf. F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 125.

¹⁰³Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 77.

God has wished to convey to us and which the Church has sought to express...”¹⁰⁴ Catechesis must be inculturated. According to the General Catechetical Directory, catechesis involves the passing on of the Gospel message of salvation and liberation in such a way that it penetrates the very core of people and society, “going to the very centre and roots of their culture”.¹⁰⁵ John Paul II in *Catechesi Tredendae*, observes the weakness of the traditional model of doing catechesis:

In the beginnings of Christian Catechesis, which coincided with a civilization that was mainly oral, recourse was had very freely to memorization. Catechesis has since then known a long tradition of learning the principal truths by memorizing. We are all aware that this method can present certain disadvantages, not the least of which is that it lends itself to insufficient or at times to almost non-existent assimilation, reducing all knowledge to formulas that are repeated without being properly understood.¹⁰⁶

African theologians, therefore, have a legitimate responsibility of exploring ways in which catechesis can be properly inculturated. This entails paying attention to the culture of the people, seeing and embracing in that culture all that contain the Gospel value and purifying what may contradict the Gospel.¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that African bishops did propose an alternative approach to traditional catechesis called life-centered catechesis.¹⁰⁸ It was supposed to contextualize catechesis in such a way that the culture and practical living situations of the catechumens are brought into it, a catechesis built on African values. The truth is that many local churches have still not put such an approach into practice. In most parts of Kenya for example, catechesis is still the old memory work!

One valuable aspect of African culture that may not have been properly tapped from in catechesis is African oral traditions: proverbs, myths, stories, riddles, etc. As a child, my parents instructed me, many times, using proverbs — some of them I never forget. It is amazing the power that African proverbs have in communication, the imagery that just sticks to the mind. The use-of proverbs in catechesis would give a really African face to explaining the faith. These would make the communication of the faith more appealing to the African ears.

4.1.4 Morality

Another area of inculturation which African Theology may deepen is Christian morality. Christian morality has many values meant to uphold human dignity in different Spheres of life. However, the morality preached by Christianity on its arrival in Africa lacked a fundamental approach to true Christian morality¹⁰⁹ It was morality focused merely on strict laws — do’s and

¹⁰⁴ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ *General Directory for Catechesis*, 98.

¹⁰⁶ J. PAUL II, *Catechesi Tredendae*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ *General Catechetical Directory*, 204.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. M. OTUNGA, “African Culture and Life-centred Catechesis”, 27-28.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 46.

don'ts. Great emphasis was put on sins to the utter downplay of virtues. According to Bujo, the human person is not just supposed to be enslaved, as it were, by empty laws, or coerced to do what is right. Instead, as the image of God — with awareness of his/her human dignity — the human person is supposed to be guided by his/her open conscience towards moral responsibility.¹¹⁰

Morality for an African is horizontal in nature; i.e. it is all connected to humans.¹¹¹ Not only does an African see evil as coming from humans (and not God), he/she also remains in a deep spiritual connection with the ancestors, who have both the powers to bless as well as punish.¹¹² Differently put, an African has a great sense of the Sacred. It is that sense of the Sacred that leads him/her to great respect for life; life in all its forms - in family, ancestors, parents, community, sexuality, marriage, etc.

In many African Societies, the more children one had, the more respected he/she was in society. The question is: should traditional values regarding procreation make African parents continue to bear the number of children they cannot properly provide for? The answer is no! There are also many African women today who see polygamy as oppressive to women.¹¹³ Isn't it time African societies heed their outcry? In some African cultures, in case of divorce or death of the husband, the wife lost all rights.¹¹⁴

Having explored the cores of both African and Christian morality, one observes that though African and Christian moralities may take different approaches (e-g. African morality being anthropocentric; while Christian morality is theocentric)¹¹⁵ their fundamental bases do not contradict each other. The central point of reference is that both have great support for life and the dignity of the human person — Which is the central issue as far as morality is concerned. In fact, instead of being harmful, Christian morality may help deepen African morality, and vice versa. How? In Christianity, one finds the most humanizing approach to morality; and approach centered on Jesus' message of unconditional love and forgiveness for one another — the very message He himself lived to the letter on the cross.¹¹⁶ As such not only would Christian morality (Which is centered on love par excellence) deepen traditional African values of community sharing, compassion, peaceful co-existence among tribes and cultures - it would also be a great tool, by Africans in striving to make Africa a more liberating and human society¹¹⁷ Also, the

¹¹⁰Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 46.

¹¹¹Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 49.

¹¹²Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 54.

¹¹³Cf. B. BUJO, *The ethical dimension of a community*, 131.

¹¹⁴Cf. B. BUJO, *Plea for Change of models for Marriage*, 39.

¹¹⁵Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 49.

¹¹⁶Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 65.

¹¹⁷Cf. B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 67.

deep human values in African morality can enrich Christian values. So, the challenge today is a careful discernment and choosing of truly African values and integrating them into the Christianized Africa of today

4.1.5 The Church-as-Family

In trying to inculturate the Gospel, the first African Synod of Bishops recommended the image of the Church as the family of God. This gives another opportunity through which African Theology may deepen its inculturation objectives. The Church as a family is an African way of being Church where communion, solidarity, sharing, openness and dialogue form the hallmark of Christian living. It is a model which Africans can easily appreciate and identify with. This is because of the African value of the extended family which is bound together by the ancestral blood and community life.¹¹⁸

While family in many European societies is made up of husband, wife and child/ Children, in Africa it is more than that. One sees the richness of the concept of family in Africa because of its extensiveness. I find the family model as a good model that, if properly developed and taught theologically, can address the problems of conflicts, tribalism, ethnicity, and other divisions that plague the African world today. It is a model that touches deeply on the African values of community life, respect for one another, and respect for traditions. The first African synod noting the challenges Africa face arising from tribalism and negative ethnicity challenged African theologians to “work out the theology of the Church as family with all the riches contained in the concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the church?”¹¹⁹

4. 2 Practical Implementation of Liberation

4.2.1 African Theology must be prophetic

African Theology, if it has to succeed in its quest for the liberation of African people, has no other option than inspire a Church that is truly prophetic. No situation calls for a more prophetic Church than that facing Africa today. According to the bishops of the second African Synod, Africa is faced with enormous challenges: Greed for power and wealth at the expense of the people and nation, politicians who betray and sell out their nations, dirty business people who collude with rapacious multi- nationals, African arms dealers and traffickers who thrive on small arms that cause great havoc on human lives, and local agents of some international organizations who get paid for peddling toxic ideologies that they don’t believe in.¹²⁰ These challenges lead to automatic negative consequences which are: Poverty, misery and disease; refugees within and outside the country and overseas, the search for greener pastures which leads to brain drain,

¹¹⁸Cf F. A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II*, 192.

¹¹⁹PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63

¹²⁰Message of the second African Synod, 36.

clandestine migration and human trafficking, wars and bloodshed, often by proxy, the atrocity of child soldiers and unspeakable violence against women etc.

All this needs a prophetic voice to shout at these atrocities. The Church in African has to be prophetic if it is to be relevant. It remains a key task of the African Church and the African theology to look squarely at the realities of people on the continent after which solutions must be sought.

4.2.2 Preferential Option for the poor

The preferential option for the poor is solidly rooted in the scripture and Catholic social teaching.¹²¹ And if African theologians are serious about authentic liberation of the poor and oppressed, they must be able to spur the institutional church, through their theological works, to focus on that need to radically be with the poor of African society. Sergio Torres, speaking on the criteria for Third World Theology notes:

The history of the salvation written in the Bible is a long account of the interventions of God in favor of the poor and the oppressed... A theology that does not act on behalf of the poor and the oppressed is not Christian theology. It stems from a different faith. It is not ours. Ours is a theology for the poor countries and for the poor in those countries.¹²²

We cannot talk of a preferential option for the poor if the lifestyle of church leaders does not show it. An authentic option for the poor is that of true solidarity with the poor.¹²³ It means a deliberate choice to enter in some degree into the world of those who have been left on the margins of society — to share in a significant way in their experience of being mistreated, by-passed, or left helpless. Briefly put, it is a sharing in the suffering of the poor.¹²⁴

Bujo observes that for the Church in Africa, personal witness has certainly not been its strong point.¹²⁵ The lifestyle of many of the clergy serves to cut them off from the ordinary people.¹²⁶ Church leaders in Africa can show their commitment to the poor by vacating their palaces, selling their huge motor cars and seeking, at least to some extent, to share the lot of Africa's multitudes.¹²⁷ It is important to note the mind-boggling observation by Donal Dorr:

There is a major on-going resistance to the notion of an option for the poor... The basic reason seems to be that there are many church leaders and theologians who are quite reluctant to face up to the kind of radical challenges which it involves. And of course theologians and church leaders are the very people who have what we may call 'theological power', that is, the power to articulate on behalf of the community the meaning and implications of the call to be Christian. So, if some of them are themselves unwilling to face

¹²¹D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*,155.

¹²² K. APPIAH-KUBI,S. TORRES,ed., *African theology en route*, 5.

¹²³D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*,15.

¹²⁴D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*,15.

¹²⁵Cf. B BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*,71.

¹²⁶Cf. B BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*,71.

¹²⁷Cf. B BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*,71.

the challenge of making an option for the poor, there is a strong temptation for them to avoid or evade it by toning down or even distorting their articulation of what it means to be a Christian.¹²⁸

The church leadership in Africa would be more credible if it took the preferential option for the poor seriously. And there have been good examples of how that can be done personally and structurally. For instance, the Jesuits and many other religious congregations in much of Latin America made a deliberate option to quit their elite school. They deliberately and publicly moved their resources (personnel and money) to serve poorer people. And they made it very clear this action was rooted in the gospel and the Christian faith.¹²⁹

4.2.3 Justice/Reconciliation/Integrity of creation

Justice, reconciliation and integrity of creation are inter-connected areas that African Theologians cannot just keep talking about. There is need for concrete actions. In a continent where conflicts and wars (6% the Rwandan genocide, the 2007/8 Post-election violence in Kenya, etc.) have left many hurt hence practical steps for reconciliation are needed today. Reconciliation is a process in which good relationships between individuals and groups are restored.¹³⁰ And that is an integral part of African religion and practice. According to Mercy AmbaOduyoye, reconciliation has a central role in African religion and practice: - Broken relations are never allowed to go unhealed. Sacrifices are performed and communal meals held to restore normalcy.

Justice and peace should be at the core of African Theology. African theologians must look for ways of not only providing theological support and moral strength to organizations and groups that work for justice and peace on the continent, it must find ways of symbolically engaging in activities towards peace and reconciliation.

Ecology and integrity of creation must be an integral part of African Theology too. As Magesa notes, spirituality today consists in listening to the “scream” of Planet Earth and having pity on it.¹³¹ In turn, it means having pity on ourselves, for we are one with nature. African Theology has a lot of resources, within African cultures, to enhance its work in this area. In fact, at the core of African spirituality is that unity between human beings and nature.¹³² All of nature is regarded as spiritual, even in its physicality. As such to disrespect or destroy the environment is to disrespect and destroy human life.¹³³

4.2.5 Dignity of Women

¹²⁸ D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 157.

¹²⁹ D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 158.

¹³⁰ D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 129.

¹³¹ Cf. L. MAGESA, “Foundations of African Spirituality,” 94-107

¹³² Cf. L. MAGESA, “Foundations of African Spirituality,” 94-107

¹³³ Cf. L. MAGESA, “Foundations of African Spirituality,” 94-107

A truly liberative theology cannot avoid the issues of women in African societies today. At the core of that theology is the total liberation and dignity of African women. According to Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, the prophetic ministry of the Church should nurture, nourish and evoke a liberative consciousness and perception, different from perceptions and cultural tendencies that tend to oppress or marginalize women.¹³⁴ That struggle for the complete liberation of the African women remains a big challenge in the face of a highly male dominating Culture.

The institutional church itself is aware of the plights of women in Africa. John Paul II referring to the 1994 Synod of African bishops said: I have repeatedly affirmed the fundamental equality and enriching complementarity that exist between man and woman. The Synod applied these principles to the condition of women in Africa. Their rights and duties in building up the family and in taking full part in the development of the Church and society were strongly affirmed. With specific regard to the Church, women should be properly trained so that they can participate at appropriate levels in her apostolic activity.¹³⁵

On a similar note, the second African Synod describes women as “the backbone of the local Church”¹³⁶ and asks for the acknowledgement and promotion of “the specific contribution of women, not only in the home as wife and mother but also in the social sphere,”¹³⁷ The synod recommends that local churches “go beyond the general statement of EA (Ecclesia in Africa), and put concrete structures to ensure real participation of women “at appropriate levels.”¹³⁸ The task of fostering the dignity of African women should indeed become an important part of African Theology. African Theology must develop a theology that is capable of solving the many problems of African women. In some communities, there is still the obligation of the widow to marry her brother-in-law without minding the risk of disease transmission, for instance HIV.¹³⁹ Many cultures still practice female circumcision of which many young girls have become victims. Many still refuse women formal education in Africa. The Gospel can liberate here, by banishing whatever wounds human dignity.¹⁴⁰

5. CONCLUSION

African theology when well expressed and understood can with no doubt bring new life and energy to the faith experience of the African Christian. Moreover, it can provide an important vision of mission in the African context - a vision that not only respects the cultures of the people but also speaks to their very concrete situations of life. African theology is a worthwhile

¹³⁴A. N. WASIKE, D.W. WARUTA, ed., *Mission in African Christianity*, 7.

¹³⁵J. PAUL II *Ecclesia in Africa*, 121.

¹³⁶*Message of the second African Synod*, 25.

¹³⁷*Message of the second African Synod*, 25.

¹³⁸*Message of the second African Synod*, 19.

¹³⁹Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social context*, 71.

¹⁴⁰Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 71

enterprise which can, and should help bring about the true incarnation of the gospel and the Christian faith on the African soil. For it to attain its objectives, African theology needs to be clear, relevant and authentic and for it to be all this, it must stop being merely a classroom theology, a theology limited to the walls of academic institutions, an engagement for professional Christians to become a theology that is reflected in the actual lives and faith experiences of each and every Christian in Africa.

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