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# Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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**Purpose:** *AJET* is published twice a year by Scott Christian University, a chartered private university in Kenya, in order to provide theological educators and students with evangelical articles and book reviews related to Christian ministry in Africa.

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## Transforming African Christian Theology

The articles in this issue of AJET illustrate how African Christian Theology might help to transform African societies as well as African Christians.

David Tarus' article is on social transformation as seen from the point of view of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. He notes that Circle theologians arrange their theology of social transformation around six themes: the Theology of God, Christian Anthropology, the Theology of Scripture, the Theology of Christ, the Theology of the Church, and Eschatology. African Christian Theology is meant to make a positive difference in the lives of all Africans and the societies of which they are a part.

Fabulous Moyo and Erwin van der Meer team up to give us a well-researched, hard-hitting article on the role (and lack of it) that the Church in Africa has played in dealing with recent witchcraft accusations and witchcraft eradication movements. These problems have global connections that produce local frustrations leading to the scapegoating of vulnerable members of society, including children. But the Church in Africa can do several things to oppose this increasing evil, if the pre-modern worldview that contributes to the fear of witchcraft can be transformed, not replaced with Western secularism.

Georgette Short examines the teaching, prayers, songs and testimonies of African pastors and church members to uncover their theology of Satan and evils spirits, both the biblically sound aspects and those aspects that need further transformation. She also draws out some of the implications of these beliefs for African theological education. Transformation starts with grasping the popular theology of ordinary church members and their pastors.

Timothy Palmer suggests that African Christian Theology really has four faces or categories today: inculturation theology, liberation theology, African evangelical theology, and prosperity theology, each one of which he evaluates. Palmer concludes that, "Christian theology in Africa should be biblical, holistic and relevant." Surely this is the kind of theology that forms the foundation for the transformation of worldviews and of society.

Philip Tachin's article about forging ethnic unity in Africa on the basis that all peoples are made in the image of God, also aims at social transformation. But in this case it is as a result of grasping the transforming implications of a single biblical truth – that we are all created in the image of God.

The book reviews also revolve around African Christian Theology. Zachs-Toro Gaiya reviews Opoku Onyinah's *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*. Gaiya points out both the strengths and limitations of Onyinah's work. My own review of Samuel W. Kunhiyop's *African Christian Theology* concludes that it meets the need for a reliable, Biblically-based, and accessible theology book to serve the whole African Church, not only the Evangelical branch, though that is its natural audience.

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# **Social Transformation in The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians**

by David Kirwa Tarus

## **Abstract**

*Social transformation in Africa has always been of interest to theologians. In the context of the growing focus on the role of women in ministry, society, and theology, this article looks into the contribution of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter, the Circle) to the theology of social transformation. The article reveals that the Circle theologians situate their theology of social transformation around six theological themes (Theology of God, Christian Anthropology, Theology of Scripture, Theology of Christ, Theology of the Church, and Eschatology) which they reexamine, redefine, and remodel to suite their theological agenda which is to transform the African continent into a humanizing continent. The article begins with a brief history of the Circle and the theological methods they employ. It then focuses on the six theological themes that shape their theology of social transformation.*

## **Introduction**

In the eyes of the world, Africa is a continent of untold problems and suffering. It has been “branded” as a “marketplace,” “dark continent,” “a land of shadow and mystery,” “a land of atrocities,” “the traumatized continent,” “the emerging continent,” “a dark hole,” and other labels. George Kinoti in his book, *Hope for Africa and What the Christian can Do*, laments that the story of Africa reads “like a chronicle of perpetual doom.”<sup>1</sup> Considering the perilous situation that Africa is facing, it is important to explore every possible resource to address this challenge, including theology. Since the 1960s male theologians have dominated African academic theology. However, African women theologians have for the last thirty years entered the scene to articulate their perspectives, especially in regard to social transformation of the African continent. This article examines the themes that shape the Circle theology of social transformation of the African continent. Before exploring the themes, a brief historical overview of the Circle is necessary.

## **Introducing the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians**

Mercy Amba Oduyoye founded The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989 in Accra, Ghana. Oduyoye is widely regarded as Africa’s leading female theologian, and the most published African woman theologian. Other key women who have been in the helm of leadership of the Circle include Musimbi Kanyoro from Kenya and Isabel Phiri from Malawi.

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<sup>1</sup> George Kinoti, *Hope for Africa and What the Christian Can Do* (Nairobi: AISRED, 1994), 14.

The Circle is a pan-African, multi-religious, and multi-racial society of women who share the same agenda, that is, “to undertake research and publish theological literature” in the fields of theology and culture. Indeed, publishing is perhaps Circle theology’s greatest achievement. The Circle website notes that Circle theologians have published more than three hundred books on various issues of theology and Christianity in Africa. This is a notable contribution considering the challenge of limited research funds and inadequate libraries in Africa. Kanyoro broadly explains the difficulties that African women theologians have to overcome in order to publish:

Many simply have no time to sit and write long treatises with all the footnotes and quotations from a million other scholars. Many have no access to books and libraries as money is a problem and theological books are expensive on our continent. Those who pass judgment on African women as a people lacking in theological expression or reflection need to hear and read our choked silence. In some instances, the seeming silence may well be a strategized expression of protest. It may also be an expression of despair, anger, overloaded systems and the other circumstances which continually weigh us down.<sup>2</sup>

One of the key motivations for starting the Circle was the absence of women’s theology in African Christian theology. Circle theologians compared African theology at that time to a bird with only one wing noting that African theology was missing the perspective of African women. The Circle therefore sought to supply African theology with the missing dimension, creating, “a two-winged theology.”<sup>3</sup> They express their goal as “to make Theology in Africa fly by equipping it with the missing wing. A bird with one wing does not fly.”<sup>4</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro asserts that, “African theology without the faith story of African women is a theology that is incomplete and contextually inept.”<sup>5</sup>

It is also important to point out one catalyst of African women theology – the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), launched at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in August 1976. The first assembly of EATWOT met in New Delhi, India, in 1981. Even though Third World women theologians were part of the contributors of EATWOT, Oduyoye laments, “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

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<sup>2</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, “African Women’s Quest for Justice: A Review of African Women’s Theology,” *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 15, no. 15 (1996): 85–86.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent history of the Circle, the notable contribution that Oduyoye played in it, and the various issues that the Circle seeks to address, see, Nyambura Njoroge, “A New Way of Facilitating Leadership: Lessons from African Women Theologians,” *Missiology: An International Review* 33, no. 1 (2005): 29–46.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thecirclecawt.org/profile.html> accessed on October 19th 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, “Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle” in Isabel A. Phiri, Sarojini Nadar, eds., *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 39.

Commission.”<sup>6</sup> The Commission was mandated to work on ways of integrating women voices into Third-World theologies. After several regional, national and continental consultations, women theologians had their first international meeting in Mexico in December 1986. One of the results was the publication of *With Passion and Compassion* by Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye. The first section of the book contains essays by African women theologians on different areas of theology, Christianity, and culture. EATWOT was the seedbed of African feminist theology through which their theology germinated and blossomed to what we see today.

Circle theologians employ various methodologies when they theologize. First, they use narrative theology. African women theologians accept story as a source of theology. They are aware of the primary role of stories in Africa’s oral corpus and so build on that resource for developing their theologies. Second, Circle theologians “adopt a perspectival approach rather than analysis and critique of existing works.”<sup>7</sup> Their theology is perspectival because its intention is to share the point of view of African women on issues that affect them. Their theology is therefore highly experiential. Their experiences (personal or communal) as women and as Africans shape their theology. Third, Circle theology is multicultural, multi-religious and multi-racial. It is intentionally dialogue-oriented and pluralistic in approach. The main dialogue partners for Christian Circle theologians are their counterparts in African Traditional Religion and African Indigenous churches. Fourth, Circle theology is highly communal. Oduyoye asserts that African women’s theology is “a theology of relations” because “African culture is very community-oriented.”<sup>8</sup> They believe that they should do theology from the perspective of community, which is perhaps why they engage in practically oriented theology. Five, and perhaps most important, is that Circle theology is greatly shaped by feminist perspectives, though they prefer to refer to their work as African women theologies. Isabel Phiri also notes that other titles such as “Circle Theology”, “Communal Theology”, “Bosati theology” or “African Women theology” have been chosen as an alternative to “feminist theology.”<sup>9</sup> This is

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<sup>6</sup> Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology; Reflections from the Women’s Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), x.

<sup>7</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Isabel Apawo Phiri, “The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians: Its Contribution to Ecumenical Formation,” *Ecumenical Review* 57, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 39. Kanyoro prefers the terminology “engendered communal theology” to explain the theology being done by African women theologians, in “Engendered Communal Theology: African Women’s Contribution to Theology in the Twenty-first Century” in Kwok Pui-lan, *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 27. Ogbu U. Kalu notes that an alternative

because of the negative connotation that the term “feminist” bears in Africa. Nevertheless, as Oduyoye has noted, the term “feminist” is often preferred because of its global familiarity.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Circle theology can be termed as feminist theology from an African context. Oduyoye defines feminism:

Feminism has become the shorthand for the proclamation that women’s experience should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being human. It highlights the woman’s world and her worldview as the struggles side by side with the man to realize her full potential as a human being... Feminism then emphasizes the wholeness of the community as made up of male and female beings... Feminism calls for the incorporation of the woman into the community of interpretation of what it means to be human.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever their method, African women theologians are concerned with making theology relevant for life. Their concern is to change the world especially in regard to how women are treated, or should be treated. Circle theologians have contributed immensely to social transformation in Africa. In the words of a respected South African theologian, Circle “theology is mounting a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways that previous African theologies have not been able to do.”<sup>12</sup> This group cannot be ignored in any discussion of African voices doing theology.

### **Themes That Shape the Circle’s Theology of Social Transformation**

Having briefly traced the formation, development, and methodology of the Circle, we turn now to an exploration of six theological themes that shape their theology of social transformation.

#### **1. Theology of God**

That God exists is taken for granted in Africa. Philosophical or theological explications of the existence of God are not major concerns in African theology. It is the same for African women theologians. They start their arguments from the perception that God exists in trinity and in a relational way. They contend that a Trinitarian, relational understanding of God helps shape community.<sup>13</sup> In other words, they assert that the diversity of God is a model for social interaction. It is this fact that Circle theologians have capitalized on to construct communal theology. Also from the diversity of God, Circle theologians build a theology of hospitality where they emphasize such themes

terminology for “feminist” theology is *sister* theology. See, Phiri and Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 264–265.

<sup>10</sup> See Oduyoye, “Feminist Theology in an African Perspective,” in Rosino Gibellini, ed., *Paths of African Theology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 167.

<sup>11</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 121.

<sup>12</sup> Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 99 (1997): 22.

<sup>13</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 136.

as caring, providing, helping, ministering, and sharing with all in need.<sup>14</sup> It is this spirit of hospitality that encourages Circle theologians to collaborate to work towards a better world.<sup>15</sup>

Circle theologians' theology of God is therefore rooted in a practical understanding of the Trinity. Oduyoye argues that the doctrine of God must go beyond metaphysical understanding to an "ethical function of the Trinity."<sup>16</sup> For Mercy Oduyoye, an ethical conception of God has serious practical significance for Africans because in light of the history of suffering, "a theology divorced from ethical demands would have little relevance in Africa."<sup>17</sup>

Circle theologians argue that God redeems nations and individuals from sin, oppression, injustices and all manner of dehumanizing structures. They affirm that the God of the Bible acts within human history, and that God sides with the oppressed. They argue that God does not discriminate on any basis of gender, race or ethnicity. Circle theologians therefore re-interpret what they believe to be male dominated imageries about God that are found in the Scripture and other literatures. They argue that salvation, redemption, liberation and reconciliation are one activity of God. From the Exodus event, they posit redemption that is more than a spiritual experience but a holistic experience. In the Exodus event they see salvation of the entire human being from sin and all other forms of oppression.<sup>18</sup> They therefore derive their motivation for social justice in the God of Exodus, a God who liberates humanity from sin and oppression.

They assert that God is ever present and works in and through his people to correct injustice. They posit that the God of the Bible is concerned with liberating or saving humanity from oppressive human or inhuman forces. Oduyoye writes, "God is concerned for the wholeness of our *be-ing* and for our relationship to God and to other human beings."<sup>19</sup> Margaret Umeagudosu writes, "God to most Africans is beyond morality, that is, capable of good and evil, and can wreak vengeance on both the guilty humans and spirits."<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>14</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, "God Calls to Ministry: An Inclusive Hospitality," in Musimbi Kanyoro and Njoroge, eds., *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, (Nairobi: Acton, 1996), 149–162.

<sup>15</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye and African Women's Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 1, (March 1, 2004): 22.

<sup>16</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 140.

<sup>17</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa*, Theology in Africa Series, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 16.

<sup>18</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 8–10.

<sup>19</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Margareth Umeagudosu, "The Earth Belongs to God: Biblical Expositions through the Eyes of a Nigerian Woman", in Elizabeth Amoah, ed., *Where God Reigns: Reflections on Women in God's World*, (Accra: Samwoode Publishers, 1997), 12.

summary, in Circle theology the Triune God is the only hope of social transformation of humanity; without God there is no social transformation.

## 2. Christian Anthropology

In Christian anthropology, Circle theologians attempt to re-evaluate the Christian understanding of anthropology to address oppression. They address two major questions: “What does it mean to be human?” and, “how should we respond to the problem of evil?”

On answering the first question, they center their anthropology on the affirmation that male and female are created in the image of God. They critique reading of the Scriptures that demote women to second-class citizens or to a level not human. They contend that the fact that humanity is created in God’s image is a motivation for social action or social transformation. Oduyoye holds that at the center of oppression is “our distortion of our God-likeness.”<sup>21</sup> She argues that the responsibility for healing our brokenness falls on men and women, and that we must “explore anew our human Be-ing and to affirm each one’s mode of being human.”<sup>22</sup> True healing of communities cannot happen if human beings are not “authentic reflectors of the Image of God.”<sup>23</sup> In reflecting the image of God, human beings express their humanness and beauty.

Oduyoye in an article titled *Spirituality of Resistance and Reconstruction* asserts that, “If one is in the image of God, then one is expected to practice the hospitality, compassion, and justice that characterize God.”<sup>24</sup> She also writes, “No one can claim to be in the image of God who is insensitive to the cry of the afflicted, who invests in structures of domination, or supports them because of vested interests.”<sup>25</sup> True human living includes consideration of the other person, we cannot live in isolation, and “it is only in community that our humanity means anything.”<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Amoah, a notable theologian from Ghana, asserts that what is needed in addressing African conflicts is an anthropology which “puts to test our maturity as human beings... a search for re-defining our humanity and our relationship with God and with each other.”<sup>27</sup>

Mercy Oduyoye strongly argues that Christian anthropology must take seriously African culture that recognizes life as life-in-community. She writes, We can truly know ourselves if we remain true to our community, past and present. The concept of individual success or failure is secondary. The ethnic group, the village, the locality, are crucial in one’s estimation of oneself. Our

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<sup>21</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 132.

<sup>22</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 135.

<sup>24</sup> Mary John Mananzan et al., eds., *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 170.

<sup>25</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 137.

<sup>26</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 141.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Amoah in Virgilio P. Elizondo and Jon Sobrino, eds., *2000: Reality and Hope*, (London: SCM, 1999), 16–17.

nature as beings-in-relation is a two-way relation: with God and with our fellow human-beings.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to affirming that men and women are created in God's image and that this theology should shape social relationships, the Circle affirms that human beings are called upon to exercise their dominion over the earth in a God-glorifying manner. They contend that human beings are called to work for *shalom* in the world. They understand *shalom* to be concrete and holistic, "Peace is not only a matter in the human community, it also has to do with our relationship to the world," Oduyoye writes.<sup>29</sup> Hence, social engagement does not ignore the relationship between humanity and the social environment.

The second major point on theological anthropology presented by Circle theologians is the problem of evil. They argue that Christian anthropology must develop theologies that address structural and personal evils in the society. Their beginning point in addressing the problem of evil is African traditional understandings of evil. In the African worldview, evil is whatever destroys community. They contend that African theology cannot ignore the context of spiritual battle, evil spirits, demons, and the destructive powers of such forces on the African person. In Africa evil spirits are greatly feared. It is the fear of the spirit world that makes many Christians turn back to African Traditional systems especially in times of death or serious calamities such as famine and war. It is this dual allegiance that must be addressed if Christianity is to be authentic in Africa.

However, in light of all of these realities, the main focus for Circle theologians tends to be an emphasis on structural evil. Sinful structures in the world are those that perpetuate evil. These structures must be dealt with in order for *shalom* to prevail. In order to deal with the problem of evil, Oduyoye argues, African women must rise beyond coping with violence or resisting violence and transform the relationship that breeds violence.<sup>30</sup> She writes, "To have an impact, Christian efforts must become more comprehensive and deal seriously with political, economic and cultural realities."<sup>31</sup>

One specific kind of evil that must be addressed is the dehumanization of women. Circle theologians are very passionate when dealing with systems that dehumanize women. They have organized academic and non-academic conferences to discuss African views on women, and what can be done to correct wrong perceptions. In academic circles, they critique academic

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<sup>28</sup> Mercy A. Oduyoye, "The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology," in Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds., *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, Accra, Ghana*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 110–111.

<sup>29</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> In Mananzan et al., *Women Resisting Violence*, 169.

<sup>31</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 44.

discourses on women, especially those by African men.<sup>32</sup> They also organize practical meetings geared towards addressing violence against women. Most of those meetings have been held at the *Talitha Qumi* Center for Women in Religion and Culture at Trinity College in Accra. Mercy Teresia Hinga reports that the 2001 meeting at the Center provided a platform for serious debates on how to be able to proactively tackle the root causes of violence. She writes,

The women are challenged from their specific local contexts to devise practical ways of dealing with the injustices they so articulately denounce in their papers and presentations. The challenge to act is also born out of their prior self-naming not merely as objects and victims of injustice but also as moral agents capable of moral action for social transformation.<sup>33</sup>

Bernadette Mbuy Beya reports on the efforts of an organization called Women of Katanga in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) which organized a march in 2004 to protest against sexual violence in Congo. Mbuy Beya notes that these protests showed that women cannot sit and watch the world being ravaged by injustice, “we must also question and denounce all practices contradictory to the gospel and testify to our fidelity to Jesus Christ.”<sup>34</sup> On the same note, Oduyoye asserts that African women must speak for themselves because they understand what they are going through. She writes, “African men carry none of the life-giving burdens that African women carry. Women with babies on their backs and yams, firewood, and water on their heads [are] the common image of African women in real life as in art.”<sup>35</sup>

The above efforts by Circle theologians show that their interest in anthropology and the entire theological enterprise goes beyond academic theology, that is reading, reflecting and writing, to a practical theology that addresses real life issues of women and others who are oppressed in Africa. Oduyoye asserts, “African women’s theological reflections intertwine theology, ethics and spirituality.”<sup>36</sup> Kanyoro adds, “for us in Africa, it does not matter how much we write our theology in books, the big test before us is whether we can bring change to our societies. This is the tall order and we agonise about it.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> An example is Oduyoye’s critique of Mbiti’s view of marriage, “A Critique of John Mbiti’s View of Love and Marriage in Africa,” in Jacob K. Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang, eds., *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 341–365.

<sup>33</sup> Teresia M. Hinga, “African Feminist Theologies, the Global Village, and the Imperative of Solidarity Across Borders: The Case of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 83.

<sup>34</sup> Sr. M. Bernadette Mbuy Beya, “Stand Up and Walk, Daughter of My People” in Phiri and Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 216.

<sup>35</sup> Oduyoye, “Feminist Theology from an African Perspective”, 174.

<sup>36</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Kanyoro, “Quest for Justice,” 82.

### 3. Theology of Scripture

Circle theologians are driven by a view of scripture that is highly influenced by feminist critical hermeneutics that posit that the Bible was written from a very patriarchal culture that might have influenced the position of the writers.<sup>38</sup> Circle theologians argue that Scripture has often been interpreted from a one-sided perspective where women's voices have been muted. They propose that to address injustice against women, Christians must "examine anew the meaning of the Bible."<sup>39</sup> To examine afresh the meaning of the Bible entails going back to God's original plan, which was genderless. To achieve this agenda, they employ various methodologies in reading the biblical text.

A volume of essays edited by Musa Dube, a South African feminist theologian, features various approaches to reading the Bible by African women theologians. The methods include: storytelling, womanhood/bosadi and womanist reading, reading from and with grassroots communities, and postcolonial feminist reading. I shall briefly explain each of these.

A storytelling approach uses the tools of African storytelling to read the Bible. Denise Ackermann asserts, "telling stories is intrinsic to claiming our identity and, in the process, finding impulses for hope."<sup>40</sup> Circle theologians utilize story as a method of doing theology. Storytelling is also therapeutic. The womanist/bosadi (womanhood) approach attempts to read the Bible from feminist liberationist methodologies that critique perceived oppressive elements in the Bible and within African culture, while also highlighting aspects that are empowering in both. This view is advanced by Madipoane Masenya, a South African theologian.<sup>41</sup> Reading from and with grassroots communities encourages learning from non-academic readers. Dube says, "There is the need to search for native voices of interpretation."<sup>42</sup> Circle theologians show that theology is to be done for the sake of the church and the community, not necessarily for the academy. They show ways of reading the Bible with people in rural villages, and emphasize that popular reading and academic reading should not be divorced. This is an important reminder to theologians to go beyond ivory-tower scholarship. Theology has to be relevant and meaningful.

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<sup>38</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 191.

<sup>39</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 136.

<sup>40</sup> Denise M. Ackermann, "From Mere Existence to Tenacious Endurance: Stigma, HIV/AIDS and a Feminist Theology of Praxis," in Phiri and Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 231.

<sup>41</sup> For more on Bosadi view see, Madipoane Masenya, "Reading the Bible the Bosadi (Womanhood) Way," *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Southern Africa and Africa 4*, no. 2 (July 1997): 15–16.

<sup>42</sup> Musa W. Dube, ed., *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 8.

Dube made Postcolonial hermeneutics in Africa prominent. She intertwines postcolonial and feminist theories with biblical exegesis to attack any use of the Bible that justifies any form of colonialism or neocolonialism. She defines postcolonial readings of Scripture as “reading the Bible in such a way that it does not continue to endorse the colonizing of any nation or people.”<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere Dube argues that the Bible is a culturally bound book that was used to support imperialism and patriarchy in Africa. She argues that Western imperialists used the Bible to rob Africans of their land, dignity and power.<sup>44</sup> The colonizer suppressed people’s ideas by imposing their own.

The victims of imperialism become the colonized, that is, those whose lands, minds, cultures, economies and political institutions have been taken possession of and rearranged according to the interests and values of the imperializing powers. Imperializing ... actively suppresses diversity and promotes a few universal standards for the benefit of those in power.<sup>45</sup>

For Dube, a postcolonial perspective does not advocate wallowing in past injustices but looks for a better, liberated future.<sup>46</sup> “A post-colonial biblical reading is of necessity a multicultural reflection on the passage, and an attempt to see how it can inform our wish to reconstruct peace and development.”<sup>47</sup> She adds that a postcolonial reading of Scripture attempts to “analyze the major mistakes of the past, and to build bridges for future dialogue.”<sup>48</sup>

In summary, postcolonial hermeneutics looks back at how the Bible was presented to the people and attempts to unclothe the text from any justification of imperialism whether from the past or current readings. It encourages indigenous reading of the Bible because it is aware that the colonizer’s perspective cannot address the deep needs of the colonized. A postcolonial perspective applies not only to the colonizer but also to the colonized.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Musa Dube, “Rereading the Bible,” in Emmanuel Katongole, ed., *African Theology Today*, (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2002), 61.

<sup>44</sup> Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 15–17.

<sup>45</sup> Musa Dube, “Reading for Decolonization (John 4.1-42),” in Musa Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley, eds., *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space, and Power*, (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 297–98.

<sup>46</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 198.

<sup>47</sup> Musa Dube, “Woman, What Have I to do With You?” in Isabel Apawo Phiri, Kenneth A. Ross, and James L. Cox, eds., *The Role of Christianity in Development, Peace and Reconstruction* (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1996), 249.

<sup>48</sup> Musa Dube, “Woman, What Have I to do with You?”, 249.

<sup>49</sup> For more on Postcolonial hermeneutics, see, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice of Post-Colonial Literatures*, (London: Routledge, 2002); R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998). See also, Gene L. Green, “The Challenge of Global Hermeneutics,” in Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green, eds., *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the*

Another perspective prominent in African women's biblical hermeneutics is the call for cultural hermeneutics as a part of listening to native voices of interpretation. Circle theologian Musimbi Kanyoro from Kenya has been articulate in advocating for cultural hermeneutics. She asserts: "Culture is a double-edged sword. In some instances, culture is like the creed for the community identity. In other instances, culture is the main justification for difference, oppression and injustice – especially for those whom culture defines as 'the other', 'the outsider.'"<sup>50</sup> She has also advocated for what she calls "engendering cultural hermeneutics",<sup>51</sup> which signifies pursuing theology from a feminist perspective. Other Circle theologians like Oduyoye who come from matrilineal societies, see African culture being more respectful to women than "domination-riddled Christianity" to quote her.<sup>52</sup> Oduyoye is more open to keeping certain African beliefs as compared to some other Circle theologians who prefer cultural hermeneutics to be able to "analyse it [culture] and put it to the test in order to know what to discard and what to keep."<sup>53</sup> However, in *Daughters of Anowa*, Oduyoye, like Kanyoro, says that African culture is a two-edged sword that provides deep cultural and religious roots for community life, while it also binds women.<sup>54</sup> In general, women theologians critically evaluate African culture in their quest for social transformation.

In conclusion, the Bible plays a crucial role in shaping the Circle's theology of social transformation. Indeed, Mbiti is correct, "The Bible is very much an African book, in which African Christians and theologians see themselves and their people reflected and in which they find a personal place of dignity and acceptance before God."<sup>55</sup>

#### 4. Christology

A good survey of what African women in general and African women Christian theologians in specific think about Jesus Christ is found in Oduyoye's

*Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 50–64. See also Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics, An African Perspective*, (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 13. For another critique of culture in relation to women issues by Kanyoro see, "Silenced by Culture, Sustained by Faith," "When Women Rise the Earth Trembles," and "When the Wretched of the Earth Speak!" in Margaret S. Larom, ed., *Claiming the Promise: African Churches Speak*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1994), 1–4; 63–67; 79–84, respectively.

<sup>51</sup> Kanyoro, "Engendered Communal Theology, in Pui-lan, *Hope Abundant*, 27.

<sup>52</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christianity and African Culture", *International Review of Mission* 84, no. 332–333, (January 1, 1995): 87.

<sup>53</sup> Kanyoro, "Quest for Justice," 78.

<sup>54</sup> Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> John Mbiti, "African Theology," in S. Maimela, A. Konig, eds., *Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics*, (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998), 142.

“Jesus Christ” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*.<sup>56</sup> Another useful essay in Christology is “The Christ for African Women”, by Oduyoye and Amoah.<sup>57</sup> Oduyoye asserts that African Christologies in general focus on “the Christ of history who defined his mission as a mission of liberation.”<sup>58</sup> Specifically, African women theologians assert a Christology that focuses on Jesus’ sensitivity to the misery and oppression of the weak. Just like the other themes already handled, their theology of Christ is practically oriented. They identify with events of Christ’s life that relate to their day to day experiences as women. One common narrative is Mary’s visit to Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39-56). This is significant for African women because childbearing is a crucial issue in forming their identity and acceptance in the community.<sup>59</sup>

Two major Christological issues shape Circle Christology, that is, Christ’s suffering and his victory. African women insist, “it is vicarious suffering, freely undertaken, which is salvific, and not involuntary victimization.”<sup>60</sup> Christ willingly suffered for humanity so that nobody should be victimized anymore. The second issue is that of Christ’s victory. Christ conquered evil by willingly dying on the cross. For African women, Christ did not come merely to suffer but to conquer death, and through his death bring wholeness and life. The resurrection of Christ is a motivation to believe that life is possible in situations of oppression and injustice. There is hope in life because Jesus Christ was and is still victorious. It is this hope that drives social transformation. Oduyoye concurs that Jesus as source of wholeness was,

empowered and sent by God to show humanity what it means to live fully the image in which we are made. Living fully has come to mean resisting oppression, transforming potential death into life and believing that the resurrection happens every time we defeat death and begin a new life.<sup>61</sup>

It is this desire for life in an oppressive world that drives African women to seek empowerment and participate in justice-making. They strongly believe that Christianity has resources for the transformation of dehumanizing culture. As we have seen above, this is based on the Christ event. It is through Christ that life is possible.

Thérèse Souga (from a Catholic perspective) and Louise Tappa (from a Protestant perspective) center their Christology on Jesus’ encouragement of

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<sup>56</sup> Oduyoye, “Jesus Christ” in Susan F. Parsons, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151–170.

<sup>57</sup> Oduyoye and Amoah, “The Christ for African Women” in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 35–46.

<sup>58</sup> Oduyoye, “Jesus Christ” in Parsons, *Cambridge Companion*, 162.

<sup>59</sup> See Oduyoye’s personal experience, “A Coming Home to Myself: A Childless Woman in the West African Space,” in Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones, eds., *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 105–123. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, ch. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, xiv.

<sup>61</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 64.

women's self-affirmation. Tappa asserts that if "Christology is to work out the full meaning of the reality of the Christ event for humankind", then the procedure for articulating it should be that "of contemplating and thinking of Christ in relation to our situation and our praxis."<sup>62</sup> Souga follows this method and maintains, "Jesus bears a message of liberation for every human being and especially for those social categories that are most disadvantaged."<sup>63</sup>

Oduyoye summarizes African women's Christology in four major models: eschatology, anthropology, liberation, and cosmology. In the *eschatological* model, the focus is on Christ's resurrection, that is, African women focus on life as possible because of Christ's overcoming of death. The *anthropological* model focuses on neighborliness, "and a life that puts others first and gives them life." In the *liberationist* model, the focus is on liberating humanity from dehumanizing structures, and in the *cosmological* model, the theologians identify with Christ who restores the cosmos.<sup>64</sup>

For African women in general and African women theologians specifically, Jesus is sensitive to their misery and oppression and seeks their empowerment and liberation. All the oppressed of the world can find comfort in Christ. Christ is not merely concerned with human suffering, he is also concerned with the overall well-being of the entire cosmos.

Because of what Christ willingly accomplished on the cross for the world, women find a voice to speak against all manner of injustice. Oduyoye writes, "As Christian women we do have a precedent. Jesus once asked his followers, 'Who do you say that I am?' Asked such a question, we have no need to echo anyone else's findings about God: we can raise our own voice."<sup>65</sup> Also she notes, "African women today can announce in their own words the one in whom they have believed."<sup>66</sup> African women theologians emphasize that in Christ Jesus women find their liberation and a voice to speak up.

For African women, Christ is the hope of Africa's poor. In Christ, the oppressed find liberation from their oppressors. In Christ also, the oppressors are strongly warned to stop oppressing others. This is evident in *Jesus of the Deep Forest* by Efua Kuma who describes Jesus as a powerful protector from all manner of dangers that human beings face in life. Jesus is also a destroyer of violent forces whether human or nonhuman.<sup>67</sup> Louise Tappa speaks for all

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<sup>62</sup> Louise Tappa, "The Christ Event: Protestant Perspective" in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 30.

<sup>63</sup> Thérèse Souga, "The Christ Event: Catholic Perspective" in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 61–62.

<sup>65</sup> Oduyoye, "Acting as Women" in Katongole, *African Theology Today*, 173.

<sup>66</sup> Oduyoye, "Jesus Christ" in Parsons, *Cambridge Companion*, 151.

<sup>67</sup> Efua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest* (Accra: Asempa Press, 1980).

African women when she writes, “Christ is the source of our faith, Christ is the norm of our faith, [and] Christ is the content of our faith.”<sup>68</sup>

## 5. Ecclesiology

In ecclesiology, Circle theologians pay attention to the theme of the household of God. They build on the experience of African women as home-makers to reflect on church as community under God – God’s house where God is fully in charge.<sup>69</sup> They argue that the church in Africa has ignored the voices of women even though women are the majority in the church. Women also serve as church secretaries, deaconesses, and in other roles the church assigns to them. Women are generally expected to obey and not question whatever their male counterparts tell them. Circle theologians argue that this does not model what it means for the church to be the household of God.<sup>70</sup> The church models God’s family when it cares for and shares with others especially the marginalized in society.<sup>71</sup>

Circle theologians also build on the African communal ethic rooted in the African maxim “I am, because we are” to encourage communal ecclesiology. Naomi Tutu, Desmond Tutu’s daughter, summarizes her father’s concept of the community, “So in Xhosa we say *U muntu ngu muntu ngabantu*, meaning a person is a person through other people.”<sup>72</sup> In this ethic, sin is understood not only in personal terms but also in a collective manner. Sin is not only what injures an individual, it also is what injures or destroys the community. Dube explains community and its place in reforming societies fighting HIV/AIDS:

The concept of community ... ought to and should become the cornerstone of propounding an African indigenous theology of justice and liberation by constantly revisiting “what it means to be community and to live in community,” “what violates community,” and “how we can live in community in our new and hybrid twenty-first century contexts... for it is only then that we can say “I am because we are, and we are because I am.”<sup>73</sup>

For African women, ecclesiology entails lived experience. Oduyoye notes that African women theologians move from the images of the Church in the New Testament, to African women’s experience in churches today.<sup>74</sup> What this means is that their primary concern is not New Testament or patristic

<sup>68</sup> Louise Tappa, “The Christ Event: A Protestant Perspective” in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 78. See also Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God*, (Accra: Sam Woode, 1997).

<sup>70</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 124–125.

<sup>71</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The African Family as a Symbol of Ecumenism,” *Ecumenical Review* 43, no. 4 (October 1, 1991): 456.

<sup>72</sup> Naomi Tutu, *The Words of Desmond Tutu*, (London: Spire, 1989), 14.

<sup>73</sup> Musa Dube, “*Adinkra!* Four Hearts Joined Together: On Becoming Healing-Teachers of African Indigenous Religion/s in HIV & AIDS Prevention,” in Phiri and Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 141.

<sup>74</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 80.

ecclesiology but practical ecclesiology that speaks to their own experiences as African women. In other words, the African woman cannot do ecclesiology outside their daily experiences of suffering and pain evidenced in polygamy, early marriages, female genital mutilation, wife inheritance, singlehood, childlessness, widowhood, and property rights. Circle theologians therefore pursue justice for women as a paradigm for ecclesiology.<sup>75</sup>

The notion of Church as a place of justice has shaped African women's understanding of ecumenism. Their theology of ecumenism flows from a life of Christian commitment to furthering the dignity of all people in Christ. Oduyoye writes, "each denomination of the Christ family is a unit expected by Christ the source to be a visible manifestation of all that is Christ-like, so that when individual members of various denominations meet in a 'strange land', they may recognize the symbol of the presence of Christ, gather around it and celebrate their oneness, being born by one baptism and constituted into a people by one cross."<sup>76</sup> Oduyoye notes that the intention of ecumenism is not uniformity but unity in diversity, "the multiple expressions of our common faith and common mission."<sup>77</sup> Using the image of the African family to describe the church, Oduyoye writes, "Africans see it [the church] as an *Abusua* [the Akan ethnic community's association of households] of Christ, the coming together of 'relatives' of Christ to be a new community that does the will of God."<sup>78</sup> She adds, "The cohesion of the African family and the quality of relationships expected has become the basis of the whole society. It has symbolized for me the meaning of being in one KIN-DOM."<sup>79</sup>

Circle ecclesiology also insists that men and women together must build a better world. Dorothy Ramodibe argues that the life of the church and its influence in society depends on how the Church treats women.<sup>80</sup> Dube calls all Christians, whether from the "first world" or "third-world", to engage in social transformation. The world is a global village, she reminds her readers.

To reread the Bible for social justice is, therefore, a quest for coexistence that is not built on exploiting the other. It is a search for ways of building a just society and world. This must involve all of us. If we realize that we are not just reading the text, but rereading it in the light of social justice, then no audience

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<sup>75</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 32.

<sup>76</sup> Oduyoye, "The African Family as a Symbol of Ecumenism," 470.

<sup>77</sup> Oduyoye, "Unity and Mission: The Emerging Ecumenical Vision" in Paul Wesley Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, eds., *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 331.

<sup>78</sup> Oduyoye, "The African Family as a Symbol of Ecumenism", 471.

<sup>79</sup> Oduyoye, "The African Family as a Symbol of Ecumenism", 446.

<sup>80</sup> Dorothy Ramodibe, *Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa* in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 16.

should say, "That's your social location and your experience. It's not my experience," for as long as we are the world we are interconnected.<sup>81</sup>

Women's ordination is on top of the agenda for some Circle theologians. They want women to be included in the ordained ministries of the church in Africa. They argue that there is no theological basis to lock out women from ordination.<sup>82</sup> They see ordained women as pillars of some of the Circle agenda, "We are hoping that they [ordained women pastors] will bring in some of the feminine possibilities as they serve as pastors in the congregations, as they minister in their sermons, and as they do church administration."<sup>83</sup>

Another crucial issue is theological or seminary training. Circle theologians call for a re-evaluation of theological training to ensure that relevant issues are covered. They argue that the reason that many pastors in Africa make no difference in their communities is because the seminary or theological college does not train them in social transformation. In addition to the neglect of social transformation, is the neglect of African women's theology in the curriculum.<sup>84</sup> Circle theologians ask pertinent questions related to pastoral training. For example, Kanyoro asks, "How can the curriculum that is taught in the seminary really be made relevant to the reality that people will have to face when they go to serve in the ordained ministry?"<sup>85</sup>

Circle theologians call the church to "being" before "doing." For Kanyoro true justice stems from character transformation of God's people. She explains "to be just is to be straight, right, attentive, acting according to the inner being and having integrity of character ... A just society depends on just people."<sup>86</sup>

Circle theologians intertwine ecclesiology with missiology. What is the mission of the church? African women theologians argue that the church is mission. Being true representatives of Christ entails living as Christ intended. The church is called to tell the truth regardless of how difficult that might be. For Kanyoro the Church in Africa needs to re-read the Scriptures "with new eyes and see that God is calling us and empowering us to do the more difficult

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<sup>81</sup> Musa Dube, "Rereading the Bible," in Katongole, *African Theology Today*, 66.

<sup>82</sup> Kanyoro, "Quest for Justice", 82–83.

<sup>83</sup> Kanyoro, "Quest for Justice", 82–83.

<sup>84</sup> Phiri identifies four challenges in theological education in Africa in training women: "1) redefining the identity of African women theologians; 2) promoting more women to study theology and be on permanent staff; 3) inclusion of African women's theology in the theological curriculum; and 4) collaboration with male theologians." Isabel A. Phiri, "Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989-2008)," *International Review of Mission* 98, no. 388, (April 2009): 105–119.

<sup>85</sup> Kanyoro, "Quest for Justice," 84.

<sup>86</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, "A Life of Endless Struggle or Stubborn Hope?: An African Feminine Perspective on the Jubilee," *Ecumenical Review* 49, no. 4 (Oct 1, 1997): 409.

tasks of our mission - that is, to speak out for the truth."<sup>87</sup> The church must speak the truth about the oppression of women within and outside the church. The Circle argues that the Church cannot ignore the voices of African women because "women are the prophets of Africa" and "missionaries to our ailing society."<sup>88</sup> For Oduyoye, "The Church therefore misses out on its vocation when it refuses to listen to and include women in its task of being in God's mission."<sup>89</sup> In summary, Circle theologians advance a practical ecclesiology rooted in the need for social transformation.

## 6. Eschatology

African women's eschatology is grounded in the reality of suffering and the plight of all the African people, especially women and children. Their eschatology is built within the context of Africa, possibly the world's most impoverished and broken continent. Njoroge notes that even though African women would love to do theology in contexts of joy, the reality is that their suffering leads to a theology of lamentation.<sup>90</sup> In spite of this reality, Circle eschatology is also a theology of hope. Circle theologians advance a theology of hope rooted in life from the biblical teaching on the resurrection of the body. It is through the victorious Christ that hope is possible. Oduyoye explains that women theologians put their hope in God who makes things better.

The dignity of humanity that women believe in, and which they believe is the will of God, has become a ground of hope in women's theology. Hope makes women utilize their anger against unnecessary suffering. They turn anger into compassion as a route to transformation.<sup>91</sup>

As with the other aspects of their theology, the Circle theologians' eschatology is practical. Their eschatology is actively involved in realizing God's will in Africa, as they see it. They envision a future where oppression will be no more. They believe that one day, "life will defeat death, and that injustice will flee the presence of justice."<sup>92</sup> They envision "a hope for the redemption of the humanity of those who do the oppressing and the marginalizing."<sup>93</sup> Their eschatological hope is rooted in action, so they believe that Christians have a mandate to make things better in this world. For Nlenanya Onwu, humanity's quest for righteousness is not necessarily a

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<sup>87</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, "Thinking Mission in Africa", *International Review of Mission* 87, no. 345, (April 1, 1998): 226.

<sup>88</sup> Kanyoro, "Thinking Mission in Africa", 228.

<sup>89</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 87.

<sup>90</sup> N.J. Njoroge, "A New Way of Facilitating Leadership: Lessons from African Women Theologians" in *Missiology: An International Review* 33, no. 1 (2005), 40.

<sup>91</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 114. See also Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience" in J.N.K. Mugambi and Lautenti Magesa, eds., *Jesus in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton, 1998), 123–135.

<sup>92</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 119.

<sup>93</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 116.

movement towards the *eschaton*, but a present experience in fullness of life and total well-being.<sup>94</sup> Following her husband's death through cancer, Fulata Moyo wrote that eschatological hope is a refusal to accept the status quo of suffering, loneliness, and hopelessness because eschatology is not only *parousia* (future events), but also "consists rather in our calling and mission to transform for the world."<sup>95</sup> For Circle theologians, eschatology is not just future oriented but involves the here and now. They work for better structures in the society for justice, peace, and wholeness to make the world a better place.

### Conclusion

This article explored six themes that shape African women's theology of social transformation. It proposed that the Circle's theology of social transformation is situated around six major themes: Theology of God, Christian Anthropology, Theology of Scripture, Theology of Christ, Theology of the Church, and Eschatology. Not all African women theologians speak in one voice, but they share one conviction: theology should be praxis oriented.<sup>96</sup> They seek to connect orthodoxy with orthopraxis. It is even possible to add "orthopathos" to their theology, that is, their theology stems from "right pathos, or right compassion." For them, theology and social transformation are interconnected; theology is transformational. Even though Circle theologians are particularly interested in elevating the place of women in society, they are also interested in all other dehumanizing structures in societies. Circle theologians remind us to think seriously about the social transformation of the world. They advocate for justice, reconciliation, and transformation of our world by way of doing theology. They particularly speak to the Evangelical church in Africa to consider social engagement part of their mission agenda. Equating socio-political endeavors with mere humanistic endeavors has made many evangelicals shy away from social-political involvement. The Church should take women's perspectives with the seriousness they deserve, for as Desmond Tutu said, "There can be no true liberation that ignores the question raised by the movement for the liberation of women."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Nlenanya Onwu, "Biblical Perspectives for Peace, Development and Reconstruction: Its Socio-Religious Implications for the Churches in Africa," in Isabel Apawo Phiri, Kenneth A. Ross, and James L. Cox, eds. *The Role of Christianity in Development, Peace and Reconstruction*, (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1996), 40.

<sup>95</sup> Fulata Lusungu Moyo, "Navigating Experiences of Healing: A Narrative Theology of Eschatological Hope as Healing," in Phiri and Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 252.

<sup>96</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, "Daughters of Ethiopia: Constructing A Feminist Discourse in Ebony Strokes," in Phiri and Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 263. Kalu adds, "some women choose to be *rejectionist* by rejecting the Bible as canon; others are *radical reformers* who mine the radical elements within the gospel for empowerment; and still others have deployed Biblicism as the mooring for *loyalist* postures." Phiri and Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 265–266.

<sup>97</sup> Tutu, *The Words of Desmond Tutu*, 59.

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# **The Christian Church and Witchcraft Accusations in Africa**

by Fabulous Moyo and Erwin van der Meer

## **Abstract**

*Contemporary African society is in crisis due to issues such as global warming, neo-colonial exploitation, corruption and other internal and external factors. These and other issues are increasing the levels of frustration in many African societies. Unable to address the more powerful forces which cause their sufferings, some people resort to the practice of scapegoating those who are weaker than them. In several African societies scapegoating takes the form of witchcraft accusations against children, the handicapped, the elderly and other vulnerable groups. The role of the church in all this has been ambiguous until date and needs to be re-examined.*

## **Introduction**

In this article we explore how the Christian church in Africa and beyond can make a positive contribution towards addressing the current wave of harmful witchcraft eradication movements in Africa. In order to understand the problem and suggest possible solutions, it is our opinion that we need to reflect on it from an interdisciplinary and global perspective.

## **Change and Crisis**

In sub-Saharan Africa we encounter various competing worldviews that in one way or another influence our lives. We may think of the pre-modern African worldview, modernism, post-modernism, Islam, and Christianity as well as economic meta-narratives such as liberal capitalism, socialism and communism. Whenever a meta-narrative is discredited or called into question due to its interaction with other (meta) narratives, crisis or even conflict may be the result. The same occurs when conflicting meta-narratives are translated into policies and practices within the same context. Such a crisis can occur at an individual level, which may result in a psychological or spiritual crisis, and also at community, national, regional, continental and global levels.

Societal crisis may be the result of dominant global forces such as the interference of global capitalist interests of multi-national corporations in national politics, or economic and political power wielded undemocratically by global economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation and other international bodies. There is ample evidence that some of their policies and practices have contributed to the growing inequality between rich and poor in the world as well as facilitating corruption, money laundering and undermining the rule of

law and democracy as well as national sovereignty on a global scale.<sup>1</sup> Every year, \$1 trillion is spirited out of developing countries through corruption, smuggling, money laundering, and corporate tax evasion. The illicit financial flows out of developing countries dwarf the flow of development assistance going in. Illicit financial flows removed \$10 for every dollar spent on overall development aid, and \$80 for every dollar spent on basic social services.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion this flow of money does not just refer to funds transferred by corrupt dictators into bank accounts in Switzerland or the Cayman Islands. It also refers to profits illegally transferred by multi-national companies so that they avoid paying revenues and taxes in the developing countries where they operate. The current global economic and financial system allows these injustices to happen albeit in most cases not intentionally and actually maintains an unequal and unjust global environment where such things can happen. Africa's poor are not merely suffering because the Western world is providing too little aid. The poor are being actively and wrongly harmed by a system of global political and economic arrangements that is disproportionately shaped by and for the benefit of wealthy Western societies.<sup>3</sup> The "indifferent masses"<sup>4</sup> often hardly realise what is happening in their societies or the world at large, let alone raise their voices. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that *indifferent* does not mean *neutral* because by going with the flow the "indifferent masses" may in effect "legitimise" and support whatever is happening.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Scapegoating Mechanisms

Wherever there are major changes in society, whether socio-economic, political or cultural, a general sense of uncertainty, insecurity and confusion often results which leads to high levels of frustration. These frustrations may be repressed taking the form of depression, withdrawal and even suicide, but all too often they are expressed aggressively by means of intimidation, violence and war. This tendency may be labelled as displaced aggression whereby the frustrations of an individual or group are projected upon other individuals or groups of people who have nothing or very little to do with the actual cause of the frustrations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pogge, "Recognized & Violated by International Law: The Human Rights of the Global Poor," *United Nations Human Rights* (2007): 2-11, (accessed Aug 2, 2012), [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/expert/docs/Thomas\\_Pogge\\_new.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/expert/docs/Thomas_Pogge_new.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Pogge, "Illicit Financial Flows," *Global Justice Program - Yale University*, <http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/globaljustice/DirtyMoney.html>, (accessed Aug 2, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> T. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 29-33.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1951), 306.

<sup>5</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 305-307.

<sup>6</sup> Ross Vasta, Marshall M. Haith, Scott Miller, *Child Psychology: The Modern Science* (New York: John Wiley, 1992), 468; Lawrence S. Wrightsman and Fillmore H. Sanford, *Psychology: A Scientific Study of Human Behavior* (Monterey: Brooks, 1975), 449.

Displaced aggression often takes the form of scapegoating whereby a person or a group is blamed for conditions not of their making. We may think of Nazi Germany which blamed the Jews for all their economic and political woes, including losing the First World War.<sup>7</sup> We may also consider extreme forms of Islamist ideology where it is common to scapegoat the Western world for all their woes and America is portrayed as the 'Great Satan' while in reality they may be not so much reacting to Western culture as to the impact of the exploitation of their resources by Western liberal capitalism in collaboration with their own political elites.<sup>8</sup> We may also think of the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972,<sup>9</sup> the anti-Chinese riots in Lesotho in 2008,<sup>10</sup> or of Zimbabwe where at the turn of this century the minority people of European descent were singled out by the ZANU PF government as the main cause of Zimbabwe's woes and dispossessed rather than seeking to address the real causes of the economic malaise in the country.

The scapegoat is the victim of a group of people who unanimously come together to blame the victim(s) for all of their group's disorder. For the group to justify violence against the scapegoat, they often accuse the person(s) of horrendous acts that threaten the stability of the group. The victims are usually vulnerable and weak, or differ from the group and as such make an easy target acceptable to all. This is a far easier way of dealing with frustrations within a group, community or society than to change those beliefs, customs, practices and power relations that actually contribute to the suffering, hardships and frustration in the group. In a context of high levels of frustration in society it is certainly much easier to find a minority group to use as a scapegoat than, for example, to address economic inequality, political

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<sup>7</sup> *Webster's On-Line Dictionary*, s.v. 'Scapegoat', Definition of a Scapegoat in Webster's On-Line Dictionary, accessed April 24, 2011, (<http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/scapagoat>); Kelly M. Sutter, *"Nazi Gods" and "Jewish Devils": The Dehumanizing Rhetoric of Nazi Propaganda*. (Boston College: A Senior Honors Thesis, 2008), <[http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/schools/cas\\_sites/communication/pdf/thesis08.sutter.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/schools/cas_sites/communication/pdf/thesis08.sutter.pdf)>, accessed January 2, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Henry J. Hyde et al, "Words have Consequences: The Impact of Incitement and Anti-American and Anti-Semitic Propaganda on American Interests in the Middle East," in *Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on International Relations of the House of Representatives, 107th congress, 2nd session*, <<http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa78802.000/hfa78802.0f.htm>>, (accessed November 10, 2011); Thomas Pogge, "Poverty is a violation of human rights," *ON LINE opinion* (1 August 2005), <<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=3717>> accessed August 2, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> BBC 1972: Asians given 90 days to leave Uganda, *BBC News* (7 August 1972), <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/7/newsid\\_2492000/2492333.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/7/newsid_2492000/2492333.stm)>, (accessed January 12, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> IRIN, "Lesotho: Anti-Chinese resentment flares," *Humanitarian news and analysis: Africa* (24 January 2008), <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/76405/LESOTHO-Anti-Chinese-resentment-flares>>, (accessed January 12, 2012).

oppression or unjust global socio-economic and political structures which are the underlying cause of the suffering that people experience.

## 2. Scapegoating and Witchcraft Eradication

In Sub-Saharan Africa scapegoating often takes the form of witchcraft accusations that entail a rather literal demonization of vulnerable groups in society. The 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly the first decade, has witnessed an upsurge in witchcraft allegations levelled at vulnerable groups in society such as refugees, the handicapped, the elderly and children.<sup>11</sup> While it is outside the scope of this article to further explore historical witchcraft eradication movements and how they are linked to high levels of frustration in African society at the time, we must keep in mind that such movements have not been confined to Africa but also occurred in other parts of the globe including Europe and North America.<sup>12</sup>

Witchcraft beliefs and witchcraft accusations against socially undesirable persons have been part of African society for many centuries as an outlet of the many frustrations that are present in small agricultural communities.<sup>13</sup> It is due to frustration on a much larger scale in society that witchcraft accusations and accompanying witchcraft eradication practices have reached epidemic proportions in many parts of Africa. It is important to note that in the past witchcraft eradication movements flourished in times of cultural, socio-economic and political change, particularly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as European colonial influence made itself felt.<sup>14</sup> In the process of redefining their cultural identity in the wake of all the changes in their society new spirit possession cults were formed to cleanse the land from evil. Often these cults adopted Christian elements in an attempt to harness the apparently superior spiritual power of the Europeans.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nathalie Bussien et al, *Breaking the Spell: Responding to Witchcraft Accusations Against Children*, *New Issues in Refugee Research* 197 (Geneva: UNHCR, 2011); Aleksandra Cimpric, *Children Accused of Witchcraft, An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa* (Dakar: UNICEF, 2010); Javier A. Molina, *The Invention of Child Witches in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Social Cleansing, Religious Commerce and the Difficulties of Being a Parent in an Urban Culture* (London: Save the Children, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Puja Lalwani, "Facts about Salem Witch Trials," *Buzzle* (13 December 2010), <<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/salem-witch-trials-facts.html>>, (accessed May 24, 2012); Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1975), 117-118, 165.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Barrington-Ward, "The Centre Cannot Hold; Spirit Possession as Redefinition," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fashole-Luke, Richard Gray, Adrian Hastings and Godwin Tasie (London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 455-460.

<sup>15</sup> Barrington-Ward, "The Centre Cannot Hold," 461-463.

### 3. Contemporary Witchcraft Eradication

Another upsurge in witchcraft eradication movements arose in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, including several movements within African Pentecostal Christianity, often resulting in violent exorcism rituals, torture and even murder.<sup>16</sup> Joseph Kony's infamous Lord's Resistance Army, responsible for thousands of kidnappings of children as child soldiers and sex slaves, rapes and deaths in Uganda, Sudan, Congo and the Central African Republic started as a witchcraft eradication movement.<sup>17</sup> The failure of post-colonial governments to fulfil the dreams and aspirations of their people is at least partially due to the unequal distribution of wealth in their respective countries as well as inequalities due to unjust global economic structures that favour the rich countries of the Western world.<sup>18</sup> Other factors may include the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, inter-ethnic tensions, environmental degradation, the effects of global warming and many other problems that affect life in modern Africa. It is hardly surprising that in countries with high levels of economic inequality as well as environmental degradation such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, the oil rich Niger delta of Nigeria, as well as post-apartheid South Africa, witchcraft accusations are reaching epidemic proportions with the most vulnerable in society bearing the brunt.<sup>19</sup>

In Malawi a well-documented case made headlines when a 12 year old boy was beaten to death because his relatives suspected that he was a witch.<sup>20</sup> Another well-documented case was the burning to death of a 12 year old boy in Mwanza, Malawi by his aunts after a prayer meeting against the demons in the 'boy-witch'.<sup>21</sup> In Nigeria many similar cases have been documented by Stepping Stones Nigeria.<sup>22</sup> Another case that hit international

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<sup>16</sup> Nathalie Bussien et al, *Breaking the Spell*, 3-5; Wim van Binsbergen, "Witchcraft in Modern Africa as Virtualised Boundary Conditions of the Kinship Order," *African Religion* (2000), <[http://www.shikanda.net/african\\_religion/witchtxt.htm](http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/witchtxt.htm)>, (accessed August 5, 2012); Rijk A. van Dijk, "Fundamentalism and its Moral Geography in Malawi: The Representation of the Diasporic and the Diabolical," *Critique of Anthropology* 15, no. 2 (1995): 171-191.

<sup>17</sup> Peter B. Clarke, *Encyclopaedia of New Religious Movements*. (London: Routledge, 2006), 337-338.

<sup>18</sup> Pogge, "Recognized and Violated by International Law," 2

<sup>19</sup> Bussien et al, "Breaking the Spell," 1-5; Cimpric, "*Children Accused of Witchcraft*," 1-11; Molina, *The Invention of Child Witches*, 1-3.

<sup>20</sup> Caroline Somanje, "3 Beat boy, 12, to death, accuse him of witchcraft," *The Nation*, 27 January 2011, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Malawi News Agency. "Three arrested for torching 12-year-old to death," *The Nation*, 2 February 2009, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Foxcroft. *Saving Africa's Witch Children - A Documentary* (Lancaster: Stepping Stones Nigeria, 2008).

headlines involved the torture and drowning of a 15 year old boy in the United Kingdom by his sister and other relatives who accused him of being a witch.<sup>23</sup>

### The Response of the Church

It is our belief that the Christian church is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in addressing local, regional and global issues from the perspective of the teachings of Christ. In light of the above we are convinced that when it comes to issues of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations in African society and beyond, the Christian church has both the mandate and the tools to make a constructive and positive contribution. Unfortunately until date the response of the church to such issues has been inconsistent, ambiguous and sometimes even harmful.

For example there has been an increase in the number of Christian leaders who have joined the bandwagon of the witch doctors and witch finders of Africa and pose as professional exorcists and witch finders. They claim to be able to 'divine' and 'sniff out' witches by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> They perform cleansing ceremonies, exorcisms and protective prayers thereby replacing and usurping the role of the traditional diviner and witch doctor.<sup>25</sup> The services performed by these anti-witchcraft specialists do provide an outlet for the frustrations which have emerged in families and communities. They also may bring a measure of comfort and reassurance to dysfunctional families or communities that they are not the problem but the problem is the one identified as the witch. But this process is not only very harmful for the person(s) who gets the blame but ultimately harms the whole community as the underlying more complex causes of stress in the family or community are not properly identified or addressed. Scapegoating actually maintains the status quo by diverting the attention from the real issues to a scapegoat and may therefore be condoned if not actively encouraged by those who are responsible for the genuine causes of the suffering of the community. In Sub-Saharan Africa the consequences have been devastating. In the past decade hundreds of thousands of children, mostly orphans, have been victimised as scapegoats, being branded as witches by traditional healers as well as by unscrupulous pastors, prophets and apostles specializing in witchcraft

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<sup>23</sup> Timon Woodward, "Relatives Accused in Witchcraft Killing," *ABC News*, 9 January 2012, <<http://gma.yahoo.com/relatives-accused-killing-teen-thought-witch-080508832-abc-news.html>>, (accessed 20 May 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Erwin van der Meer, "The Problem of Witchcraft in Malawi," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2011): 78-85.

<sup>25</sup> Nii Narku Dowuona, "Children, Women Disgraced As Witches On Metro TV," *Ghana Web-News* (29 November 2006), <<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=114658>>, (accessed August 2, 2012); Victoria Ojeme and Caleb Ayansina, "Child witch accusation: FG warns churches, parents, others," *Vanguard Nigeria - News*, 21 June 2011, <<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/06/child-witch-accusation-fg-warns-churches-parents-others>>, (accessed May 25, 2012).

eradication. The children who are branded as witches are subjected to horrific abuses and are often expelled from their families and communities. Others are murdered as in the cases referred to above while others are murdered indirectly as they die of starvation and neglect.

Similar to many perpetrators of crimes against humanity in the Nazi era in Germany, those who kill children or adults accused of witchcraft do not see themselves as murderers but as doing humankind a service. They are the spiritual warriors, agents of justice and peace, who cleanse the community of the presence of the evil witches who they believe are the main cause of all misfortune. Narratives, testimonies, newspaper articles, even 'Christian' propaganda films which depict children as witches continue to fan the flames of violence against children branded as such.<sup>26</sup>

The question that faces the church in Africa is how should we respond to these issues? What makes the issue more complex is that some of the perpetrators who victimise children and other vulnerable people in witchcraft eradication commit their crimes in the name of Christianity just as some did in the Nazi era in Germany. Until date the responses of the Christian church in Africa can be categorised as "avoidance", "collaboration" and "intervention".

### **1. Avoidance and Maintenance of the Status Quo**

Confronted with the suffering of those who are accused of witchcraft in Africa, the evidence on the ground shows that the majority of theologians and theologically trained clergy tend to simply ignore such issues let alone intervene in behalf of the victims. Largely this tendency can be attributed to the fact that theological training in Africa, both in the universities and seminaries, is heavily influenced by Western theological education which has not done much thorough reflection on issues such as witchcraft and magical beliefs. Even if an institution offers a course in African pre-Christian religious beliefs and cultural practices this course usually is rather superficial and rarely provides the students with theological and pastoral tools to respond to issues such as witchcraft accusations in society. Discussions with several hundred clergymen in Southern Africa confirmed that they all felt ill-equipped to handle matters of witchcraft. In many cases the clergy themselves were fearful and intimidated by witchcraft and afraid they could fall under its influence. In Evangelical institutions the tendency is to equip students with a wide range of hermeneutical and exegetical tools to interpret scripture without the hermeneutical and exegetical tools to interpret complex issues in society including deviant religious beliefs. It is a positive development that many

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<sup>26</sup> IRIN, "Rights: Child witchcraft allegations on the rise," *Humanitarian news and analysis-Africa* (16 July 2010), <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/89858/RIGHTS-Child-witchcraft-allegations-on-the-rise>> (Accessed 01 May 2011); Sharon LaFraniere, "African Children Falsely Accused of Witchcraft: African Crucible: Cast as Witches, Then Cast Out," *New York Times* (15 November 2007), <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/15/world/africa/15witches.html>>, (accessed 10 January 2011).

theological institutions have introduced courses in African pre-Christian beliefs in response to the revived interest in African philosophy and African theology. It is also partly due to the romanticizing of the African cultural heritage and the search for a post-colonial African identity. As good as these efforts are, they are often superficial, descriptive and insufficient to address complex issues such as witchcraft. Yet, the well-known African scholar John Mbiti described the issue of witchcraft, witchcraft accusations, and the fear of witchcraft as one of the most disturbing elements in African religion and life.<sup>27</sup>

Serious philosophical enquiry, intellectual debate and scholarly interaction with African worldviews, cultures and religious experiences is often inadequate in theological education and reflection. Sometimes courses on African pre-Christian religions resemble a 'Hogwarts defence against the dark arts' course rather than meaningful reflection. The fear of syncretism at times stifles any initiative to engage meaningfully with such issues. Ironically in this manner syncretism may be encouraged as clergy are left ill-equipped to deal with cultural and other contextual issues in society. Without an alternative frame of reference they may resort to a non-Christian frame of reference to make sense of such issues. Among those of a Charismatic and Pentecostal persuasion there may be the added fear that the study of non-Christian religious thought and practices is tantamount to venturing into a world of demons. Unfortunately many other evangelicals concur that African pre-Christian religions are demonic in nature and therefore not worthy of serious theological engagement leaving them ill-equipped when confronted with such issues.

The colonial 'witchcraft suppression acts' also reflect this failure to engage the underlying worldview in any meaningful manner and also an unwillingness to acknowledge their socio-economic and political failures which frustrated the population giving rise to more witchcraft eradication attempts.

We also need to recognise that people do not change easily their worldview unless it is specifically engaged, and not once or twice but consistently. If we acknowledge that a worldview is the "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives", then we may appreciate that it is not something that changes easily.<sup>28</sup> Of course one may also wonder whether a change of worldview to the semi-secular worldview promoted by Western Christianity is the best alternative for Christianity in Africa. Maybe we should be more concerned about the Christian transformation of local cultures and worldviews rather than replacing them. In early Christianity a Jewish Christian was not required to embrace Greek culture nor was a Greek Christian required to embrace Jewish culture but rather they were allowed to remain fully Jewish or fully Greek and yet embrace

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<sup>27</sup> Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 117-118, 165.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 15.

Christ and Christ's teachings. We must avoid proclaiming Christ plus foreign cultural ideas.

The current approach to African cultures, religions and worldviews has resulted in a lack of meaningful interaction between these and Christianity. Knowingly or unknowingly more effort was put into replacing African culture by means of Western education. Evangelists were usually content once a convert professed Christianity, confessed the right creed and adopted what they perceived as a Christian lifestyle and culture. In line with the assumptions of the colonialist government, it was generally assumed by the early missionaries to Africa that the worldview of the individual would gradually change. However, one of the problems associated with proselytizing is that it is impossible to transform a worldview unless it is deliberately and consistently engaged. Failure to do so will only result in superficial changes. Only by meaningful engagement in teaching, discussion and careful reflection can someone modify or substitute beliefs and practices that have always been part of a person's worldview. Even then it is a gradual process. If we choose the biblical approach of bringing Christian transformation within an existing worldview we need to do a lot more than providing people with theological and exegetical tools to exegete and evaluate their worldview in the light of the example set by Christ and Christ's teachings.

In the area of witchcraft many African Christians feel that their church is unable to help them adequately. Some feel that the church does not address their witchcraft concerns properly or that the prayers offered by their church are not powerful enough. As a result many visit Pentecostal churches to receive specialist services whenever they are convinced their problems are related to witchcraft. Of course, the very presumption that some prayers are more powerful than others is itself rooted in a long magical tradition that attributes power to the shaman or the religious specialist who does the praying, rather than to the God who can answer even the weakest prayer of the smallest child. The emphasis is on the 'powerful' method, manner and wording of the prayers. Consequently they may rely on traditional healers or 'prophets' who provide specialist prayers and exorcisms.

## **2. Pentecostal Collaboration**

In contrast to mainstream Evangelicals, those of a Charismatic or Pentecostal persuasion do not shy away from confronting witchcraft related issues. However, among many we observe a tendency to, on one hand avoid meaningful theological reflection on the issue, while on the other hand engaging it superficially and aggressively as something demonic. The emphasis is on spiritual warfare and spiritual deliverance. They understand people as being in bondage to demonically inspired false beliefs and in need of spiritual liberation. However, liberation is not understood in the biblical sense of teaching the truth that sets people free but as exorcism, spiritual cleansing and the breaking of demonic spiritual ties and curses. Traditional

healers specialise in divining spiritual causes of bewitchment and who is the one who did the bewitchment. Increasingly Charismatic and Pentecostal deliverance practices mirror those of traditional healers with pastors, prophets and apostles specialising in identifying the witch. We may then conclude that while on the surface attacking the African pre-Christian worldview, many Charismatic and Pentecostal leaders have assimilated its concepts, beliefs and practices. When it comes to witchcraft accusations the underlying beliefs are rarely questioned but simply redefined in terms of Satan and the demons. By praying against magical curses, and prayers to break alleged spells, many Pentecostals are validating the belief in witchcraft and its efficiency and in so doing they contribute to more fear in society and oppression of the accused. The Charismatic and Pentecostal witch finders of Akwa Ibom state in Nigeria are a good example of how such things can get out of hand as some Pentecostal witch finders detain, exorcise and even murder children accused of witchcraft.<sup>29</sup>

### Positive Intervention

In the 21st century many Christians in Africa have expressed their concern about issues arising from the pre-Christian worldview such as witchcraft beliefs, witch hunts, albino murders and child sacrifices. Unfortunately intervention has been limited to addressing symptoms. Several shelters and safe houses have been opened in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi and Nigeria, to accommodate child victims of witchcraft accusations or victims of ritual mutilation although little is done to address underlying causes.<sup>30</sup> In a few instances Christian activists have been involved in calling for legislative reform and involved in awareness campaigns.<sup>31</sup> We propose that the church in Africa becomes more proactive in promoting a multi-pronged intervention which among other things should involve theological reflection, awareness creation, engaging the media, involve civil society and advocating as well as reviewing existing legislation and promoting legislative reform in order to combat witch hunting practices.

#### 1. Further Theological Reflection

There is an urgent need for more reflection on issues such as witchcraft in theological education, missionary training, leadership seminars, workshops, and within Christian scholarship in Africa and beyond. Special attention must be given to the issue of spiritual truth claims that are based on anecdotal

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<sup>29</sup> Foxcroft, *Saving Africa's Witch Children*.

<sup>30</sup> Isaac Phiri, "Saving Witches in Kolwezi: Accused of Witchcraft by Parents and Churches, Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo are Being Rescued by Christian Activists," *Christianity Today* (September 2009), <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/september/27.62.html>>, (accessed 10 November 2011); Van der Meer, "The Problem of Witchcraft in Malawi," 78-85.

<sup>31</sup> Coalition Against Child Witchcraft Stigmatization in Africa, <<http://stopchildwitchcraftaccusations.blogspot.com>>, (accessed 23 August 2012).

evidence and to how the church responds to these both theologically and pastorally.<sup>32</sup>

How do we respond to an old woman being convicted of witchcraft by a magistrate after a ten year old girl confesses to have been taken by the old woman on a magical plane and on return caused the death of a boy by magically hitting him with a hammer?<sup>33</sup> How do we respond to the teenage girl who genuinely believes that she is responsible for all the deaths in the community because she is a witch? How do we respond when someone in an apparent state of 'possession' makes all kinds of malicious revelations?<sup>34</sup> Is such information truly reliable as some have suggested?<sup>35</sup> What are the theological, legal and other consequences if such ideas are embraced as truthful revelations? In the African context many anecdotes are taken as Gospel truth both by many African Christians and foreign missionaries alike without thorough investigation and careful critical reflection. A thorough study and understanding of both biblical theology and the African context is essential in order to respond adequately to such issues.

Theological educators in Africa, whether at an institutional or congregational level, need to be well conversant with the African worldviews, especially beliefs and practices rooted in these beliefs. This also applies to those who prepare missionaries and other Christian personnel for working in Africa. The Africanisation of faculties in theological institutions on the continent is critical in this regard. Africanisation is not just necessary as a means for assuaging racial tensions in predominantly European staffed evangelical colleges within Africa or to be implemented just as a matter of political correctness, but it is critical if there is to be a genuine transformation of worldviews and a nurturing of Christians who are comfortable in their African worldview, cultural or philosophical skins. It is also crucial in developing a Christianity in Africa that exudes both Christ-likeness and 'Africanicity' – the two realities embodied in harmony within an individual African Christian and the same reality also being expressed communally in the African churches and other Christian institutions. This is not an argument for affirmative action on racial grounds for there are Africans of Bantu origin who operate almost solely from a non-African worldview and have less understanding and appreciation of the African worldview than some Europeans who are ardent students of African culture.

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<sup>32</sup> Erwin van der Meer, "The Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare Theology of C. Peter Wagner and Its Implication for Christian Mission in Malawi," *DTh Thesis* (Pretoria: UNISA, 2008), 229-232.

<sup>33</sup> Caroline Kandiero, "72-year-old jailed for witchcraft," *Daily Times*, 29 Aug. 2007, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Robert J. Priest, Thomas Campbell and Bradford A. Mullen, "Missiological Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm," in *Spiritual Power and Missions*, ed. Edward Rommen (Pasadena: Carey, 1995), 9-87.

<sup>35</sup> Charles H. Kraft, "Christian Animism" or God-Given Authority? In *Spiritual Power and Missions*, ed. Edward Rommen (Pasadena: Carey, 1995): 91.

Theological educators in Africa, whether at an institutional or congregational level, should make a conscious effort to relate biblical teaching to the worldviews, beliefs and practices rooted in these beliefs. This requires hermeneutical tools not only for the exegesis of Scripture but also anthropological, philosophical and psychological tools for gaining an in-depth understanding of a worldview and the people who are influenced by it.

We need to reflect upon the lessons learnt by the early Christian church as reflected in Scripture whereby Jewish Christians had an antagonistic attitude to the worldview and culture of the Gentile Christians and attempted to impose their culture upon them. The apostle Paul vehemently opposed this and sought to promote Christian transformation within the culture. In this endeavour he tried to be Greek with the Greeks and Jewish with the Jews, and he even employed pagan philosophies in order to relate the gospel to the host culture. It is essential that we seek to bring Christian transformation within a culture and worldview rather than seeking to make people embrace our worldview. This requires a thorough understanding of the worldview of the people we minister to as well as a thorough understanding of Scripture and a thorough understanding of our own worldview.

Christians should live differently because they are Christians.<sup>36</sup> Their allegiance to the person and teachings of Christ should be reflected in everything they say and do. However, if their behaviour is based primarily on traditional or contemporary societal beliefs rather than Christian beliefs, then their day-to-day lifestyle essentially remains unchristian and will at times even be anti-Christian. In recent history we have seen extreme examples of this in Europe with Christian Serbs massacring Bosnian Muslims, the on-going Irish Catholic-Protestant tensions and in Africa Christian Hutu massacring Christian Tutsi and vice versa. In South Africa it is about 20 years after *Apartheid* but worship on Sundays does not largely reflect this reality as evidenced by many Christians worshipping largely with people who share the same racial background. In Europe there is a proliferation of African migrant churches that celebrate their African identity at the expense of integration and building cultural bridges to reach the largely non-Christian population of their host nations. Whenever our cultural background and worldview dominates our belief system and behaviour, Christ is relegated to the side-lines and our lives will reflect the world rather than our allegiance to Christ. Conversion must involve a transformation of beliefs, but if it is a change only of beliefs and not of behaviour, it is false faith. Conversion may include a change in beliefs and behaviour, but if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic christo-paganism, which has the form

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<sup>36</sup> Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 2008, 12.

of Christianity but not its essence. Christianity becomes a new magic and a new, subtler form of idolatry that will mislead millions.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. Creating Awareness of the Situation

When it comes to issues such as child witchcraft accusations or child ritual mutilations and human sacrifice that affect a whole nation or society, we need to go beyond the walls of our church buildings. The church is called to be salt and light in society and as such should be at the forefront of addressing social evils. Creating awareness in churches, in schools and various other forums are some of the interventions the church can be involved in.

Even though many Christians are hesitant to work together with government agencies, multi-lateral organizations and NGOs such as human rights organizations, social activists and the like due to differences of opinion, we must consider that just because we disagree on a number of things does not mean that we cannot work together in other areas. There are many examples in the Bible where men and women of God worked for and worked with ungodly governments and rather ungodly allies for a common goal which was not in conflict with their loyalty to God, like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon and Esther in Persia. We can only be the 'salt of the earth' if we are in the world. At the same time we must not compromise our beliefs and we must avoid becoming 'of the world' in the sense of compromising Jesus' teachings.

## 3. Engaging the Media

In the case of child witchcraft accusations in Malawi, the albino murders in Tanzania or child sacrifice in Uganda the role of the media is often ambiguous. On one hand we read reports condemning such evils while on the other hand there are many reports of supernatural events, the efficiency of witchcraft and the power of ritual sacrifices that indirectly may encourage such evils.<sup>38</sup> The church can engage the media positively by encouraging them to be careful, critical and objective in their reporting. This may be done in special seminars for journalists or by means of encouraging the development of a code of ethics that does not sensationalise preternatural stories.

When it comes to the film industry, several studies have suggested a correlation between witch-hunts and ritual killings and the showing of Nigerian religious horror movies on television and in the cinemas.<sup>39</sup> Many of these movies mix Christian and pre-Christian African religious elements and should be discouraged in the church as they confuse many believers. In society as a whole we may encourage age restrictions on these movies just as government censorship bodies deal with violent Hollywood movies and also clearly stress

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<sup>37</sup> Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 2008, 12-20.

<sup>38</sup> Van der Meer, "The Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare Theology," 252.

<sup>39</sup> Linda Battarbee, Gary Foxcroft and Emilie Secker, *Witchcraft Stigmatisation and Children's Rights in Nigeria: A Report Prepared for the 54th Session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* (Lancaster: Stepping Stones Nigeria, 2009), 2-10.

that what is shown is fiction and not factual in nature. In a bid to protect what it called 'the poor portrayal of Nigerians' that country's government banned the screening of 'District 9' a film produced in South Africa as it depicted Nigerians as criminals and cannibals.<sup>40</sup> However, the same government failed to stop the screening of Helen Ukpabio's "end of the wicked", a movie in which she depicts children as witches responsible for misfortunes, harm and death which befall adults.<sup>41</sup> For the protection of the children and other members of the African communities at risk due to witchcraft accusations, it would not be too heavy a price to ask for an age restriction and a warning that this is fiction to be printed on selected African movies that feature themes such as witchcraft, demonology, Satanism, curses and other occult matters.

The media industry should be discouraged from sensationalizing witchcraft stories as part of responsible journalism and part of their duty towards community building. As an old African saying goes 'it takes the whole village to raise a child', it also takes the whole village to protect a child, or all those that are vulnerable within the community. Multi-pronged efforts are needed from various sectors of the communities in the countries heavily affected by the witchcraft accusation phenomena if its negative effects are to be curbed.

#### 4. Calling for Legislative Reform

Societal reform from a Christian perspective also involves engaging the judiciary in order to lobby for just laws that mirror the Biblical foundation for law and order, namely 'love your neighbour as yourself' as the apostle Paul refers to in Romans 13:8-10. It is interesting to note here that Paul stresses love for our neighbours as the core philosophy of the law in the context of relating to the government. Seeking the good of the land, promoting love, goodness, mercy, peace and justice wherever we are is part of our biblical mandate as salt and light in the world, shining as stars in the darkness.

In terms of legislation we may need to call for a repeal or revision of the inefficient and ambiguous witchcraft suppression acts still in effect in various African countries. The situation in Malawi and other African countries where vulnerable people are convicted of witchcraft and jailed shows that these laws do little to curb witchcraft eradication practices.<sup>42</sup> Most 'Witchcraft Acts' in the

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<sup>40</sup> Julie Bloom. "Nigeria Says 'District 9' Is Not Welcome," *The New York Times*, 20 September 2009. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/21/movies/21arts-NIGERIASAYSD\\_BRF.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/21/movies/21arts-NIGERIASAYSD_BRF.html?_r=1)>, (accessed 20 August 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Helen Ukpabio, "End of the wicked," *Film fragment*, 20 February 2012, <<http://ieet.org/index.php/IEET/more/helenukpabio20120212>>, (accessed 11 August 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Carrie Byrne, "Hunting the Vulnerable: Witchcraft and the Law in Malawi," *Consultancy Africa Intelligence*, 16 June 2011. <[http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=783:hunting-the-vulnerable-witchcraft-and-the-law-in-malawi&catid=91:rights-in-focus&Itemid=296](http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=783:hunting-the-vulnerable-witchcraft-and-the-law-in-malawi&catid=91:rights-in-focus&Itemid=296)>, (accessed 5 December 2011).

affected countries imply or claim that witches and witchcraft does not exist. In one sense what these Acts affirm is true but in another sense it isn't. Understanding this paradox is not that complicated: Witches do exist and so do their 'witch' crafts; but we want to contend here that they only exist and operate in the natural world with natural means albeit at times with impressive results using ventriloquism, poisons, drugs and other natural means. It is their claims and operations in the preternatural realm that should be questioned, put under scrutiny and many times be discarded. We may think of claims such as flying on brooms or winnowing baskets or the transmigration of souls to inflict harm on others, claims of shape changing into nocturnal animals or claiming to ride on hyenas at night.

However, while we may discard any supernatural claims, people who label themselves as witches and admit to practising witchcraft do exist in the natural sense. Among them you may even find some who put poison in people's food or drinks or use other natural means of causing harm and then ascribe the effects of their acts to some supernatural force. Whether some supernatural forces are real or unreal is a theological matter and not one for the legal fraternity. However, any natural means, such as poison, employed by either so-called witches or witch finders that inflicts harm must be dealt with by the law. Legislation against witchcraft beliefs or supernatural assumptions will not achieve much. Repealing the current 'Witchcraft Acts' may be a good starting point. The natural acts of witches or witch finders such as poisoning are easily prosecutable under other laws. Possibilities on whether accusers can be prosecutable under already existing defamation laws should also be investigated.

The missionary led church in the colonial period supported the 'Witchcraft Acts', but now in post-colonial Africa and in light of the recent history of witchcraft accusations, the African led church should call for their repeal as part of championing the protection of those being affected by witchcraft accusations. If as a church we keep quiet about such evils in our societies, we make a mockery of the quintessential mark of true spirituality, namely the protection of widows and orphans who represent all vulnerable groups in our societies. After all, at the heart of the Gospel is love for God and for our neighbour, particularly the weaker and hurting neighbour as Jesus so aptly illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Witch hunting is not just an issue for human legislation but is indicative of a serious spiritual problem, because its practices and underlying beliefs are contrary to the Law of Christ.

### **Final Remarks**

This article is meant to provide an introductory discussion to the phenomena of witchcraft accusations being experienced in several African countries. We sincerely hope that we have demonstrated that the Christian church in Africa, and beyond, can actually make a positive contribution towards addressing the problem of the current wave of harmful witchcraft

eradication movements in Africa. Apart from raising awareness within the Christian community we call for further discussion and research on several aspects relating to dealing with witchcraft in general and witchcraft accusations in particular within the Evangelical community where there is unfortunately too much collaboration. We advocate for a multi-pronged and interdisciplinary approach at local, regional and a global level. There is also an urgent need for Christian academics, theologians, ethicists, philosophers, activists and others to be actively involved in addressing some of the contributing global factors that cause so much frustration in African societies. We can think of the unjust global economic and political structures, the effects of global warming, and the exploitative and often corrupt practices of multinational corporations as well as other global issues. This could be done in the form of participation in the world social forum or joining hands with those who call for a more just economic order such as Thomas Pogge.<sup>43</sup> The few suggestions we have made so far with respect to possible solutions are meant as a starting point for discussion and intervention and are by no means meant to be exhaustive. It is our hope that others will pick up the challenge to address some of the issues we have discussed and take constructive action.

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Pogge, "Poverty, Human Rights and the Global Order: Framing the Post-2015 Agenda," in *MDGs and Human Rights: Past, Present and Future*, eds. Malcolm Langford, Andy Sumner, Alice Yamin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012).

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# **Satan and Demons in Popular Christian Theology**

by Georgette Short

## Abstract

*Between 2010 and 2012 fourth year students from Scott Theological College (now Scott Christian University) recorded hundreds of church services in East Africa. The aim of this project, supervised by Dr Gregg Okesson, was to identify African theology as articulated in worship services. Thousands of pages documented what was said and done in a large sample of churches in Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda and highlighted interesting expressions of popular Christian theology. This article examines the theology of these churches concerning the devil and demonic spirits, as conveyed through their teaching, prayers, songs and testimonies. It analyses the beliefs expressed in these different forms, showing what these congregations believe about the devil and how to counter his activities. The devil and his forces are seen as being active in many areas of life and responsible for the misfortunes and difficulties Christians face. He seeks to disrupt worship services and prevent people from hearing God's word. Though Christ defeated him on the cross and will conclusively defeat him when Christ returns, he still has power. Therefore Christians need to oppose him so that he cannot hold sway in their lives and worship of God. The aim is to understand popular beliefs about the devil, not to critique such beliefs or to suggest specific doctrinal improvements.*

## **Satan is Alive and Working Against Christians**

I Peter 5:8 says, 'Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.' The East African churches whose services were recorded in the ecclesiastical research gathered by students and faculty from Scott Christian University during 2010-2012 very much subscribe to this image of the devil. These East African Christians see the devil as a very real presence in the world and as actively working evil in the lives of Christians. Although they believe Jesus Christ has already defeated the devil, Satan still has considerable power and influence. He needs to be identified as being at work because he uses many dangerous ploys against individual Christians and the church as a whole. Unless he is opposed and prayed against, he will work against Christians and cause problems in their lives. References to the devil and demonic forces appear frequently in the ecclesiastical research. They can be found predominantly in the prayers and teaching of the churches but can also be seen in choir pieces and testimonies.

## **The Devil and Christian Teaching**

Teaching about the devil and his forces, his influence in the world, and how he can be defeated is a strong theme in these churches. Occasionally, whole sermons are given over to dealing with this subject but more typically teaching on the devil is woven into sermons dealing with other matters.

## 1. Teaching: Jesus Christ Has Won a Crucial Victory Over Satan

Generally, the churches researched teach that Jesus has completely defeated the devil through his death, resurrection and ascension and will defeat him conclusively when he comes again. While believers may fear the devil and should not underestimate his influence, the churches teach that he has already been defeated by Jesus and so has only limited power.

During a leaders' seminar at the Christ Celebration Centre in Nairobi, Bishop Mureithi taught that, 'Jesus not only dealt with sin and the law on the cross but He also dealt with Satan. Speaking about his crucifixion in John 12:13, Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out". The death of Christ on the cross looked like a great victory for Satan but it was a great defeat that he will never recover.'<sup>1</sup> Mureithi went on to say that three things happened on the cross: Jesus disarmed the powers and authorities; in his death, resurrection, and ascension he vindicated God and vanquished the devil; and he triumphed over the Roman soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

Another example of this kind of teaching can be found at Nairobi Pentecostal Church. Jesus 'is the victorious conqueror who has defeated our enemies - sin, death, Satan, and hell.'<sup>3</sup> At Nzau Bible College Pastor Mulinge also stressed the devil's defeat:

The best example I can give to illustrate God's communicable character of holiness is Satan's hurlment into the world. As the scripture says when sin was found in him, that is the 'morning star', he was hurled into the world because God is holy and he cannot accommodate ungodliness. Satan, who is the essence of all evil, has a mission of propagating his shrewd schemes but at the end he will be doomed for eternal destruction for God is holy and he will finally bring every thing to his submission.<sup>4</sup>

Such statements underpin what is by far the most dominant teaching on the devil within the churches researched - that although the devil is active in the world, Jesus has already defeated him and so he has limited power. This teaching, combined with an understanding that Jesus' Second Coming will herald the devil's ultimate destruction, encourages Christians to see the devil as relatively powerless when compared to Jesus and therefore not to be feared. In traditional African worldviews, aspects of which many African Christians share, evil spirits wield significant power, so Jesus' victory is a necessary and important teaching of the church.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Mureithi, Christ Celebration Centre, Nairobi, July 26, 2011, Albert, Sermon 17.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Mureithi, Christ Celebration Centre, Nairobi, July 26, 2011, Albert, Sermon 17.

<sup>3</sup> Nairobi Pentecostal Church, Woodley, Nairobi, Korir, Sermon 15.

<sup>4</sup> Pr. J. Mulinge, Friday Fellowship, Nzau Bible School, Nzau, Makueni County, May 26, 2011, Ndolo, Sermon 10. Minor corrections in this and other quotations are made to increase readability.

<sup>5</sup> Editor's footnote: We must carefully distinguish between practicing African Traditional Religion and holding African worldviews. African theologians often speak of the

Leading on from such teaching is the understanding that the believer can have victory over the devil in their own life because Jesus has already defeated him. While these churches suggest that some believers are being troubled by the devil, they also teach that they do not have to be because it is possible to be victorious over the devil. These churches are aware of the ways in which some of their members have been badly affected by the devil at work in their lives, but they teach that God can release them from his influence.

Some preachers suggest that the devil is attacking people even within the church. As the pastor at Jesus Celebration Centre said:

The devil has held many captive; am just coming from visiting a family which has been destroyed by the devil. Their shambas, cows and whatever they have been affected by the devil. The devil has subjected their children to drunkenness because somebody used evil spirit to destroy the family but I prayed for the family for the deliverance of God.<sup>6</sup>

Another pastor warned those attending a youth rally that, 'The devil is in the mission of winning many Christian believers from the kingdom of God to the evil kingdom of the devil. The devil oppresses, possesses, people and he also opposes us from reaching our destiny.'<sup>7</sup> Pastor Samuel Kioko suggests that:

Many people do not obey, Satan has blinded them. They are obeying the devil and doing his works. Instead of sending the gospel, people are dealing with evil things like alcoholism, worshipping idols, and lies. The Bible says that we should put off all evils things so that we may be true disciples of Jesus. It is possible that Satan is still controlling you, he has put his demons on you although you are in church. He has blinded you and you cannot meditate on the word of God.<sup>8</sup>

Family problems are also attributed to the devil's actions, 'Friends if we are united the Devil will not have a chance to disunite you. The reason why many families are in calamity...'<sup>9</sup> These examples demonstrate a strong belief that the devil is active in people's lives, and that he is the source of many of the problems they face.

The churches involved in this research believe that the devil can cause problems in the lives of believers, however, there is also a strong emphasis

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continuing influence of traditional African worldviews among Christians. (See for example, Samuel W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, Nairobi: HippoBooks, 2012, p. xv.) But this is very different from retaining a basic loyalty to the gods and spirits of African Traditional Religion. Conversion to Christ does not require conversion to a Western view of evil spirits, whether Christian or secular. It does require a shift of loyalties from ATR to Christ, but worldviews are transformed, not abandoned.

<sup>6</sup> Lunch Hour Service, Jesus Celebration Centre, April 19, 2011, Godwin, Extra Sermons.

<sup>7</sup> A.I.C Katangini D.C.C Youth Rally, December 28, 2010, Godwin, Sermon 6.

<sup>8</sup> Pr. Samuel Kioko, Gospel Revival Centre, Mavivie, April 27, 2011, (Kanwele, Sermon 13).

<sup>9</sup> Pr. Joshua Kioko, AIC Miwani, Machakos, December 5, 2010, (Maurice, Sermon 5).

that because Jesus has defeated the devil, Christians can have victory over them too. This was summed up well at the Jesus Celebration Centre where it was said that, 'The devil will not continue arresting the people of God but the Lord is going to give them strength to overcome the challenge.'<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Paul Muthoka teaches that, 'God gives the believer victory over Satan and all other spiritual forces. The victory of a believer is won and there is no power of darkness that can prevail against the church. Jesus pronounced of building a church in which the gates of Hades will not overcome.'<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Teaching: Christians Can Defeat the Devil by Using Scripture

This kind of assertion gives the churches a theological basis for teaching that their congregations can counter the attacks of the devil, and it enables them to see that they need not fear the devil if they believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore, although Christians need to be wary of Satan, Christians can deal with him decisively and prevent him from causing harm to people.

Biblical passages are often used to give more extended teaching on the activities of the devil and how to counter them. Two passages that were used on a number of occasions are the temptation of Jesus and the image of the armour of God in Ephesians 6:10 ff. Both of these passages are used to help Christians to deal with the devil's schemes in their own lives. They are encouraged by Jesus' temptation to follow his example when faced with temptation and urged to put on the full armour of God in their fight with the devil by a study of what Paul teaches the Ephesians.

In a youth service in a sermon entitled *Trusting Jesus in Temptation* the pastor used Jesus' temptation as an example for the congregation to follow. Jesus was tempted like we are, therefore he not only understands what we are going through but can also help us in our times of temptation.<sup>12</sup> Pastor Mulei first stresses that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are and yet was without sin. He also suggests that the devil attacked Jesus at his weakest point and then goes on to look in detail at the three ways in which the devil tempted Jesus. He shows how Jesus countered the devil by the use of Scripture and uses illustrations to make each point relevant to the congregation. He ends, 'Believe in Jesus Christ ... because Jesus overcame when he was tempted in lust, because Jesus overcame when he was tempted in power, and because Jesus overcame when tempted in worship. May God bless you and help you overcome that which you are struggling with.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lunch Hour Service, Jesus Celebration Centre, April 19, 2011, (Godwin, Extra Sermons).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Muthoka, Jesus Celebration Centre, Wote Town, July 23, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 20).

<sup>12</sup> Pastor Mulei, AIC Katisaa, September 11, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 12).

<sup>13</sup> Pastor Mulei, AIC Katisaa, September 11, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 12).

During a service at Muumandu Secondary School, Moreen, a student leader, uses this passage to encourage her fellow students to use the Bible as a weapon against the devil. She says, 'As secondary school students we will not be in a position to overcome if we do not know the word. The Bible says how can a young man make his way straight. Only by reading the word of God. The word of God is a weapon that makes us overcome the devil. Remember when Jesus Christ was in the wilderness ... , he was tempted by devil to change the stones into the bread. But Jesus oh yes, Jesus told the devil it is written man does not leave by bread alone, praise God, praise God again.'<sup>14</sup> Moreen uses this passage to motivate her colleagues to read the Bible because through doing so they will be able to overcome the devil and other challenges in their lives.

Ephesians 6:10-20 is also used as the text for a number of sermons. In a service in Scott Community Chapel, Machakos, the preacher uses this passage to help the congregation see what part they might play in advancing the gospel. He suggests that, 'Our position in the battle should be defensive and offensive: (Eph. 6:16) In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. (Eph. 6:17) And you will need the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit - which is the Word of God (TLB)', and further argues that believers need to put on the full armour of God.<sup>15</sup> Pastor Joshua Nzomo also argues from Ephesians 6:10-20 that, 'Satan discourages God's people but God's people will overcome him as they have with them the armour of God.'<sup>16</sup> These speakers use Ephesians 6:10-20 in a very specific way. They see the armour of God as a means of fighting spiritual battles against the devil and a way of both protecting yourself against his schemes and attacking him when necessary.

### **3. Teaching: Scripture Reveals How the Devil Tempts Believers**

Eve's temptation by the devil in Eden is used to teach about how the devil operates. The temptation of Eve is used to highlight some of the ploys the devil uses to tempt believers to act against God's will. Francis Mumo says: Mr. Devil is so craft[y] that he understands areas of our weaknesses and uses them to deceive us Christians, so we should be smarter to detect the devil whenever he comes to destruct us from what we know is true. In Genesis 3:4ff, the devil gave the woman assurance that they will not surely die by eating from the tree of knowledge which she believed God said so. The devil used his craft way by telling the woman that what God did is that he did not want them to be like him that's why he prohibited them from eating from that tree, which was not true. Instead of the woman seeking to ask her husband to know the truth of the matter she went ahead and saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some

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<sup>14</sup> Moreen, Muumandu Secondary School, May 13, 2011, (Mweu, Sermon 2).

<sup>15</sup> Scott Community Chapel, Machakos, November 20, 2011. (Judith, 34).

<sup>16</sup> Pr. Joshua Nzomo, AIC Mwanyani/Bomani DCC, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010, (Gideon, Sermon 5).

and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ... As the way he deceived Adam and Eve also he will look ways to deceive us too.<sup>17</sup>

The preacher uses this passage to highlight both the character and ploys of the devil as he tempted Eve and suggests that it serves as a warning of how he might tempt us too.

At a service at Ahero Bible College Genesis 3 was also used to show how the devil tempts the believer. The preacher said that, 'According to verse one of chapter 3 in Genesis the devil caused if to doubt, "did God say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" the devil knew that God did say then why ask, to bring the element of doubt.<sup>18</sup> The devil is also seen creating discontent in Eve as well as suggesting that God is untrustworthy and a liar.<sup>19</sup> The preacher concludes with some advice on how to avoid temptation by the devil when he says, 'Satan looks for an opportune time (Eve was near the forbidden fruit) if you don't want to eat of the forbidden fruit don't come near it. If you don't want to be accused of misusing church finances flee from them leaving them with the concerned. Why counsel opposite sex in private places?'<sup>20</sup> He uses Eve's close proximity to the fruit to suggest that believers should not linger near things that might tempt them to sin.

Some characters in the Bible are regarded as examples of what the devil is like. Pastor Nzomo, in a sermon about spiritual weapons, likens Goliath to the devil and uses this as a means of discussing the weapons and tactics the devil might use against believers. He connects Goliath and the devil and suggests that God keeps his people safe from the devil when he says, 'God is the only one who protects us against Satan, who pictured as the Philistine.'<sup>21</sup> He also demonstrates what weapon we should use against the devil. 'When we fight our enemy the Philistine (Goliath-Satan) is in our midst, we should be very keen knowing his tactics and fight him with God's word.'<sup>22</sup> This last point cannot be made directly from this passage but the speaker may have in mind what is taught elsewhere in the Bible, specifically the temptation of Jesus and Ephesians 6:10-20.

According to Rev. Samuel Mwatha, King Ahab can also be seen as a type of the devil. 'On his side King Ahab was a cunning and opportunistic person. He was a schemer who spoke what was not in his heart. He is a good picture of the devil - for the devil kisses from the front and kills you from behind.'<sup>23</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> Pr. Francis Mumo, Funeral Service, Makuli Village, Kangundo, December 27, 2011, (Mutunga, 27).

<sup>18</sup> Ahero Bible School Chapel, (Judith 9).

<sup>19</sup> Ahero Bible School Chapel, (Judith 9).

<sup>20</sup> Ahero Bible School Chapel, (Judith 9).

<sup>21</sup> Pastor Joshua Nzomo, AIC Mwanyani, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010, (Gideon, Sermon 5).

<sup>22</sup> Pastor Joshua Nzomo, AIC Mwanyani, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010, (Gideon, Sermon 5).

<sup>23</sup> Rev. Samuel Mwatha, Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa, Gikomba-Nairobi, June 26, 2011, (Nyerere, Sermon 8).

evil character of King Ahab, as well as his actions, are equated with the devil. There is a veiled warning to believers in what Rev. Mwatha says which believers need to heed when confronted by the devil. In using the example of King Ahab, he warns that the devil does not attack directly but uses any opportunity he can to strike.

Other Bible characters are also used to show how the devil works. In a sermon by Joshua Mutinda, believers are warned through the life of Elijah that the devil often attacks when life is going smoothly. He says, 'Elijah had overcome the Baal gods and was enjoying himself, when suddenly the devil struck. The devil will always come to us at times when we think all is well. Take care!' <sup>24</sup> While the devil is not mentioned in this passage of Scripture, Mutinda equates the troubles Elijah had after his encounter with the prophets of Baal as having their source in the devil and uses it as a warning to his listeners when things are going well for them.

#### **4. Teaching: Christians Must Wage Spiritual Warfare**

Much of what is taught in the churches concerning the devil suggests that Christians are involved in spiritual warfare. Whole sermons such as the one preached by Julius Nyerere <sup>25</sup> deal with this subject while other preachers include it as a sub-topic in their sermons. Using passages such as Galatians 6:10-20 and referring to David's battle with Goliath strongly evokes this idea, but the churches included in the ecclesiastical research also use language in much of their teaching on the devil which further supports the belief that Christians are in a battle against the devil. Pastor Muthoka uses warlike language when he says, 'It means that God gives the believer victory over Satan and all other spiritual forces. The victory of a believer is won and there is no power of darkness that can prevail against the church. Jesus pronounced of building a church in which the gates of Hades will not overcome.' <sup>26</sup> Pastor Joshua Nzomo says, 'Satan has his army and always wants to fight God's people.' <sup>27</sup> The Jesus Celebration Centre teaches that, 'The spiritual warfare is real and we are fighting against the principalities, and all the evil schemes of the devil. We are all surrounded by the evil spirits...' <sup>28</sup> At a service AICT Kakola-Kahama-Tanzania it was stated that, 'The enemy the devil is at war with us, the weapon and methodologies of the war are needed to win the battle. Paul understood very well that the church of Ephesus was facing the

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<sup>24</sup> Joshua Mutinda, Redeemer Gospel Church, Katheka-kai, May 29, 2011, (Nyerere, Sermon 6).

<sup>25</sup> Julius Nyerere, Leaders' Fellowship Meeting, AIC Kwa-vonza on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. (Albert, Sermon 36).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Muthoka, Jesus Celebration Centre, Wote Town, July 23, 2011. (Albert, Sermon 20).

<sup>27</sup> Joshua Nzomo, AIC Mwanyani/Bomani DCC, Dec. 5, 2010, (Gideon, Sermon 5)

<sup>28</sup> Lunch Hour Service, Jesus Celebration Centre, April 19, 2011. (Godwin, Extra Sermons)

same.<sup>29</sup> These are all examples of the kind of language and imagery used when teaching about the devil that suggests combat.

This teaching makes it clear that it is imperative for Christian believers to resist the devil. As has been seen this is implied in much of the churches' teaching but is also taught more explicitly. However, it seems that the activities of the devil are not always apparent because some of the churches teach that there is a need to be aware of what the devil is doing. Those who are under the influence of the devil or who are being attacked by him are perhaps those who are not aware of his schemes. Pastor Mulei teaches the congregation at AIC Katisaa that, 'We should be aware of the tricks of the devil to get us hooked in our problems.'<sup>30</sup> Similarly the pastor at AIC Katangini urges youth at a rally repeatedly to remain vigilant and 'aware of the scheme of the Devil'.<sup>31</sup>

### **Prayers and the Devil**

A close examination of the material gathered also identifies numerous references to the devil in the prayers of the churches. Sometimes prayers petition God for his protection against the devil, other times the devil is addressed directly. At times there are general references to the devil's activity, at other times specific situations are mentioned.

The prayers of these churches appear to reflect much of what the church teaches, putting into practice some of what is taught. Typically prayers related to the devil are offered near the beginning of a service but can be noted throughout. Analysis of these prayers brings to light a number of common features that demonstrate how the devil is viewed, what work he is believed to be engaged in and what can be done to combat him.

The names used for the devil help us to understand how he is viewed. Often he is simply referred to as the devil or Satan but other names are also given to him. One of the most regularly used names for the devil is 'the enemy'.<sup>32</sup> When this name is given to the devil, he is regarded as the one who opposes the work of God or of Christians. It is often used when the person praying wants to prevent the devil from having an influence in the worship service or when he appears to have had some influence over people already. Satan is seen as the Christian's greatest adversary and the one who wants to harm Christians and prevent them from doing what God wants. 'The Evil One' is another name used frequently.<sup>33</sup> This name highlights his nature and

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<sup>29</sup> AICT-Kakola- Kahama-Tanzania. January 9, 2011. (Madaha, Sermon 4)

<sup>30</sup> AIC Katisaa, September 11, 2011. (Albert, Sermon 12).

<sup>31</sup> AIC Katangini, December 28, 2010. (Godwin, Sermon 6).

<sup>32</sup> Elder Gitau, AIC Ngong Road, August 29, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 4); AIC Mathare, November 6, 2011, (Judith, 29); Grace Christian Church, Machakos, (Mutunga, 39).

<sup>33</sup> Chairlady, A.I.C Kikongooni, August 11, 2010, (Christine, Sermon 16); Intercessory Prayer, A.I.C Katoloni, April 10, 2011, (Godwin, Sermon 20); AIC A.I.C Katoloni, September 16, 2011, (Mainga, Sermon 17).

alludes to the kind of activities he is involved in. The use of this name means there can be no doubt that the devil is an evil force, and that the evil things that happen in the world should be attributed to him. Another name sometimes used is 'the destroyer'.<sup>34</sup> This is used when the devil is seen to destroy or damage property or people's lives and can be connected directly to the activities he is considered to be engaged in.

These names for the devil are important and rich in meaning in an African context where a person's name suggests something of his or her nature. In naming someone it is possible to have power over them. In giving the devil these names the Christians in these churches are showing that they know what the devil is like and know the activities he is engaging in. This knowledge of the devil gives them a starting point for defeating him.

Those who offer these prayers do so with considerable authority. They often confront the devil directly and use strong, confident language to prevent him from having an impact on the worship service or the lives of believers. The words used, such as denounce,<sup>35</sup> proclaim defeat,<sup>36</sup> come against,<sup>37</sup> destroy,<sup>38</sup> and rebuke<sup>39</sup> suggest a belief that although the devil is strong, he can be defeated. This is generally done in Jesus' name<sup>40</sup> and sometimes with reference to the power of Jesus,<sup>41</sup> showing that the person praying does not think that he or she can defeat the devil through human strength but is very conscious of the need to rely on Jesus for power.

The devil is commonly seen as being unhappy with the congregation gathering to worship God and may attempt to disrupt the worship service.<sup>42</sup> Therefore many of the opening prayers ask God to protect the congregation from what the devil might seek to do or oppose the work of the devil directly using words and phrases such as 'rebuke', 'arise against', 'renounce', 'bind',

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<sup>34</sup> AIC Mutongu, July 5, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 10); AIC Isaalala, January 1, 2012, (Albert, Sermon 28).

<sup>35</sup> Saints Gathering Worship Centre, (Christine, Sermon 4); AIC Mutituni, December 4, 2011, (Judith, Sermon 21).

<sup>36</sup> AIC Mathare, November 6, 2011, (Judith, Sermon 29).

<sup>37</sup> A.I.C Katangini December 19, 2010, (Godwin, Sermon 4); Gospel Revival Center (GRC), at Mavivie - Machakos, April 27, 2011, (Kanwele, Sermon 13).

<sup>38</sup> General Revival Center, Mavivie, 02 Monday, 2011, (Madaha, Sermon 21); AIC Mumbuni, April 11, 2011, (Korir, Sermon 11).

<sup>39</sup> AIC N'gelani, May 1, 2011, (Yator, Sermon 10); AIC Matuu, July 17, 2011, (Musyoka, Sermon 7).

<sup>40</sup> AIC Muthesya, July 10, 2011, (Musyoka, Sermon 6); AIC Githurai, Nairobi, July 10, 2011, (Mutunga, Sermon 19); Victory Evangelical Church, Kangundo, March 12, 2011, (Stella, Sermon 7).

<sup>41</sup> AIC Kimutwa, Kimutwa D.C.C, December 25, 2011, (Mweu, Sermon 34).

<sup>42</sup> AIC Isaalala, December 25, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 27). Evangelical Assemblies of God, Tanzania, Nyegezi L/Church, Mwanza Tz, December 26, 2010, (Kanwele, Sermon 6).

'stand against', 'refuse the plans of', 'proclaim defeat' etc. When praying in this way, the person praying turns from praying to God to addressing the devil personally. He is named, the devil, Satan, the enemy, the evil one, the destroyer etc. and he is then confronted directly.

Prayers may mention particular ways the devil might act to disrupt the service. These include making people tired and sleepy, making them backslide, and preventing people from attending church.<sup>43</sup> As we have seen, as Christians meet for worship they are aware that the devil is not pleased about this and will do everything in his power to disrupt the meeting. This is why it is seen as necessary in many churches to pray against such activity of the devil in order that the service goes smoothly so that God can be worshipped and his word heard by those attending.

Based on what it said in these prayers, the work of the devil has considerable scope. His work is always seen as negative in nature, causing harm and bringing problems. Some of the work of the devil is referred to in general terms and some is specific to the circumstances of the congregation. Those praying suggest that the devil's general work involves seeking to destroy the world,<sup>44</sup> that he destroys and brings confusion,<sup>45</sup> attacks people,<sup>46</sup> and has tactics and plans against God's people.<sup>47</sup> More specifically he makes people weak,<sup>48</sup> causes people to sleep during the service,<sup>49</sup> brings sickness,<sup>50</sup> disturbs families,<sup>51</sup> and makes people backslide.<sup>52</sup> In one instance he is seen as the force that prevented children from going to school in the past.<sup>53</sup> Drunkenness, fighting and prostitution are regarded to have their source in the devil with demons connected to each of these things requiring to be cast out.<sup>54</sup> Leading young boys into immorality through drunkenness is another thing attributed to the devil.<sup>55</sup> It appears that everything bad that happens in the world and every difficulty people face have their source in the devil.

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<sup>43</sup> AIC Mutituni, December 4, 2011, (Judith, Sermon 21). Grace Christian Church, Machakos, (Mutunga, Sermon 39); A.I.C Kyemutheke, September 4, 2011, (Nyerere, Sermon 18).

<sup>44</sup> AIC Mbukoni, March 23, 2011, (Godwin, Sermon 14).

<sup>45</sup> A.I.C Kikongooni, August 7, 2010, (Christine, Sermon 16).

<sup>46</sup> Kyondoni Village Kabati Kitui, June 4, 2011, (Muema, Sermon 10).

<sup>47</sup> AIC Bomani, June 4, 2011, (Ndolo, Sermon 4).

<sup>48</sup> AIC Nunguni, July 10, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 2).

<sup>49</sup> AIC Mutituni, December 4, 2011, (Judith, Sermon 21).

<sup>50</sup> Jesus Celebration Centre, April 19, 2011, (Godwin, Extra Sermons).

<sup>51</sup> Africa Brotherhood Church, Matetani, January 7, 2012, (Mutunga, Sermon 29).

<sup>52</sup> Grace Christian Church, Machakos (Mutunga, Sermon 39).

<sup>53</sup> AIC Katwanyaa, December 31, (Stella, Sermon 6).

<sup>54</sup> Pentecostal Church of Rwanda, Jenda, December 24, 2010, (Shadrack, Sermon 1); Jesus Celebration Centre, April 19, 2011, (Godwin, Extra Sermons).

<sup>55</sup> Africa Brotherhood Church, Kaiani, October 16, 2011, (Mutua, Sermon 3).

In these prayers God's might and power is stressed and contrasted with the powerlessness of the devil. Although the devil is seen to be active in the world and in the lives of believers, he is not as powerful as God, and so it is possible to prevent him from acting. God gives the victory over the devil,<sup>56</sup> he has not left Christians defenceless,<sup>57</sup> and he will provide whatever is needed in the moment of fierce attack.<sup>58</sup> The prayers also recognize that people need God's protection as they gather to worship him.<sup>59</sup> Prayers therefore request God's protection.<sup>60</sup> So although Jesus has defeated the devil, he still has power and is still active in the world and regards Christians as his enemies whom he seeks to attack. Believers are seen as in need of protection from the devil, and belief in God's superior power causes them to pray to him to safeguard them against what the devil might do.

As we have seen, many of the prayers also suggest ways of combating the devil. They ask for God's protection, they address the devil directly in order to counter what he intends to do and to demonstrate how relatively powerless he is. This is done in Jesus' name and often with reference to his blood. The name of Jesus is seen as being very powerful to combat the devil and is used frequently in prayers that confront the devil. His blood is also seen as powerful to protect the believer from the devil's attacks.

In both their teaching and their prayers the churches recognize that the devil does not work alone but has other forces at his disposal. Mention is therefore made of demons, evil spirits, witches etc. As God has an army of angels, the devil has his own forces.<sup>61</sup> These must be opposed or believers will be harmed. At the Jesus Celebration Centre one prayer says, 'The demons which bring sickness we destroy them in Jesus name.'<sup>62</sup> Pastor Kioko declared to his congregation that, 'It is possible that Satan is still controlling you, he has put his demons on you although you are in church.'<sup>63</sup> Believers therefore need to be aware of and to oppose demons and other spiritual forces that are working on behalf of the devil as well as the devil himself.

A belief present in both the teaching and the prayers is that people are either on God's side or the devil's - there is no middle ground. Before people are saved they are under the control of the devil but once they are saved they should be under God's control. Places where God would not want Christians

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<sup>56</sup> Jesus Celebration Centre, Wote Town, July 23, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 20).

<sup>57</sup> Scott Theological Chapel, Machakos, August 29, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 16).

<sup>58</sup> AIC Athi River, Athi River, January 22, 2011, (Mutua, Sermon 19).

<sup>59</sup> AIC Kikongooni, August 7, 2010, (Christine, Sermon 16).

<sup>60</sup> AIC Kyondoni, August 6, 2011, (Muema, Sermon 10); Anglican Church of Rwanda, Shyira, Cathedral of John the Baptist, December 26, 2011, (Shadrack, Sermon 3).

<sup>61</sup> AIC Mutuu, July 17, 2011, (Musyoka, Sermon 7).

<sup>62</sup> Jesus Celebration Centre, April 19, 2011, (Godwin, Extra Sermons).

<sup>63</sup> Pastor Samuel Kioko, Gospel Revival Centre, Mavivie, April 27, 2011, (Kanwele, Sermon 13).

to go are under the control of the devil.<sup>64</sup> However, the devil seems to still be a threat to Christians even when they are saved and so it is necessary for the Christian to be wary and to fight against what the devil is trying to do. We were once alienated from our God because we were Satan's prisoners.<sup>65</sup>

### The Devil and Christian Songs

The devil is mentioned in Christian songs. Like the prayers, they reflect what people are taught and believe about the devil. Some examples are:

'Job the man of God faced many challenges that were brought by the Satan but he beared them all (x2)

Job said I was born without anything I was given my children by God  
And all my wealth I was given by God and then he has taken, let God be  
praised x2<sup>66</sup>

'Shun from evil x2 my brother.... Shun from evil x2 my sister.... Shun from  
evil x2 my father.... Shun from evil x2 my mother.... This is the end times, the  
devil is looking for someone to devour. X2<sup>67</sup>

'I have seen, seen the downfall of Satan glory be to God, glory be to Jesus  
I have seen, seen the downfall of Satan glory be to God amen<sup>68</sup>

'Love is the weapon to defeat the devil<sup>69</sup>

'Haie....le...le...le....le Satan be cursed x2

You ruled the world surely be cursed

You separated us with God

Be cursed forever and ever x2

Thank Jesus for your salvation

Am saying thank for your salvation

The devil doesn't have authority to rule

Us any more, I command him in the name of Jesus

Be cursed forever and ever.x2<sup>70</sup>

In these songs people have the opportunity to affirm their beliefs about the devil, to proclaim his defeat, and to assert that God will protect his people. As in prayers, songs declare the devil's defeat and affirm his lack of authority. Songs also suggest ways in which the devil can be defeated. Believers affirm what they believe and are taught how to defeat the devil through the medium of songs as well as through teaching and prayer. Singing in the church worship services reinforces for believers what the Bible teaches and what the church believes about the devil.

<sup>64</sup> Nyanyaa Secondary School, December 18, 2011, (Albert, Sermon 26).

<sup>65</sup> AIC Ivengeani, May 14, 2011, (Christine, Sermon 2).

<sup>66</sup> AIC Utoo, May 8, 2011, (Muema, Sermon 1).

<sup>67</sup> AIC Upendo, Mathare, October 16, 2011, (Muema, Sermon 26).

<sup>68</sup> AIC Mumbuni, December 11, 2011, (Musyoka, Sermon 17).

<sup>69</sup> Deliverance Church Kauti, October 2, 2011, (Mutua, Sermon 3).

<sup>70</sup> AIC Kyanda, May 1, 2011, (Ndolo, Sermon 1).

### **The Devil and Christian Testimonies**

Testimonies are not a major feature in the services the students recorded. Often the programmer asks people to testify but no one comes forward. Based on the fact that the devil is mentioned regularly in other aspects of the worship services, one might expect that he would also be a common feature in testimonies. However, most testimonies are concerned with aspects of the Christian life such as healing<sup>71</sup>, salvation<sup>72</sup> or God's faithfulness<sup>73</sup>. Only three of the testimonies recorded mentioned the devil directly. Jacob, speaking at a crusade, said, 'Every time devil will cheat us that we have a lot of time to stay in sin.'<sup>74</sup> During a service at Kitulu, Timothy began his testimony with these words, 'Praise the Lord enemies of the Devil. Don't be surprised that I address you this way. In fact we became enemies of the devil when we gave our lives to Jesus Christ. If you are not born again you are not an enemy of the devil. But don't worry you can still be saved, since Jesus is merciful. I praise Jesus that he has kept me in him for the whole of this term.'<sup>75</sup> Peter speaking at Malindi told the congregation, 'You know where God wants to penetrate the devil comes in to destroy.'<sup>76</sup> These testimonies are in line with what is found elsewhere in the research. Those testifying see the devil as one who opposes them and seeks to harm them. He will cheat Christians and wants to destroy them. Because of this they need to fight against what he is trying to do. Jesus is again seen as the one who can help believers to fight against the devil.

In other places the devil is not referred to directly in people's testimonies but there is mention of witchcraft and being under the influence of forces contrary to God. In a TV commercial Apostle Musili highlights the 'testimony of Edwin who was involved in witchcraft and ended up in prison for many years. Edwin won the case to get him out of prison, but it was too costly. Ended up with a costly price to pay. His son died. Other people were struck by lightning and died. His wife left him. He was left with nothing of his own. The Lord chased him away.'<sup>77</sup> Another testimony is found in one of Musili's broadcasts in which Musili also refers to someone whose business has been affected by witchcraft.<sup>78</sup> For the preachers involved, these testimonies highlight the dangers of witchcraft and how it can ruin someone's life completely and even mean separation from God. Such testimonies serve as a warning to Christians to have nothing to do with witchcraft or witchdoctors.

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<sup>71</sup> Fridah Githurai, Nairobi, October 30, 2011, Mutunga, Sermon 25.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Chirchir, Open Air Meeting, Kitui, May 15, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Pastor John Mbale, Muumandu Secondary School, July 15, 2011, Mweu, Sermon 6.

<sup>74</sup> Jacob, Wikililye Market, May 12, 2010, Christine, Sermon 1.

<sup>75</sup> Timothy Musau, Kitulu, July 3, 2011, Nyerere, Sermon 9.

<sup>76</sup> Peter, Tarasa, Malindi, December 19, 2010, Stella, Sermon 4.

<sup>77</sup> Apostle Musili, NTV, September 9, 2010, (Gregg Okesson).

<sup>78</sup> Apostle Musili, NTV, October 31, 2010, (Gregg Okesson).

## Summary

According to this research, for East African believers the devil is active in many areas of life and so needs to be included in discussions about subjects such as marriage, illness, drunkenness and disunity. While the teaching highlights particular aspects of the devil's activity and how the believer can counter his activities, the prayers of the church give a more comprehensive picture of the scope of the devil's activity. In their prayers, believers ask for God's protection against the devil. At times they confront him directly so as to prevent him from disrupting services or causing harm in people's lives. People who have been harmed by the devil are prayed for and help from God is sought for their restoration. The prayers show that the devil is seen as the source of many problems in life including illness, people losing their faith, people not being able to achieve their ambitions, drunkenness, fighting, divisions and prostitution. There is considerable overlap between what is taught and what is included in the prayers. Choir pieces and songs refer to the devil at times, reinforcing what is taught more directly elsewhere but this is relatively rare. In the testimonies recorded, the devil is not often mentioned directly but involvement in witchcraft is. These references build up a picture of how the devil is regarded by these East African churches and demonstrate how their faith in God helps them to handle demonic influence in the world.

References to the devil are not confined to any one denomination. Many of the churches are Pentecostal churches such as Nairobi Pentecostal Church, the Redeemed Gospel Church, and the Jesus Celebration Centre, but there were also many instances of references to the devil in the officially non-charismatic denomination Africa Inland Church congregations. The devil is mentioned in churches in Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda. The devil was also talked about in Bible Colleges and secondary schools and was a concern in both rural and urban areas.

So the churches in which research was conducted are very conscious of the activities of the devil. Churches of different denominations and in different countries teach about him directly, they mention him and even confront him in their prayers, and they speak of him in songs. He is seen as an adversary of both God and believers, but because Jesus has defeated him on the cross he has limited power. He is regarded as the source of the challenges in life and seems to be particularly involved in troubling believers. He does not like when Christians meet to worship God and uses many ploys to try to disrupt worship services. He, therefore, needs to be opposed by Christians who can be victorious over him in Jesus' name.

## Implications For Theological Education in Africa

This study has implications for theological education in Africa. The issues raised in this research concerning the devil need to be addressed in Biblical studies, theology, and pastoral theology classes. Graduates will be serving as

pastors in churches where belief in the devil and demons is strong, where people see them at work in different ways in their lives, and where they hinder worship in their churches. Biblical studies classes must include teaching about the devil and demons emphasising, as the churches do, that although the devil has a certain amount of power, his power is limited. Jesus needs to be shown to be the all-powerful one who has defeated the devil on the cross and will defeat him conclusively when he returns.

In theology classes the historical position taken by the church regarding the devil and his cohorts should be addressed. In both these disciplines what is believed and taught in the local churches must be addressed and compared with the Church's position historically and in other parts of the world.

In pastoral theology classes discussion of the beliefs concerning the devil found in local churches should be examined. Pastoral issues related to these beliefs, such as demon possession, consultation of witchdoctors etc. should be discussed. Student pastors should be assisted in thinking through these issues so that they are equipped to deal with them in the pastoral situations they will face.

In all these classes students need to learn how to recognise when teaching and beliefs in the churches are in line with Scripture and when they are grounded in incompatible elements found in traditional African worldviews.

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# African Christian Theology: A New Paradigm

by Timothy P. Palmer

## Introduction

The last 50 years have seen a flood of material on African Christian theology. It has generally been assumed in this literature that there are two basic types of African Christian theology - inculturation theology and liberation theology. This assumption goes back to the 1970s, when these two theologies were defining themselves in relation to each other and in relation to "mission theology."

Even more recently the paradigm of these two types of African Christian theology has persisted. In 1993, Emmanuel Martey defined the issue in the title of his *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*.<sup>1</sup> In the same decade, the editor of *Paths of African Theology* assumed that inculturation and liberation are the "twin foci of theological reflection in Africa."<sup>2</sup> Charles Nyamiti believes that inculturation and liberation are the basic two types of African theology and christology.<sup>3</sup> In 1994, Ngindu Mushete stated that the three types of theology in Africa are still mission theology, "African" theology and black theology or black South African theology.<sup>4</sup> And in the last decade Peter Okuma is still of the opinion that Christianity in Igboland is still "Mission Christianity," with its focus on "the next world."<sup>5</sup> (Obviously Okuma has spent too much time in European libraries.)

But the theological and ecclesiastical landscape has changed in the last decades. The existence and nature of so-called "mission theology" in Africa is no longer clear. Instead, the theology of the mainline churches in Africa has moved beyond its missionary origins.

This is clear if one considers the existence of non-formal theology as well as formal theology. Bulus Galadima has demonstrated the importance of non-formal theology in one's assessment of African theology.<sup>6</sup> Non-formal theology

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Rosino Gibellini, "African Theologians Wonder . . . and Make Some Proposals," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. R. Gibellini (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), pp. 1-8 (6).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Nyamiti, "Contemporary African Christologies," in *Paths of African Theology*, pp. 62-77 (64).

<sup>4</sup> A. Ngindu Mushete, "An Overview of African Theology," in *Paths of African Theology*, pp. 9-26 (13).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Chidi Okuma, *Towards an African Theology: The Igbo Context in Nigeria* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Bulus Galadima, "Non-Formal Theology: A Case for Lay Involvement in the Theological Endeavour," in *TCNN Research Bulletin* 29 (June 1996): 4-14.

occurs any time an African - or a European or an Asian - preaches or prays or sings. Philip Jenkins and others have shown how mainline African Christianity has in fact developed its own distinctive theology, which is both non-formal and formal.<sup>7</sup>

It is our contention in this essay that the old paradigm of two types of African Christian theology is out of date. This essay argues that there are currently at least four basic types of African Christian theology today: inculturation theology, liberation theology, African evangelical theology and prosperity theology.

### **Inculturation Theology**

Inculturation theology is a form of contextualization. The context into which the Gospel is placed in this case is usually the traditional African culture. The non-formal inculturation of the Gospel in the African context is as old as the African church. The preaching, praying and singing of African Christians throughout African church history are forms of the inculturation of the Gospel. Often these forms of inculturation are in the local African language.

But the formal inculturation of the Gospel into the African context began in the middle of the twentieth century. "The real starting-point of African theology came from a European Franciscan missionary in the Belgian Congo, Placide Tempels."<sup>8</sup> In 1945 his *Bantu Philosophy* was published in French. But "the first African who can be called an African theologian was Vincent Mulago, a Catholic priest from the then Belgian Congo."<sup>9</sup> The year 1956 saw the publication of his Ph.D. thesis in French on the "Bantu Vital Union." In the same year Alexis Kagame published his "The Bantu-Rwandian Philosophy" in French. That year also saw the publication of a collection of articles under the title *Des Prêtres Noir s'Interrogent*, or "The Black Priests Ask."

Formal African inculturation theology began in Francophone Africa, but Anglophone Africa soon followed suit. The 1960s saw a flood of materials on African Christian theology, both in French and English (European languages!) and by both Roman Catholics and Protestants. In 1969 the All-Africa Conference of Churches in Abidjan said, "African Theology is 'a theology based on the Biblical faith of Africans, and which speaks to the African soul.'"<sup>10</sup> In the same year, Pope Paul VI said in the Rubaga Cathedral in Kampala: "An adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Faces of African Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Bénédét Bujó, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. J. O'Donohue (Nairobi: Paulines Pub. 1992), p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> B. Bujó, *African Theology in its Social Context*, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology-Adaptation or Incarnation?* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977), p. 23.

spiritual activities is not only possible, it is even favoured by the Church. . . . [You] may, and you must, have an African Christianity.”<sup>11</sup>

The inculturation of the Gospel was done to make the Gospel relevant to the African situation. In 1983, Osadolor Imasogie wrote, “Christianity, for many Africans, remains a foreign religion. . . . It is only when incarnation takes place that Christianity ceases to be a foreign religion.”<sup>12</sup> Even Byang Kato advocated, “Contextualize without compromise.”<sup>13</sup>

But the results of this inculturation exercise have been mixed. At times the result has been pure syncretism or a return to African traditional religion. Gabriel Setiloane said that, “we have learnt nothing new about religion from the missionaries. . . . But we Africans are bringing something to Christianity: a view of Divinity much higher, deeper, and all-pervasive.”<sup>14</sup> Bolaji Idowu concluded his book on *African Traditional Religion* by praising a “faithful remnant whose loyalty to the religion of their forbears will continue steadfast.”<sup>15</sup>

I maintain that there is both irresponsible and responsible inculturation. When our culture is placed above the Gospel, then we have syncretism, which is a mixing of the incompatible elements of two or more religions. But when the Gospel is placed above the culture, transforming the culture, then responsible inculturation is possible. But in the end, after 50 years, what has inculturation really produced? Tersur Aben maintains that African contextualization and inculturation have yielded meager results. He says, “Africans contribute quite minimally to biblical theology.”<sup>16</sup> He concludes: “Many African theologians now concede the failure of enculturation to yield viable African Christian theology.”<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, African culture is changing rapidly. African culture is becoming more urbanized and westernized. Many of young people are far removed from the traditional African religion. A young Birom student of mine recently said that he doesn’t know traditional Birom religion. He grew up in a Christian church in the urban setting of Jos. His culture is that of urban Nigeria - iPods and iPhones, the internet, go-slows, unemployment, Muslim-Christian

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<sup>11</sup> A. Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1983), pp. 23-24.

<sup>13</sup> Byang Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa* (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1985), p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Setiloane, “Where Are We in African Theology?” in *African Theology en Route*, e. K. Appiah Kubi and S. Torres (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), pp. 59-65 (63).

<sup>15</sup> Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 208.

<sup>16</sup> Tersur Aben, *African Christian Theology: Illusion & Reality* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2008), p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> T. Aben, *African Christian Theology*, p. 172.

tensions, corruption and survival. This culture is far removed from the traditional African culture of ancestors and sacrifices and mediators.

Liberation theology complains that inculturation theology neglects the pressing social issues in our society. Desmond Tutu said, "I fear that African Theology has failed to produce a sufficiently sharp cutting edge."<sup>18</sup> Tutu also said, "African theology will have to recover its prophetic calling."<sup>19</sup> More harshly, Bénézet Bujo said: "The theology of inculturation, so often preached triumphantly in African churches, is a pompous irrelevance, truly an ideological superstructure at the service of the bourgeoisie."<sup>20</sup> It would be wrong to write off inculturation theology in these terms. But it must be admitted that often inculturation theology is simply a form of comparative theology.

### Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, in contrast, is a form of contextualization that places the Gospel in the contemporary African setting. Instead of focusing on the traditional African culture, liberation theology is passionately concerned with rectifying the glaring injustices in African society. Liberation theology began in this continent in South Africa, taking the form of Black Theology.

The historical antecedents of Black Theology go back to the situation of slavery in the Americas. "The roots of Black Theology must in fact be traced to . . . the arrival of the first African slaves in the seventeenth [and sixteenth] century. The subsequent history of Americans of African origin . . . is the raw material of what we now call Black Theology."<sup>21</sup> But "black theology as an academic concern can be dated from July 31, 1966 when the National Conference of Black Churchmen issued a statement asking power and freedom from the leaders of America [and] power and justice from Negro citizens." In 1969, "James Cone published *Black Theology and Black Power*, which marked the formal inauguration of Black Theology."<sup>22</sup>

In the 1970s Black Theology came to South Africa. In 1972 *Essays on Black Theology* was published in Johannesburg but was banned by the government before it reached the bookstores.<sup>23</sup> In the 1970s Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak were leaders of the Black Theology school of thought.

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<sup>18</sup> Desmond Tutu, "Black Theology and African Theology-Soulmates or Antagonists," in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 1997), pp. 36-44 (43).

<sup>19</sup> D. Tutu, "Whither African Theology?" in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. E. Fashole-Luke et al. (London: Rex Collings, 1978), pp. 364-369 (369).

<sup>20</sup> B. Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> John Mbiti, "An African Views American Black Theology," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History. Vol. 1: 1966-1979*, ed. J. Cone and G. Wilmore (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), pp. 379-84 (379-80).

<sup>22</sup> J. Mbiti, "An African Views American Black Theology," p. 379.

<sup>23</sup> J. Mbiti, "An African Views American Black Theology," p. 383.

But John Mbiti accuses Black Theology of reductionism. He wrote, "What I view as an excessive preoccupation with liberation may well be the chief limitation of Black Theology. . . . Black Theology cannot and will not become African Theology. . . . Black Theology hardly knows the situation of Christian living in Africa, and therefore its direct relevance for Africa is either nonexistent or only accidental. . . . African Theology is concerned with many more issues, including all the classical theological themes, plus localized topics."<sup>24</sup>

In the subsequent years, liberation theology moved beyond racial issues. Socio-economic liberation has become a major concern of liberation theology. Allan Boesak even accuses James Cone of reducing liberation theology to the racial issue. Instead, Black Theology should focus on total liberation. "It focuses on the dependency of the oppressed and their liberation from dependency in all its dimensions - psychological, cultural, political, economical, and theological."<sup>25</sup> For Bénézet Bujo the main problem is "the mass poverty of Africa." Although some church leaders have spoken out on behalf of the poor, "it must be said that the church of Africa has been a silent church."<sup>26</sup> Jean-Marc Éla supports Bujo's call for economic liberation.<sup>27</sup>

There are other forms of liberation theology in Africa. Feminist theology is an example. Mercy Oduyoye, for example, focuses on the unique situation of women in Africa, including their oppression.<sup>28</sup>

Liberation theology is a theological response to the problems of poverty and injustice in African society. Liberation theology is a cry for justice. Liberation theology stands in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus Christ himself. Unfortunately, liberation theology has often been one-sided. Too often liberation theology focuses only on the socio-economic liberation of the person, neglecting the need for spiritual salvation. Allan Boesak is an example of this. For him the will of God is "liberating the oppressed," not the sinner. His "total liberation" includes theological liberation but not spiritual liberation. His discussion on righteousness deals with Jesus' "kingly justice" but not Paul's forensic righteousness.<sup>29</sup> Tersur Aben observes: "Conceiving African Christian theology as simply the liberation of Africans from their suppression under Europeans [or, Africans] has the negative effect of reducing Christianity to mere sociopolitical religion."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> J. Mbiti, "An African Views American Black Theology," pp. 381-83.

<sup>25</sup> Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977), p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> B. Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> See Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985).

<sup>28</sup> Mercy Oduyoye, "Feminist Theology in an African Perspective," in *Paths of African Theology*, pp. 166-81.

<sup>29</sup> A. Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, pp. 142, 144, 146.

<sup>30</sup> T. Aben, *African Christian Theology*, p. 39.

African liberation theology is a contextualization of the Gospel into the context of injustice and poverty within Africa. It is a cry for justice in our unjust world. We must recognize the presence of massive corruption and injustice in many Christian countries and states on this continent. Africa desperately needs justice. But this should not be done to the neglect of the liberation of the individual from the guilt and effects of sin.

### **African Evangelicalism**

Many scholarly works on African Christian theology neglect African evangelicalism as an African Christian theology. Yet this is the dominant form of Christianity in large parts of Africa. African evangelicalism has also developed its own distinctive theology. Evangelicalism is a Christian theology that takes seriously Scripture as the Word of God. Christian evangelicalism assumes the full authority and reliability of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, the satisfaction theory of the atonement, the need for conversion, and the obligation to evangelize the world.

Early missionary theology in Africa was by and large evangelical. Early missionary theology preached the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven. But this theology tended to be individualistic and other-worldly. Salvation was for the individual believer in heaven above. Early missionary theology tended to neglect this present world. The kingdom of God for them was the church. Therefore Christians should not get involved in politics since politics was worldly. Christianity was a Sunday religion. Christianity was about conversion of the soul, not the body.

In contrast to early European and American missionary theology, African evangelicalism is now much more interested in this world. Contemporary African evangelicalism has put the Gospel into the modern context of poverty, suffering, unemployment and disease. African evangelicalism believes that Jesus is the answer to these problems. It is thus necessary to believe in Jesus as one's personal Savior. Faith in Jesus will guarantee eternal life in heaven. But faith in Jesus will also provide solutions to problems on this earth. African evangelicalism believes in miracles today. Early missionary theology believed in miracles in the time of Jesus but was less clear about miracles today. African evangelicalism believes in the power of prayer and the real possibility of miracles in our Christian life today.

Paul Gifford writes: "The popular Christianity we encountered [in Africa] ... was not concerned with a renewed order or any 'new Jerusalem', but with a job, a husband, a child, a car, an education, a visa to the West. It was about succeeding in this realm." He says that the missionaries taught hardship in this life in exchange for happiness hereafter. But "the missionary legacy has vanished with scarcely a trace, for it is terrestrial rewards that feature so

prominently in African Christianity today.<sup>31</sup> Philip Jenkins calls this new evangelicalism *The Next Christendom*. For Jenkins, the Anglican Communion in Nigeria is a good example of current African evangelicalism.<sup>32</sup> Jenkins feels that this new evangelicalism is global, extending beyond Africa. Pentecostalism is a big part of African evangelicalism. But the example of the Anglican Communion in Nigeria reminds us that not all of African evangelicalism is Pentecostal. Even though Pentecostalism has entered the mainline churches, African evangelicalism is broader than Pentecostalism.

This African evangelical theology also believes in the reality of the spirit world. While liberal European theology thought that spirits did not exist, early evangelical missionary theology taught the reality of good and bad spirits in the Bible times. But African evangelicals speak of the reality of good and evil spirits today. African evangelicals teach the power of Jesus to defeat the evil spirits in our present context today.

This new evangelical theology is an indigenous form of African Christian theology. Often it is non-formal theology. It is an African contextualized theology distinct from inculturation theology, liberation theology or missionary theology. African evangelicalism, like liberation theology, is concerned with societal problems in the African context. But while liberation theology looks for structural solutions in society, African evangelicalism tends to look for individual or personal solutions. Liberation theology wants to transform society; African evangelicalism wants to transform individual lives.

### **Prosperity Theology**

Prosperity Theology is a major African “Christian” theology that is usually neglected in the academic textbooks. Often Prosperity Theology is wrongly joined together with African evangelicalism. Since Prosperity Theology is so dominant in Africa, it needs to be treated as a separate African Christian theology. The context of this contextualized theology is again the modern African context. The context is contemporary, often urban, Africa with its social and economic problems of poverty, unemployment, school fees and barrenness.

Prosperity Theology holds to some of the same presuppositions as African evangelicalism. It believes in the power of prayer and the possibility of miracles. It believes in the power of Jesus to meet the daily needs of individuals and to overcome evil spiritual powers. But Prosperity Theology differs significantly from African evangelicalism in that it assumes that every Christian has a right to be prosperous. Prosperity Theology assumes that God

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 339-40.

<sup>32</sup> See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

will make every Christian prosperous if the believer does the right things.<sup>33</sup> It assumes that a faithful Christian will be rich and that poverty is an indication of lack of faith. But this is not Scripture's teaching. Despite the general truths of the Sinai covenant in Deuteronomy 28, righteous people sometimes suffer. The book of Job makes this clear.

Prosperity theology is a form of what Martin Luther calls the theology of glory. Theologians of glory focus on one's own prosperity instead of the prosperity of the other person. But for Luther, the theology of the cross is the theology of the *agape* love that Jesus taught and exemplified. Sometimes this *agape* love will result in personal suffering. The theology of the cross offers salvation through justification by faith that manifests itself in a life of *agape* love to one's neighbor.<sup>34</sup> Prosperity theology is a syncretistic form of Christianity, a deviation from African evangelicalism. Usually it is a non-formal theology, but since it is so prominent in Africa, it should be included as a distinct type of African Christian theology.

## Conclusion

Christian theology in Africa is contextual. But the African context is diverse and always changing. The traditional African culture is not the same as our modern African context. Inculturation theology attempts to put the Gospel into the traditional African context. Sometimes this effort is successful; but sometimes it results in syncretism. Liberation theology, African evangelicalism and Prosperity theology all address issues in our modern African context, especially the issues of survival in a difficult socio-economic context. But their solutions differ. Liberation theology stresses social justice; evangelicalism emphasizes the power of prayer; Prosperity Theology believes in personal prosperity.

Christian theology in Africa should be biblical, holistic and relevant. Theology should give an answer to our sin and guilt before God. But theology should also be relevant to our personal and social needs. Inculturation theology reminds us of our traditional African roots. Liberation theology reminds us of the concern for justice. African evangelicalism reminds us of the power of prayer and miracles. We need responsible contextual theology. But we should guard ourselves against theologies that distort the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>33</sup> See Peter Young, "An Evaluation of Prosperity Teaching," in *TCNN Research Bulletin* 43 (March 2005): 4-15; Femi Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> See Timothy Palmer, "Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross in the Nigerian Context," in *TCNN Research Bulletin* 48 (Sept. 2007): 4-12. See also [www.tcn.org/publications](http://www.tcn.org/publications).

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# Humanity Made in the Image of God: Towards Ethnic Unity in Africa

by Philip Tachin

## Abstract

*Ethnic divisions plague Africa and these divisions often lead to violence. This has become a cankerworm in the African marrow, eating away at the developmental and progressive elements within every nation and preventing growth. Ethnic diversity, with all its potential beauty and riches, becomes ugly when various ethnicities hate and destroy one another rather than integrating and complementing one another for mutual growth. This paper critically analyses one of the causal factors of this unhealthy division - a poor view of our own image. I argue that for Africa to progress it must align itself with the biblical concept of man as the image bearer of God. When we see each other as made in God's image, we will see those of other ethnicities as extensions of ourselves and so work together with one another in our national schemes.*

## Introduction

The colonialists forged many diverse ethnic groups into nations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This diversity has often produced negative consequences in African nations: ethnic tension, hatred, struggle, and wars of wanton destruction, especially when the distribution of political power and economic wealth come into play. Whether by deliberate choice or negligence, the colonial powers failed to try to imbue these diverse ethnic groups with a sense of oneness that would diminish or replace the major differences that often characterize them.<sup>1</sup> After the exit of the colonialists, there was an ever-growing ethnic identity that overshadowed national identity. This state of affairs has greatly inhibited the development of individual African nations, and comes, in part, from a poor epistemic view of who and what we are.

One of Africa's greatest challenges is self-realization and the need to advance socio-economic and political stability. Current events in Africa constitute serious theological concerns. For quite some time, Africans have had a serious "battle over image."<sup>2</sup> This image problem involves how we view ourselves and how we let others view us. Various African scholars have critically analyzed the problem and offered solutions such as Nigeria's National Sovereign Conference.<sup>3</sup> But these efforts have not addressed the ontological

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<sup>1</sup> Tokunbo Simbowale Osinubi and Oladipupo Sunday Osinubi, in, "Ethnic Conflicts in Contemporary Africa: The Nigerian Experience," *Journal of Social Science*, 12 (2): (2006), 102, also blame the colonial masters for the endemic ethnic problems in Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Anekwe Oborji, "The Theological Language in Africa: A Missiological Reflection," cited at <https://www.sedosmission.org/web/index> on May 8, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> See Osinubi and Osinubi, "Ethnic Conflicts in Contemporary Africa," 111-112.

foundation of humanity, of which ethnic groups need to be well informed. African theologians bring theological concepts to bear on the African situation, but the concept of our being made in the image of God, which has so much to do with changing our intellectual orientation, has not been given an in-depth articulation and application to the African context, nor has there been an examination of how it can positively impact our sense of unity, creativity, self-actualization, and destiny.<sup>4</sup> This essay tries to fill that gap by urging all the diverse ethnic groups in Africa to see themselves as extensions of one another. This can help Africans develop an attitude of acceptance, love, tolerance, and unity that will ultimately turn Africa from a pariah continent into the pride of its citizenry.

Being created in the image of God gives us a higher status and an integration that is greater than the linguistic and cultural diversities that make us different from one another. It is important for people to know that we all are equally created in the image of God and be sensitive to that fact, rather than simply acknowledging it. Such knowledge and understanding should make every individual and every ethnic group choose to view others with a sense of brotherliness, dignity, and responsibility.

Most of this essay refers to the Nigerian context, as that country has the highest combination of ethnic groups, about 250,<sup>5</sup> and a Nigerian solution to ethnicism may be a solution for other African nations as well.

### **The Negative Impact of Ethnicism in Africa**

What makes people into a distinct ethnic group and ethnicity is shared “beliefs, values, habits, customs and norms because of their common background.” These qualities usually make them see themselves as “different and special”, superior to others.<sup>6</sup> Ethnicism has, to some degree, negatively impacted African nations in all aspects of development from annoyances to civil wars. Ethnic groups in Africa have developed such rigid, emotional, and stereotyped predispositions against one another that they resist changing their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards one another.

#### **1. Ethnic Superiority**

The attitude of superiority over others progressively turns into a cultural mentality that perceives those who are different as peculiar. The idea found in multicultural societies that one’s own culture is superior to all others, more

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Rwiza, argues that the issue of identity and dignity is a struggle for Africans even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century globalized context. See his article, “Laurenti Magesa: An African Liberation Theologian,” in *African Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers*, vol. 2. (Nairobi: Paulines Africa, 2006), 238.

<sup>5</sup> CIA, *The World FactBook* 2013 ISSN 1553-8133, cited at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> on June 3, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Mirror for Humility: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Company, 1999), 37.

often than not, turns African ethnicities against one another and results in oppression and other forms of injustice. This often degenerates into serious hatred and violent conflicts. As the African history of ethnic violence can testify, this unhealthy attitude has bred a high level of prejudice and discrimination between ethnicities. But while major ethnicities have often undermined minorities over time, ethnicism has also pushed minorities to develop a survival strategy that usually turns into contests and struggles that become violent at the slightest opportunity. As sophisticated firearms proliferate in Africa, some minorities have been asserting themselves.

When political actions are not geared towards national development but towards ethnic interests, national values are set aside and progressive development becomes a fiction the ruling ethnic group uses to legitimize its privileges. Cacho rightly argues that the main constraint shackling African nations is ethnicism:

Yet tribalism is at the root of these regularly identified development constraints. Tribalism directly affects the quality of governance; it is conducive to corruption, negatively impacts the availability of investment finance, prevents thousands of skilled Africans from returning home and indeed encourages many who are trained in the subcontinent, to emigrate.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Bad Governance**

In this context, bad governance becomes the order of the day while good governance suffers. The rule of law fails in countries like Nigeria because those who enforce it apply it selectively, in most cases favouring their own kith and kin while victimizing people of other ethnic extractions. The rule of law requires the cooperation of all citizens in the various related sectors, especially in fighting corruption, but there is always mass connivance to defeat justice, prudence, transparency, and accountability simply to safeguard those who belong to a politically connected group. With this unhealthy situation, no magic can make African nations achieve a higher level of development.

Though violent conflicts have been diminishing in some African countries recently, many nations still suffer internal ethnic conflict. And even as there is reduced violence, ethnic tension has always been manifest among the groups over a number of issues. In virtually all aspects of national existence “tribal structures of Africa continue to manipulate politics and control the lives of its citizens.”<sup>8</sup> This state of affairs subjects African people to indignity, no longer imposed by the colonialists but perpetrated by Africans on themselves. That

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<sup>7</sup> Cornelius P. Cacho, “Tribalism - The Binding Constraint on African Development,” May 21, 2008. This article was cited from the Foreign Policy Association at [http://www.fpa.org/topics\\_info2414/topics\\_info\\_show.htm](http://www.fpa.org/topics_info2414/topics_info_show.htm) on May 8, 2013. The word, ‘tribalism’ has been disputed and some scholars seek to replace it with ‘ethnicism’ but what obtains in Africa is practically the same whether labelled tribalism or ethnicism.

<sup>8</sup> George H. Wittman, “Tribalism Cripples Africa,” posted on December 24, 2005 at <http://www.ghanaweb.com>, and cited on May 4, 2013.

ethnic groups inflict humiliation upon others shows that they rate those others as less than human. The chronicle of ethnic clashes in Nigeria alone is overwhelming.<sup>9</sup> The derogatory attitude and behaviour that ensue among ethnic groups evidences a lack of understanding among Africans of what it means to be human. This epistemic failure is due in part to the mentality that secular anthropology has inculcated in Africans, placing humans alongside animals due to some physiological similarities. Prehistoric fossils serve as the basis for connection between what is called modern man and animals.<sup>10</sup> In this view, humans evolved from lower animals. This question of origin is of fundamental importance because one's view of one's background can have either negative or positive effect on one's self-image. Evolutionary theories contain no cogent or sufficient elements that might change the conceptual orientation and behaviour of those who destroy others simply because they differ in ethnic, cultural, and religious leanings.

Studies have shown that African nations that are more homogenous lean towards unity and stability.<sup>11</sup> The more ethnically diverse nations of Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, Somalia, Central Africa Republic, Ghana, Congo, Ethiopia, and Nigeria all have sad histories of ethnicism and its bitter consequences.<sup>12</sup> Writing on the Kenyan experience, one report laments the constant tribal political struggles between the Kikuyu and the Luo - the groups that dominate the other forty ethnicities - and the increased devastation under Daniel Arap Moi.<sup>13</sup> A failure of African leaders is that they are generally not

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<sup>9</sup> The recent Fulani invasion of various groups such as Berom, Tarok, Eggon and Tiv in the north central, and the Jukun-Tiv, Hausa-Jukun, Fulani-Eggon, Eggon-Alago, Eggon-Migili, Fulani-Agatu and Fulani-Kataf conflicts all point to this fact. Sometimes these groups also attack the Fulani, generally because other groups devalue their dignity. Also in the past some ethnic groups in the South-South like Ijaw-Itsekiri, Ijaw-Urhobo, Ijaw-Ilajes, Ife-Modakeke, Aguleri-Umuleri, engaged in fierce fights destroying one another. (See *Vanguard*, July 16, 2012; *ThisDay* March 21, 2013; *Gboozza, The African Social News Network*, January 30, 2012; *Vanguard* April 9, 2013; *ThisDay* May 14, 2013; *The Sun News* May 14, 2013; *Guardian* June 2, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> See E. Adamson Hoebel, *Anthropology: The Study of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1966), 7, 97 ff; James Peoples and Garrick Bailey, *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Australia: Thomson-Wadsworth, 2003), 21-24. There are numerous other works on this issue, though the theories conflict. It must be critically observed that the ascription, 'modern man' only serves one perspective which is inappropriate for man has always been what he is today in physiological structure.

<sup>11</sup> Calestous Juma, "Viewpoint: How Tribalism Stunts African Democracy," 27 November 2012. This article was cited from the BBC web page at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20465752> on May 8, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Nigeria alone accounts for over 35,000 lost lives in the last decade.

<sup>13</sup> P. Asmussen, A. Brochstedt, L. Jensen, A. Kjær, M. Krogholt, L. Mortensen, *Tribalism in Africa: The Complexity of Ethnicity*, Roskilde University Digital Archive, 53-54; [http://rudar.ruc.dk/bitstream/1800/4204/3/PROJECT\\_til\\_biblio.pdf](http://rudar.ruc.dk/bitstream/1800/4204/3/PROJECT_til_biblio.pdf), accessed May 12, 2014 at 10:00 AM.

policy driven even though there seems to be available policies, and those who do talk about policies seem never to put them into practice.

Davidson blames the current situation in Africa on the colonial structures that refused to recognize the peculiar sociological and cultural context of Africa.<sup>14</sup> This results in a state of affairs that “flourishes on disorder, is utterly destructive of civil society, makes hay of morality, flouts the rule of law. It is the reverse of the civil society revealed by the records of history increasingly and intensively inspected, since the 1950s, by historians from many cultures and countries.”<sup>15</sup> Although ethnic groups and their differences existed before colonialism, the colonialists exacerbated these to their own advantage.

### **3. Military Rule**

Since independence, Africans have experienced military rule at times in their various countries. The military used their powers to favour their own ethnic groups while at the same time suppressing other groups. Even today, some military personnel generally look upon civilians with the utmost disdain. When democracy returned to some African countries after international pressure, some African civilian leaders replicated the military’s inglorious treatment of their citizens. There has been such vast injustices and massive corruption that socio-economic suffering has become the lot of many Africans. The deteriorating leadership system in Africa, as leaders tend to manipulate their political and economic resources to the advantage of their kinsmen, has bred distrust and made all ethnic groups overly sensitive to their own existence and to seek their welfare at the expense of other ethnic groups. A national identity does not factor strongly in the mentality of ethnic groups as they owe more allegiance to their ethnic interests than to national interests. This further compounds the political situation such that this constant tension among ethnic groups scheming against one another. In Nigeria, this problem manifests during presidential and gubernatorial campaigns and also at the Federal Character Commission, which is supposed to fairly distribute public sector jobs among all ethnic groups.

Some politically, economically, strategically, socially, and numerically stronger ethnic groups believe that certain positions in any country are their exclusive right, while other groups may only have them by privilege. For instance, in Nigeria, the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, which are the major ethnic groups, have struggled over key positions since independence, and those three groups in turn suppress the minorities. It is as a result of this that Awolowo sees Nigeria, not as a nation but as a geographical expression.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Tafawa Balewa did not see the ethnic groups in Nigeria as one people but as different peoples artificially lumped together showing no visible

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<sup>14</sup> Basil Davidson, *The Black Man’s Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (Abuja: Spectrum Books, 2005), 11, 225.

<sup>15</sup> Davidson, *The Black Man’s Burden*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (Lagos: Faber & Faber, 1947), 47-48.

willingness to grow together in unity.<sup>17</sup> Greed for political control along ethnic lines has been so exacerbated that the majority ethnic groups accuse one another of marginalization, whereas the ethnic minorities also have their own tales to tell, first, against one another and then against the majority groups.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. Language Divisions

Language is one of the most divisive features in ethnicism. In Nigeria, for instance, English is the lingua franca, but in many public offices, including academic institutions, native languages dominate. In many cases, the native languages determine whether one can get a job or any favour in government establishments. For instance, if one speaks Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, or any of the local languages in a public office where the person in charge speaks the same language, the chance of getting one's desired favour is about 80%. Those who are not able to communicate with the person in charge in his or her own language are often at a disadvantage, no matter how highly qualified they may be. Another feature that heightens the spirit of ethnicism is the question of the "indigene":<sup>19</sup> no citizen is qualified to work in a state government outside of one's original home state. Even federal agencies in particular states are dominated by indigenes of a state in which such agencies are established. Thus ethnicism has been a great hindrance to national development.

#### 5. Conclusion

The causes of ethnic disputes are mainly land disputes, cultural differences, religious bigotry, economic manipulation, and political interests.<sup>20</sup> Fighting seems to be everywhere, and it affects the stability of the continent at all those points of conflicting interests, so that it is apparent that tribal or ethnic politics will die hard on the continent. The nature of ethnicism is to suppress other ethnicities by undermining their potential to contribute to the overall good of society. There is no continent on earth in the twenty-first century where people of similar cultures would hunt down and kill fellow humans as they do animals, except Africa. Africans apply the same hunting mood for animals to their fellow Africans in all kinds of violent conflicts. While secular anthropology has not helped to change such negative attitudes of Africans among

<sup>17</sup> Tafawa Balewa in his Legislative debate in March 1948, cited in Dan Agbese, *Nigeria Their Nigeria* (Lagos: Newswatch Books, 2008), 69.

<sup>18</sup> Jude Uwalaka argues against the marginalization of Igbos in *The Struggle for an Inclusive Nigeria: Igbos to be or not to be?* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2003), 29; see Simon A. Rakov, "Ethnicity in Nigeria," Fall 1990, and cited at <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/nigeria/ethnicity.html> on May 1, 2013; Jibrin Ibrahim argues that the Hausa/Fulani have been marginalized in "Hausa/Fulani oligarchy and the marginalisation of Nigerians," *Daily Trust*, 05 November 2012. Recently, Yorubas accused Jonathan's government of marginalizing them (see *The Punch*, Dec. 16, 2012; *The Sun*, Feb. 24, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> The US Report on Nigeria also suggests scrapping this ethnic element. "NIGERIA: U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2013 Annual Report," 106.

<sup>20</sup> See Mwendaga Jibo, A.T. Simbine, H.S. Galadima, *Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in Nigeria: The North-central Zone of Nigeria* (Ibadan: The Lord's Creations, 2001), 15 f.

themselves, Christian anthropology offers a better perspective that should be accepted and inculcated into younger generations to prepare them for a better future for African nations. The task we have today is to rediscover ourselves by going back to the fundamentals of the creation ordinance that gave us equal status and the potential for self-development and growth.

### **The Image of God as the Basis for Ethnic Integration in Africa**

The question of human origin is of critical importance to the value we place on human life and to our behaviour towards one another. God created us in his own image: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26, 27). This idea of man being created in the image of God appears repeatedly in Scripture (Gen. 5:1; 9:6; Jas. 3:9).

#### **1. What does it mean to be made in the image of God?**

This concept is the exclusive preserve of the Jewish and Christian religions; it is not found in other religions. Though Christian theologians have argued over other details of what the image of God in man is, many exclude the idea that the image of God in humanity has a physical aspect. For example, Lutheran theology sees the concept in terms of the gifts that were implanted in man such as "knowledge of God, fear of God, and trust in God."<sup>21</sup> Some see the image in the sense of man's intellectual and moral capacity and his spirit or soul. This is patterned after God's nature and is the ground for man's religious ability to connect with God.<sup>22</sup> The human body is excluded in all these definitions. Machen argues, "The 'image of God' cannot well refer to man's body, because God is a spirit; it must therefore refer to man's soul. It is man's soul which is made in the image or likeness of God."<sup>23</sup> More pointedly, the similitude lies in the fact that God is a person and man is also a person.<sup>24</sup>

This view, however, is inconsistent with what human personality means; human personality takes all that humans are into account, namely body and soul. So other scholars believe that the whole man constitutes the image. "Scripture never makes a distinction between man's spiritual and bodily attributes in order to limit the image of God to the spiritual, as furnishing the only possible analogy between God and man."<sup>25</sup> Moreover, God has revealed

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord*, trans. Charles Arand and others (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), Art. 2, 115.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 96-7.

<sup>23</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 145.

<sup>24</sup> Machen, *The Christian View of Man*, 145.

<sup>25</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 77.

himself in various anthropomorphic ways in Scripture without which it would be difficult to know that he is a person and capable of personal relationship. Such descriptions as God seeing, hearing, acting with a mighty hand, and having emotions such as anger and compassion show that the human body conveys some truths about God, though not necessarily in physical terms. Ursinus highlights the knowledge aspect of the image, but argues that “the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul,” the “purity and integrity of the whole man,” as well as the “dignity and majesty of man” are comprehended in this concept.<sup>26</sup> Ursinus believes that the image lost its glory or its conformity to God in the fall, but the “incorporeal, rational, and immortal substance of the soul together with its powers” still remains even in unregenerate souls.<sup>27</sup>

It is more sensible and logical not to split human personality in search of the image of God in humanity, but to view the image as comprehensive in scope, including our ontological and functional aspects, that is, the gifts that we are endowed with and the tasks we are to perform.<sup>28</sup> In this view, the image expresses itself in man’s volitional powers, aesthetic and artistic ingenuity, and the sense of divinity by which he relates with God.<sup>29</sup> Man possesses certain qualities of God that make him unique. Such uniqueness is drawn from the glory and honour that the image bestows upon man in contrast to animals. It was because of this distinctive aspect of man that he was given dominion over the whole universe, which is part of the *cultural mandate*. This dominion was an important characteristic that resulted from being created in the image of God.

## 2. Why is it important that humans are made in the image of God?

The importance of this image concept is illustrated when God gives the reason for the prohibition of murder in Gen. 9: 5-6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” On this note, God requires man to be accountable for the life of his fellow man. The prohibition of murder implies the protection of one another.

The reason that murder is here said to be such a heinous crime that it must be punished by death is that the man who has been murdered is someone who imaged God, reflected God, was like God, and represented God. Therefore, when one kills a human being, not only does he take that person’s life, but he *hurts God himself* - the God who was reflected in that individual. To touch the image of God is to *touch God himself*; to kill the image of God is to *do violence to God himself*.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G.W. Willard (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1852), 30.

<sup>27</sup> Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> A. A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 69, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 69-70. The special ability to relate with God underscores humanity’s essential nature of divine awareness or *sensus divinitatis* (Calvin’s language: *Institutes*, 1.3.1, 88) which forms the bedrock of human religiosity.

<sup>30</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 16. [Emphasis mine].

This requirement is reflected in the sixth of the Ten Commandments, which involves preserving the image of God in man. The prohibition of murder or killing in the sixth commandment takes into consideration all internal and external causes that bring about the act. When Jesus explained this command (Matt. 5:22), he did not restrict it to the very act of killing itself, he also pointed to the internal causes such as anger, envy, hatred, and desire for revenge. Ursinus explains that “in removing the effect he may at the same time remove all the causes which contribute to it, and that embracing under the term murder, all the sins which are connected with it, he may, by showing its aggravated character, the more effectually restrains us from these sins.”<sup>31</sup>

### 3. How does an African traditional worldview value humanity?

The traditional worldview of African people upholds the integrity of the human person, especially in that the “dignity, inherent worth, the value, the moral status and rights of every human person in society has to be respected and honoured.”<sup>32</sup> In this respect there is reciprocity between people which seeks to protect and preserve life rather than exterminate it. If human dignity is anchored in the nature of the person as the image bearer of God, then any act of violence against any person on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, class, or religion is an assault on the very dignity that person bears. The African worldview agrees with this biblical truth and for this reason needs to be strengthened in the African context.

Many people today are clamouring for the integrity of creation, but this can only be truly achieved on the foundation of a proper view of the integrity and sanctity of human life.<sup>33</sup> Many people have also coupled a conscious resolution to protect animals with a high-level commitment of resources to ensure their rights and safety. How much more should they also work to protect human dignity, given that humanity bears the image of God?<sup>34</sup> Human dignity is far greater than that of animals. Scripture accords humanity higher glory, setting it at the helm of all created things (Ps. 8). Humanity as the caretaker of the creation must first value human life, and from this conviction it can proceed to guarantee the integrity and preservation of creation.

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<sup>31</sup> Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 583-584.

<sup>32</sup> E. M. Conradie, “On the integrity of the human person and the integrity of creation: Some Christian theological perspectives,” *The Integrity of the Human Person in an African Context: Perspectives from Science and Religion*, ed. C. W. du Toit (Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, 2004), 107.

<sup>33</sup> George E. Tinker, “The Integrity of Creation: Restoring Trinitarian Balance,” in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*, ed. William R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 202-213.

<sup>34</sup> See movements like “People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals,” at <http://www.peta.org/> and “Virginia Beach SPCA,” at <http://www.webcrawler.com/info.wbcrlw1.305.04/search/web?q=virginia+beach+animal+control&cid>. Although some people question the credibility of some of these organizations, it still shows some intent for conscious preservation of animal life.

#### 4. How does an Islamic worldview value humanity?

Balogun argues a version of Islam that agrees with the biblical injunction stated above: “The Quran teaches that whoever kills a soul has killed a nation and whoever saves a soul has saved a nation.”<sup>35</sup> This shows the connection between human souls and national development that everyone should know irrespective of religious and ethnic divides. But the level of contradiction to this truth, which we experience everyday is quite alarming as people commit mass murder in the name of ethnicity or religion. Murder stems from a conscious hatred of someone. Therefore, to contain murder we must eliminate all forms of hatred of others.

#### 5. How does God value humanity?

This image of God in human beings is a “special characteristic of the human race, which distinguishes us from other creatures and makes our salvation a matter of supreme concern to God.”<sup>36</sup> Kline highly values the image concept, especially its likeness to God, as man’s commission to dominion means his participatory “judicial function” with God in ruling the universe.<sup>37</sup> Genesis 1:26–28 shows the close affinity between the image and dominion that is the definitive characteristic of humanity. The image and glory of God are at the base of this theological concept. For this, “man is a royal son with the judicial function appertaining to kingly office.”<sup>38</sup>

This importance of this concept can also be understood when we correctly grasp how it applies to Christ. Scripture says that Christ is the express image of the invisible God and the effulgence of the Father (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3). Because he is divine, the nature of his being the image of the invisible God is not precisely the same as ours; Christ nevertheless conveyed all this image of God in his humanity. Some theologians believe that the image of God in man was lost at the fall,<sup>39</sup> but such positions have neither explicit nor implicit support in Scripture. On the contrary, some passages (Gen. 9:6, 1 Cor. 11:7, and Jas. 3:9) attribute creation in the image of God to all humanity and are too bold to be dismissed or interpreted as saying that the image was lost.

Calvin affirms that though the image of God was badly corrupted and the supernatural gifts were stripped from Adam’s posterity at the fall, that image was not completely lost.<sup>40</sup> Calvin understands the image to be the “glory of

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<sup>35</sup> Ishola Balogun, “Amnesty and the Quran,” *Vanguard*, April 5, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Gerald L. Bray, “Image of God,” *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 2008), 576.

<sup>37</sup> Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 27.

<sup>38</sup> Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> T. Camelot, ‘La théologie de l’image de Dieu,’ *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 40 (1956), 459, 464.

<sup>40</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1961), 2.1.12.

God which peculiarly shines forth in human nature.”<sup>41</sup> Although it was by God’s love and grace that he sent his Son to become incarnate that he might redeem humanity, it is not out of place to see that humanity was so important to God that he could not abandon it to destruction. It is for this reason that Christ came to redeem the image and restore it to its original glory. Jesus voluntarily chose to do this through adoption of the human nature, which shows how important we are to God. By appearing as God’s image in human form even as we are also in God’s image, Christ reconnects us with God in a remarkable way that further heightens the importance that God bestows upon us.

“When, therefore, thou hear that the Son is the brightness of the Father’s glory, think thus with thyself, that the glory of the Father is invisible until it shines forth in Christ, and that he is called the impress of his substance, because the majesty of the Father is hidden until it shows itself impressed as it were on his image.”<sup>42</sup>

That Christ is the firstborn of all creation and we all are connected to him as his brothers to be conformed to his image (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15) shows that our image is also the effulgence of God at the creaturely level, especially for those who are redeemed in Christ. Calvin is aware that human language is inadequate to explicate the glorious divine truths, but adds that this should not deter us from expressing them in human language. In our image too, the glory of God is hidden, and what pertains to Christ also pertains to us. Though through us the effulgence of God’s glory is relative and imperfect, Christ’s own is absolute and perfect. Calvin argues that Christ brings us immeasurable benefits: through Christ, the “very majesty of God” descended to us, since we are incapable of ascending to God, and he took “what was ours” in order to “impart what was his to us.”<sup>43</sup> This expresses how God assigns great significance to our humanity. This idea of the image of God in man is worth presenting to all African peoples irrespective of ethnicity, religion and gender.

## **6. How does the image of God in humans and humanity apply in Africa?**

The importance of this image concept extends from the individual level to the whole of humanity. While every human being holds that unique dignity, its scope comprehends the entire human race so that every ethnic group stands equal before God. Hoekema rightly argues that “we can only see the full riches of the image of God as we take into account all of human history and all of man’s diverse cultural contributions.”<sup>44</sup> Similarly Bavinck: “The image of God is far too rich to be completely represented by a single human being, no matter how gifted he might be. That image can only be disclosed in its depth and riches in the whole of humanity with its millions of members.”<sup>45</sup> The force and

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<sup>41</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 47.

<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1996), 32.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.12.1-2, 232-233.

<sup>44</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 100.

<sup>45</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 2 God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 621.

strength of any multi-ethnic nation lies in its corporate entity, as no single ethnic group, no matter how large, can carry all the responsibilities of a nation. This perspective is critical in shaping the mentality of ethnic groups in Africa to appreciate one another. The fact that every human being and every group of people are made in the image of God should make ethnic groups see themselves as extensions of one another. It is also because every person carries the likeness of God that James warns against insulting anyone (Jas. 3:9). This means that whether or not someone holds beliefs, values, practices, and social interests similar to yours, you should treat him with dignity. In Africa a self-destructive tendency makes ethnicities undermine what God has planted in all of them.

Conclusions similar to those of Hoekema and Bavinck above may have been the view of those who fought against the enslavement of Africans.<sup>46</sup> Before the abolition of slavery, a number of Westerners believed that Africans were inferior and only worthy of being slaves whereas whites were superior and worthy of being masters or slave owners. This perspective seriously undermined their ability to understand that Africans were made in the image of God and so scorned the dignity of Africans. Africans themselves became disoriented when they accepted the same unbiblical thinking such that even after the slave trade, the effort to perform better in the continent has been embarrassing. In a sense, some Africans today have been taken over by neo-colonialists who dictate the state of African development to which we have been enslaved.

The idea that man is made in the image of God means that all humanity was imbued with potential even before it came into existence. Wisdom in humanity is patterned after the wisdom of God. This wisdom has been displayed in human endeavours in the sciences and the arts. Africans have developed such great artistic creativity and skills that Europeans could not resist the temptation to vandalize their creations and export them to Europe. This clearly implies that if Africa works hard to overcome ethnic distractions and to create an enabling environment, it would be at a highly competitive global level in all aspects of life.

The unity required of humanity by virtue of the image concept is similar to that of the triune God who manifests both unity and diversity ontologically and functionally. In eternal wisdom and counsel, God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit puts the economic functions of the three Persons together in creation and

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<sup>46</sup> According to Guy Duqella and others, the Quaker Christians championed the fight against slavery in America as early as the 1600s because they believed that everyone is human and Africans were human. [http://cghs.dadeschools.net/slavery/anti-slavery\\_movement/quakers.htm](http://cghs.dadeschools.net/slavery/anti-slavery_movement/quakers.htm), cited on May 8, 2013. When William Wilberforce also came to the Christian faith, he saw every human being as the image bearer whom God loves and shows mercy to despite sin. See Rusty Wright, "William Wilberforce and Abolishing the Slave Trade," cited at <http://www.probe.org/site/c/> on May 8, 2013.

redemption to his own glory. When God the Son became human, he did not arrogate everything to himself; instead, looking away from himself to another, namely the Father, he said expressly that he came not to do his will but the will of the Father (Jn. 4:34). And Paul follows this understanding by affirming that despite his humanity, Christ had the same substance or form with God but he nevertheless freely chose subjection to the Father (Phil. 2:6). The Father sends and reveals the Son, the Son comes and reveals the Father by doing his will, and the Spirit comes in the name of the Son and teaches all truth according to what the Son has done (Matt. 11:27; Jn. 14:26; 17:1-6). Therefore it is incumbent upon us (including and perhaps especially Africans) as God's image bearers to mutually submit to one another in the same way, thus demonstrating the wondrous potential of God as we govern the whole creation on God's behalf. Mutual submission helps Africans to see ourselves as one, and to serve one another in love and humility without discrimination.

This means that we must not look down upon the contributions of different groups of people from various nationalities and races; rather, we must welcome these contributions as adding to our enrichment. A proper appreciation of the doctrine of the image of God, therefore, should rule out all racism - all denigration of races other than our own, as if they were inferior to us. God made all human beings in his image, and all of them can enlighten and enrich us.<sup>47</sup>

The problem of discrimination based on ethnic group is deeply rooted and universal in humans. It tends to work against humanity itself rather than against what should have been alien to humanity. Even those who practice ethnic discrimination it cannot be totally free from its effects, as they perpetuate it when their victims retaliate. This maggot in the heart of humanity is a result of sin. We need to make a deliberate effort to break away from this mentality and tear down the human walls of hostility that ethnicism builds.

Christ broke down the walls of hostility between Jew and Gentile so racial, ethnic, and gender differences are dissolved (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:10). Confessing Christians of various ethnicities should champion this redemptive reality by living it out in practical ways. In this way all African ethnicities would come to their true nature as God originally intended it to be, in which "true community is no longer threatened, in which one man is no longer a danger for the other."<sup>48</sup> Nigerian Chris Mamman's cry against ethnic cleansing must be heard and heeded everywhere in Africa: "We make bold to say that God in his wisdom created the Akyes, Alagos, Eggons, Fulanis, Gwandaras, Hausas, Kanuri, Milgilis and the Tiv. He created us not to fight and exterminate one another but to harness our diversities for the growth and progress of humanity."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 100.

<sup>48</sup> Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 99.

<sup>49</sup> Chris Mamman, <http://pointblanknews.com/pbn/press-releases/recent-attacks-on-the-eggon-people-by-other-ethnic-groups/>, posted May 2, 2013, cited on May 9, 2013.

Africa can be different from what it is now. Africa can progress to higher levels of development and technological advancement, equalling those levels reached by nations across the Atlantic in the twenty-first century. But African ethnicities need to overcome the self-centeredness that blinds them from appreciating what God has invested in other groups. Our age is one of globalization, and it is time for all nations to deliberate on socio-economic cooperation. Despite the cultural and linguistic differences across the globe, nations are seeking ways of getting closer to one another in order to work out modes of enhancing life. This explains why nations outside of Africa show genuine interest in what is happening in other nations, and seek to invest in one another. When we bring this attitude closer to home, African ethnicities will be proactive in ways of including and integrating with one another to map out socio-economic and political vistas that will propel our nations forward and build a well-developed continent that will draw more foreign investments. Each ethnic group needs the potential of other groups for the collective interest of all, since no group has a monopoly on abilities and resources.

The attitude of giving appointments by ethnic affiliation should be totally discouraged. Rather, there should be conscious identification of the best brains among all ethnic groups, people who are competent to take sensitive responsibilities that can transform nations within short- and long-term plans. This principle of integration requires enacting robust economic policies that would spread out infrastructural development evenly among all ethnicities. Such economies can be sustained by factual anti-graft pursuit that spares no sacred cows, whether ethnic or fraternal.

### **Conclusion**

This paper advocates that ethnic groups in Africa should see themselves as extensions of one another because all of them bear the image of God. The language and cultural differences are a result of long historical and geographical separation; their genus is the same. While ethnic identity remains a reality of human existence, we can instil a sense of national consciousness that will eventually provide ground for such identities to have more meaningful existence in view of our connections with one another and how we complement one another. An alternative to this solution is further fragmentation, African nations breaking into smaller nations according to their ethnicities, but they will still fail to actualize themselves. The beauty of human diversity can only be appreciated if we use that diversity to uphold one another without prejudice. This issue is of critical importance to our development as people in Africa. Therefore, its pursuit requires the efforts of every citizen in every nation. It should be a cultural movement that would see ethnic groups overcoming their boundaries, and integrating themselves as essential parts of each nation. This needs an aggressive campaign at all levels of human existence through family instruction, schools, all media, adverts, traditional and cultural associations, seminars, and conferences. Leaders of various positions

should assume responsibility for this in order to effect this most desirable change, so that ethnic distinctions can be overtaken by national identity on the basis of the fact that we are all created in the image of God.

In Revelation 7:9-10 we see the beauty of human diversity as people from every nation, tribe, people and language are represented before God who created them all. This is ethnic diversity and globalization in their highest forms, collapsing into unity as everyone has one thing in common – worshipping in the blessed presence of God.

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Opoku Onyinah

## **Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana**

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Reviewed by Zachs-Toro Gaiya

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Apostle Dr. Opoku Onyinah (PhD, University of Birmingham, 2002) has been the chairman of the Church of Pentecost (CoP), and a pastor with the denomination for about three decades.

Issues related to witchcraft, i.e., accusations, divination, exorcism, and the state of the accused (or exorcized), while endemic in the church, are often neglected due to the myths surrounding witchcraft. Onyinah has done the church a great service by seeking ways to demythologize the subject using contextual theologies. Since people travel with their religions or beliefs wherever they go, we should enter into constructive dialogue with Onyinah. The Book's focus "is divinatory consultation ... [and] exorcism" from a "classical Pentecostal" perspective.

Onyinah's tapestry of Akan cultures, strong Pentecostal theological and biblical word analysis, and anthropological and socio-psychological interpretations and descriptions could disturb some evangelicals, but there is value in the work. This seven-chapter book is a modified Ph.D. thesis aimed at "the development of some properly safeguarded ministry of exorcism," and contributes to the "ongoing formation of African Christian theology from a Pentecostal perspective" (5). Onyinah describes the cosmology of the Akan people and the historical development and practices of Christianity in Ghana, with an emphasis on CoP. He relates an Akan understanding of witchcraft with a western understanding of demonology, coining the word "witchdemonology" to describe this. He then provides some insights for contextualization for the CoP and the Akan people's Christianity.

Onyinah interviews a number of "self-claimed witches ... [and] self-claimed delivered witches," accused and self-confessed witches, ordinary people, Muslims, diviners and exorcists, and theologians. He describes the cosmology and religious beliefs of the Akan people, especially their understanding of the spirit world, including the Supreme Being - *Onyankopong* in relation to their understanding of humanity and their sociological context, in which any major change has always been a fertile breeding ground for witchcraft accusations.

Central to *bayie*, or witchcraft, “is the belief that some people may possess supernatural powers, which may be used for either good or bad ... in accordance with the belief of the Akan” (50). *Abisa*, or “divinatory consultation”, is “the act of consultation to find out the supernatural causality of one’s problem and knowing how to combat it” (87). *Abisa* is necessary because there cannot be an exorcism without a proper prognosis of the accused “witch”. In fact, *abisa* is “the crux of the matter” (85), the core of Akan religiosity (87).

Onyinah deals with the discontinuity and continuity of Akan cultures and Christianity as these relate to exorcism - the conflicting understanding of “witches” introduced by the lack of proper synthesis of Western and Akan cultures or beliefs vis-à-vis Christian doctrine. The author describes the historical development of the spiritual churches, the ministry of their prophets, and the practices of exorcism. Parallel to this is the description of the historical development of CoP, including the various theological turning points taken in order to reposition the church in the midst of social change. According to the author, the CoP became stronger and more popular while seeking to correct some of the erroneous practices of the spiritual churches and secessionists by adapting into the church some relevant Akan cultural practices as it relates to exorcism. Some practices that were corrected were unscriptural according to the author. The author also describes the various movements and individuals that contributed to the development of a strong ministry for exorcism or deliverance that (with some modifications) became the practice in CoP.

Onyinah’s helpful combination of demonology with witchcraft holds in tension the diverse Western understandings of these concepts and the Akan beliefs. “Witchdemonology” is the “beliefs and practices of deliverance ministry in Ghana ... [which is] a synthesis of the practices and beliefs of Akan witchcraft and western Christian concepts of demonology and exorcism” (172). After analyzing the concept of “witchdemonology,” the author highlights the positives and the negatives of this concept.

In seeking contextual theologies of exorcism, the author appeals to some biblical passages with direct and indirect bearing on “witchcraft”/demonology and exorcism or deliverance from both the Old and New Testaments. We must appreciate the pastoral insights derived from these texts even when we may disagree with the hermeneutics. Onyinah’s theological constructs fit within “classical Pentecostalism”.

The book is not without its problems Onyinah provides a contextualization of exorcism by simply presenting public beliefs. His analysis is not sophisticated and though he attempts to critique some of the practices of exorcism, issues remain. For instance, “exorcism is used in this research to mean a deliberate act of binding or releasing, performed on a person who is believed to be possessed by a spirit of evil intent” (17-18). Onyinah knows his method of exorcism, deliberate binding and releasing, contrast’s with Jesus’ methods as he admits, “*preferably* those [methods] of Jesus are to be followed.

Jesus' main method of exorcism is a *simple* word of command" (276, my italics). Though Jesus' method could be a model, Onyinah seems to suggest (in the spirit of contextual theologies) that we apply our discretion in exorcism. In fact, we know that Jesus did not bind the spirits. Even when Michael (Jude 1:9) was face with some sort of spiritual entity, he cautiously appealed to the Lord to rebuke Satan. There are some areas of disagreement on exorcism between "classical Pentecostals" and other evangelicals. If the motif of binding is taken from Matthew 18:18, then the context is not spiritual warfare but forgiveness.

Jesus' model of "identifying" those who need exorcism is very different from that practiced today. In some biblical encounters with demons, the demoniac may identify the healer (such as Jesus or Paul) and then exorcism takes place. We must also reject the uncritical acceptance of witchcraft confessions – are they a means of simply *extracting* information or a *process* of truth/fact-finding?

In addition, what comes next after exorcism? It is not enough to simply exorcize, Onyinah needs to address the "witches" sociological needs. He earlier demonstrates the danger of neglecting this, but not only does he fail to nuance this central factor, he fails to recognize it as a need for further study. Some of Jesus' actions go beyond "exorcism" to reconciliation and reintegration into the society or family circle (e.g. Luke 8:39; 9:42; 17:14,19). Reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation with humans. Exorcism should not be an end in itself but a means to correct the inherent problems of social isolation experienced by those accused of witchcraft, such as threats of excommunication or execution. The goal is reconciliation with God, the church, and the society, especially for evangelical Christians who seek to make the gospel of Jesus known to all.

If some of Onyinah's ideas cause unease, this should lead to dialogue, not distrust. The use of interviews, observations and minutes of meetings as primary source material is a strength of the book. The diverse primary sources meshes well with the "bilingual" theological approach. Using primary oral sources as well as written sources is necessary when doing contextual theology that addresses issues of concern to academics and local people. We must take seriously witchcraft and witchcraft accusations, especially the African and Biblical definitions of these words. With globalization, "witchcraft" related issues are no longer limited to Africa. The subject calls for dialogue and not apathy.

This work will be a good dialogue starter for those interested in this issue, despite the lacunas in the work. I commend Onyinah's work, especially to academic libraries, seminary students and faculty, pastors, and Christian ministry workers who are interested in contextualized theologies related to witchcraft beliefs and accusations.

Samuel Waje Kunhiyop

## African Christian Theology

HippoBooks, 2012, an imprint of -  
WordAlive Publishers in Nairobi, Kenya,  
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and Zondervan in Grand Rapids, USA.

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1090 Ksh; Amazon US \$18.98 (Kindle \$20.22)

Reviewed by Andrew Wildsmith, Scott Christian University

Samuel Kunhiyop (PhD, Trinity International University, Illinois) is formerly the Provost and Professor of Theology and Ethics at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS), and the Head of the Postgraduate School of South African Theological Seminary. Currently he is the Secretary General of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and a visiting Professor of Ethics at Bingham University, Karu, Nigeria.

There is a sense in which this is the systematic theology book that evangelicals in Africa have been waiting for. Not only is it written by an African evangelical, not only does it address a range of theological topics familiar to traditional Western systematic theologies, it is also accessible, conservative, Biblically-oriented, and focused on Africa. Kunhiyop's *African Christian Theology* does not replace Wilbur O'Donovan's *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, but it does, in a sense complete it. As Kunhiyop, himself a former student of O'Donovan's in Nigeria, points out, O'Donovan desired his book to be a forerunner: "It is the prayer of the author that the book may be a means of stimulating African authors to present the truths of their own study in written form" (p. 2). Kunhiyop says, "As a former student of Wilbur O'Donovan, I see this present book as a modest response to this desire" (p. xiv). These are not the only full length books on theology from Africa written by a single scholar, of course. J.S. Mbiti's *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (1986); J.N.K. Mugambi's *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989); K. Bediako's *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (1995); A.E. Orobator's *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (2008); James H.O. Kombo, *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought*, Leiden: Brill, 2007; and Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions*, Bukuru: ACTS, 2011, the same book is also published by Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2013 - each covers a lot of ground, but is not quite the same sort of systematic theology book. And of course, edited collections of articles by African theologians, each also covering some of the same topics, from K. Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres' *African Theology En Route* (1979) to S. Ngewa, M. Shaw, T. Tienou's *Issues in African Christian*

*Theology* (1998) to D.B. Stinton's *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (2010), threaten to outnumber the grains of sand it seems, but again are not systematic theologies in the traditional sense. Kunhiyop's book covers many of the usual topics found in a systematic theology, it does so from an evangelical perspective, and it has the African flavour that we've been waiting for.

But it is not a radical book in its intention, structure or conclusions, nor is it exhaustive. Kunhiyop is not reacting against or hostile to theology that has been developed in the West. Indeed he makes use of it and critically interacts with selected thoughts of Western theologians from many traditions, from Carl F.H. Henry to Karl Barth, from John Calvin to Clark Pinnock, from F.F. Bruce to Hans Küng, from Donald Bloesch to Charles Ryrie, and many others. Kunhiyop also avoids equating the study of African theology with a comparative religion approach that sees Christianity as merely equal to ATR, Islam and other religions. Kunhiyop's attitude is that, "Christianity based on biblical revelation stands above all other religions." (p. xiv) Nor does Kunhiyop assume that all academic theology by African theologians is inevitably liberal and syncretistic. "But *African* is no more a synonym for *liberal* than *American* is a synonym for *evangelical*. Scripture is always interpreted within a context, and Africa is the context in which I seek the true meaning of Scripture." (p. xiii) Kunhiyop looks for positive contributions by a wide variety of African academic theologians from many backgrounds, but he also interacts critically with them and is not afraid to differ when he detects deviation from biblical conclusions. Similarly he critically examines African traditional thought and practice with sympathy as well as antipathy when necessary. He is aware of the continuing effects of the traditional worldview and is also cognizant of post-missionary Western imports such as Pentecostalism, prosperity theology and secularism. His goal is to "articulate a theology that originates from an authentic search for the meaning of Scripture in order to apply it to African life today." (p.xiii)

Kunhiyop deals with many topics that are familiar to traditional, Western evangelical systematic theologies because certain themes and concepts are important in all contexts: God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, salvation, the Church, eschatology and some of the issues that often accompany these topics, such as angels and demons, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the extent of salvation. He also focuses on the African context of each theme or issue. For example, chapter three, "God and the Spirits", begins with the fact that God and the spirit world are familiar ideas to Africans who become Christians, touching on M.N. Nkemnkia's *African Vitalogy*, Parrinder's *African Traditional Religion*, and Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa*, but insisting that ATR does not give a reliable picture of the true High God. Such a picture can only come from the Scriptures. As he discusses the God of the Scriptures, Kunhiyop deals with the Trinity from a biblical point of view, but also briefly noting that while African titles for Christ, such as Ancestor or Liberator, can be used, they must be used carefully. As he examines what the Bible says about the spirit world, Kunhiyop

highlights such issues as the relationship between evil spirits and disease, and possession and exorcism, as well as the deep fear of evil spiritual powers that distress many Africa Christians. As the Forward to the book notes, Kunhiyop scratches where the African church itches.

Kunhiyop's ability to interact with African and Western theologians from a wide variety of backgrounds, and his determination to anchor his thinking in the Bible, yields conclusions that are generally evangelical and conservative. But at times, his goal of applying the Bible to African contexts leads him to broader thinking. For example, when speaking of salvation and the Christian life, he stresses a holistic view of the extent of salvation, one that goes beyond the spiritual, to include physical, and emotional salvation. But when discussing the topic of prayer, he not only has a firm belief in the efficacy of prayer ("Through prayer, impossible things can become possible."), but he also warns that prayer is not magical, and that "Total salvation, which will remove all physical problems, temptations and evil, will only be realized in heaven." God's will is paramount (pp. 134-135). Also in the area of salvation and the Christian life, Kunhiyop discusses a biblical theology of the ancestors, focusing on where one goes for help to deal with some of life's crises – Christ or the ancestors. Here he deals with traditional beliefs, the temptation to revert to them when a crisis strikes, and the need to maintain loyalty to the God who saves believers and who has far greater power than any other, including the ancestors. Christ replaces the ancestors as the only legitimate, lawful Mediator (pp. 135-139).

It is this section also that we can see that Kunhiyop's theology is not exhaustive. The essentials are there – salvation applies to all aspects of life, prayer is answered according to God's will, when a crisis strikes Christians must stay loyal to the all-powerful and loving Creator and not seek help from other powers. But what happens when God says "No" to our prayers for healing, or school fees, or a better job, or a son to carry on the family line? Much more can be said about the many pastoral issues that arise from this theology, correct as it is. Christians in Africa are greatly attracted to Prosperity Theology which always provides hope for "Yes" answers. But Kunhiyop knows this and has not tried to be exhaustive on any topic.

One could have hoped for longer discussion of certain issues (such as Prosperity Theology) and the inclusion of a topical index, but these are small quibbles compared to what is included. Kunhiyop ends each chapter with questions and suggestions for further reading. The book's length makes it ideal for use as a textbook in Africa at the diploma and bachelor's levels and as a supplementary textbook at the master's level. Theological colleges and universities elsewhere should include this title in their libraries alongside those by African theologians of different traditions in order to have a well-rounded view of African Christian Theology.

# Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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