

THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY by Dr.Gwinyai Muzorewa*.

INTRODUCTION:

While some theologians are still working hard to establish the origins, source and method of African theology others are interested in the future of the enterprise and that is now. It lies in the present imaginative African interpretation and application of the gospel. African theology is emerging from a new African hermeneutic because the questions it addresses are African and the answers have to speak to the African situation in the light of the Word of God. When a theology that is relevant to the African social context is evolved, then we have an authentically African Christian voice, whose primary responsibility is the African situation and accountability to God.

African theology must be defined in a Third World context using a Third World language and idiom. The Western oriented traditional Christian theological language has not adequately met the needs of the developing nations. That is why it did not challenge colonialism, slavery and imperialism which was at its peak at the time that missionary ventures were also at their highest point! In fact, in some cases the missionaries exporting western theology rode in the same vessels to Africa with the colonialists. The former came to preach the gospel (which liberates), while the latter came to colonise, enslave and exploit. Furthermore, the missionary was often charged with responsibility to pastor both the colonialists and their subjects. Here the missionaries wasted the opportunity to preach human equality, dignity and justice. In retrospect we can certainly perceive how Western theology was completely irrelevant to the African situation. So we need now to do an African theology that meets the needs of the people who are struggling daily to recuperate from colonial and foreign economic, legal and government systems planted by the white people.

In fact the Christian traditional theologies have tended to be very dominant and they do not speak for the oppressed and marginalised. It is only within the last three decades that Christian theology has addressed the concerns of the oppressed and the poor through various liberation theologies in Latin America, North America, Asia and Africa and some of this has had to deal with the liberation of theology itself from the traditional Christian doctrines which themselves can be oppressive.¹

African theologians feel that they are beyond the stage of quibbling over the definition of African theology.² What we are doing now is to concentrate on developing relevant theological doctrines that

speak to the soul of the African people. Such doctrines can only form a genuine content of African theology if they enhance the African life wholly. Our theology cannot neglect any aspect of life because the African world view is comprehensive.

While there is much written of African theology, very little has been written on "The Future of African Theology."³ True up until the beginning of the 80's African theology has mainly been concerned about its definition, nature and method. However, the past and the future also help to sharpen the definition of the present, hence this prognosis. Therefore a discussion on the future of African theology is quite appropriate at this point.

J.H. Cone's article which was presented at Accra in 1977 at the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians was prophetic.⁴ Until then and since then, to my knowledge, there is not much written on the subject as yet by an indigenous African.⁵ It is our estimation that all African theologians should be challenged by these words: If by African theology we mean an interpretation of the Christian Gospel in the light of the political and cultural situation in Africa, then it is obvious that the future of this enterprise belongs primarily to Africans alone."⁶

This emphasises the importance of a contextual approach to theology. Africans primarily are charged with this responsibility. However, this need not brand African theology "exclusive" since Christianity should be and is inclusive. But as far as a theological perspective goes, we believe that any genuine universal theology must come from local observations, reflections, articulation and even speculation which may manifest themselves in other parts of the world.

The definitions offered by various theologians may be helpful in understanding what is presently regarded as African theology. However, most of these definitions tend to stifle the development of the "future African theology," because they tend to point away from our contemporary social context in Africa.⁷ Shortly, I shall offer a definition that prognosticates African theology as I envisage it.⁸ My definition basically affords a theological continuity with traditional theology in Africa without itself being a thing of the past. We do not advocate returning to the past but at the same time we cannot divorce ourselves from God's revelation just because it is pre-christian. In fact a backward drift is unnecessary because what God reveals continues to live.

In addition to a new definition of the future African theology, I also suggest three elements that I believe will constitute a future African

theology:

- 1) a contextual indigenization and universalization of the Gospel,
- 2) an African hermeneutical principle, and
- 3) an African Christian authentic expression of the faith and the consequent commitment.

It is fairly obvious that if African theologians attempt to advance into the future using borrowed theological concepts and tools such as Western Philosophy, they can be sure to distort the possibilities that the future has in store for them. I believe that African theologians need to review some of the tools they have used since the rise of African theology as well as consider other tools they could use in order to ensure originality, continuity, authenticity and relevance. The problem with the present definitions is that they have been inherited from the Western Christian tradition. These naturally were not intended to serve African religious needs. And consequently using borrowed theologies will only help Christianity to remain foreign to the African people. This reduced the degree of commitment to Christ among the African believers.

THE DEFINITION OF A FUTURE AFRICAN THEOLOGY

a. The Present Definitions

Because the African is first a human being and then a believer, a realistic and pragmatic definition of African theology must first reckon with the fact of human existence, rather than confession of faith. In placing human existence prior to faith, African theology focuses on the importance of belief in the Power that creates and sustains the African people. After all, does our Christian faith not serve to ensure our eternal survival? Christ came so that those who believe in Him may be empowered to overcome any destructive forces that threaten eternal, spiritual as well as physical survival. Human existence is what God gave and loved first, then gave Jesus Christ the founder of Christian faith.

Indeed, even the religious sense of absolute dependence on spirits and divinities is based on the premise that survival comes first. Since many Africans live at a subsistence level, most of their actions are motivated by the will and desire to survive both physically and spiritually and then spiritually. This is the human situation to which Christian theology must speak in Africa, and seek an answer to the question of human survival in both forms.

It is for this reason that African theology must speak for the poor and the suffering masses. I content that any definition of African theology that does not focus on this note of a wholistic survival, is mere intellectualism that only seeks an academic status and approval and does not serve any salvific purpose for the African.

Unfortunately several definitions on African theology lack this essential pragmatic dimension. Therefore they must be marginalised.

Before we scrutinise some of the definitions, we need to make clear what we mean by a definition. We refer to a statement that expresses in the fewest and clearest words possible the core of what African theology is. Such a statement must certainly constitute the key to what theology is, as well as its perimeters and or theological horizon. A definition marks, as it were, the boundaries within which all our theologising is done. For me, this is what a useful definition ought to do and to be. It is on the basis of this understanding that I critique the present definitions, and construct what I believe is an adequate (though not definitive) statement. Now, let us review selected definitions.

For instance to simply say that African theology is, according to John Mbiti, "a theological reflection and expression by African Christians" fails to describe what is actually happening in African Christian communities.⁹ Such a definition is very general and fails to define the core and the perimeters of African theology which would distinguish it from Western traditional theology which has remained "a resident alien" in the hearts of the majority of the African Christians.¹⁰

The major problem we experience with this definition is that it does not seem to be based on an African epistemology since many African Christians are academic and theological products of the West. Most Africans are currently turning to the traditional religious beliefs for clarification on Christian doctrine because the former speak to the African in a more concrete and spiritual manner than the latter in its current form. Also, the movement from the mission churches to an indigenous African Christianity is due to the fact that Christianity has, by and large, remained "alien" to the African believers. Christianity is "alien" when the gospel is presented with Western cultural presuppositions. When this happens, it is necessary to screen the cultural sheath so to speak and remain with the essential gospel and present it within indigenous cultural presuppositions. We realise that this process is not as easy as changing clothes but it is absolutely necessary that it should be done.

Also, such a "theological reflection" is not only artificial and specifically academic but is abstract. It lacks the survival dimensions when it is done by people who are not struggling to survive, because they do not have this experience. I contend that such a definition does not stem from the African soul if it is based on Western Philosophy. Furthermore, it seems to emanate from a non-African cosmology. The mind which does the reflection has been trained to operate with western cultural values which are primarily

good for the Westerners. However, this is not to reject everything that is western. An African could benefit from Western tools provided one uses them with discretion. One has to make a conscious effort to discard a western world view and operate with an African one.

A useful definition of African theology is one that represents a theological continuity between African traditional religion and Christianity because that is the spiritual journey which the soul has travelled and must journey through. African theologians who are drawing theological raw material from traditional religion inevitably reflect on the meaning of both revelations in order to construct a theology which is relevant to them.

Furthermore, Mbiti's definition does not say what the African Christian reflects upon. But if we assume that it is "a theological reflection" upon the Christian faith, a difficulty arises because African Christian believers are employing their traditional ways and concepts of God in their Christian worship. For example, the use of traditional instruments is becoming more prevalent in the church today than two decades ago. Also many Africans have not set out to define God because they rely on their traditional knowledge.

Therefore, since most Africans believe that they can better understand the faith through the framework of their indigenous religious beliefs, there should be traditional religious ingredients in the definition of African theology. It seems to me that including some traditional religious ingredients in the definition of African theology is one effective way to create a genuine Christian theology which reflects African thinking. It is self-evident that Christianity took hold in the west because the gospel from the East was planted in the matrix of Western Philosophy, Psychology and culture. Mbiti's definition does not take cognisance of African traditional religious beliefs although he knows that these beliefs still inform many African Christians. Lastly, Mbiti does not mention the scriptures (unless Mbiti assumes the use of the bible).

If African theology is 'a theological reflection' upon what God is doing among the Africans, then the element of survival must be highlighted because the majority of African people live at a subsistence level. Survival is their greatest concern. They believe that God helps them to survive. Most of the events in African life are to be interpreted in terms of whether they enhance life. Therefore any serious theological reflection has to involve what God is doing to make it possible for the people of Africa to survive.

Both Christian and traditional believers share the common concern for survival. Therefore what God is doing in history among the

Africans, must be interpreted in terms of survival not just Christian doctrine. Such an African interpretation of survival constitutes a new and important element in the doing of African theology. To my surprise most of the present definitions of African theology do not even mention survival. When it is mentioned it is placed in the extreme periphery as if it is incidental.

Another artificial concept which is used in an attempt to define African theology is the phrase "African Christian Communities."¹¹ These communities are first concerned with survival and Christianity is hoped to enhance it. The Christian religion in the African context is understood to be a means to make survival possible. Consequently survival, not Christianity, is the basic cause of morality or immorality as well as reflection in an African community whether it calls itself Christian or traditional.

The so-called "Christian action" alone cannot be a sufficient basis for African theology because the current Christian code of ethics taught in our theological seminaries for instance, was established in the West to suit and regulate the demands of western culture, not African. In many cases, western morality is different from African morality, e.g. the idea of individual versus corporate responsibility. Therefore, an African community that supposedly operates on "Christian" principles (by which is meant "Western code of ethics") may in fact be living on a double standard because there is also an affinity for traditional cultural practices, especially in times of crises.¹²

The question we have to raise is: can such a theological reflection based on alien religious principles and ethics be authentically African? I contend that the definition of an African theology must be based on a realistic starting point, i.e. where the people are, rather than where they are not, or where they could be. Unless that musical note of religiosity is struck, "Christian" theology cannot touch the hearts of the millions of African "believers" even though they may fill the church registers and come to worship Sunday after Sunday.

The African indigenous church movement is considered a source for African theology mainly because it draws most of its insights from the traditional religion and culture when it indigenises the faith. Traditional religion acknowledges survival according to an African definition of the concept as its sole *raison d'être*. Therefore the above movement is a dependable source of an African theology because it is informed by both the needs of the African soul and the Scriptures. And the latter is being interpreted and appropriated by the former.

The traditional knowledge of God and the Bible are the major source of African theology which is constructed within African experience. When theologians draw on these two basic sources, the most likely result is a theology with an African perspective. The African who is primarily concerned about survival needs, is in a better frame of mind to reflect on what God is doing to enhance human survival on the continent than one who first strives to observe principles of Systematic Theology. I believe there can be no meaningful Systematic Theology without experiencing God.

God speaks to every people directly or by means which are recognised by the community to which communication is intended. But as long as Christianity is "alien," it is erroneous to base an African theology on Christian expression because such an expression is irrelevant to the needs of the African.

Another reason why an African theologian believes that the Bible and not western Christian heritage remains the most viable source of theology is that the Bible message relates to believers at their survival level. The Bible is a written history of a people who were trying hard to survive, people who believed that they survived only through the hand of Yahweh. For instance, the crossing of the Red Sea,¹³ the feeding of the four thousand,¹⁴ the raising of Jairus' daughter¹⁵ and the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself,¹⁶ illustrate how the Bible is a series of struggles where God intervened and enabled the respective communities and individuals to survive. Most of us Africans tend to identify with those desert experiences.

We must remind ourselves that although traditional religion is not informed by the special revelation (the gospel), it is traditionally held that the former remains one of the most viable sources of theology in Africa. As a matter of fact, saying that leaves us with many questions. For instance, if the God who revealed himself in traditional religion (which I wish to label general revelation) is the same as the one who revealed himself in Jesus Christ (which is generally held as special revelation) then, what sense does it make for one to convert from traditional religion to Christianity?¹⁷

Another question related to this is why theologians tend to use traditional religion only as a major part of the raw material for African theology as if to suggest that general revelation is inferior to the special revelation? It is not true that all first hand religious experience is raw material at least initially?

If the God who reveals himself in the general revelation is one with Jesus Christ (John 14:10), what do Africans look for in Christianity that they do not already have in traditional religion? The ultimate

question is, can African theology be both genuinely true to African tradition and Christianity without contradiction or compromise? These questions need to be addressed at some point.

Regarding the revelation, the questions raised is based on the presupposition that traditional religion is a "self-contained system of beliefs." It is too important to put in the periphery. I am also calling into question the Western traditional interpretation of the Trinity¹⁸ and that of the Incarnation.¹⁹ These two doctrines imply that to know the Father is to know the Son because the two are One. (I have dealt with these two doctrines in my essay on the doctrine of God)

If the quest for an African theology is a concern to create a theology and a faith that Africans can relate to naturally, why do theologians choose to assign an inferior rank to traditional religion? In most African patriarchal communities the son is only known with reference to his Father, not vice versa. Similarly, for Christianity to be really indigenised it has to be expressed through the African religious concepts since we are really seeking to understand the function of the Son through our knowledge of the Father. That is consistent with the African logic in establishing kinship relationships. So, African theologians may wish to do Christology in the light of, firstly general revelation, and then special. But is this not what the Bible does in fact? John 3:16 begins: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ...". Logically speaking, the sentence presupposes our prior knowledge of God, and then what God did. We can truly understand what God did when we know who God is first.

However, the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that the Son and the Father are one and God is Three in One. The question that needs to be answered is this: Why do Africans convert from traditional religion (knowledge of and belief in God) to Christianity (knowledge of the Father through the Son)? When God acts in history He may be identified as the Holy Spirit, the Father or the Son as far as the Christian is concerned. But for the traditionalist, God is God. It is not true that what matters is the divine action only and not necessarily the mode of being involved because the THREE are ONE. Our major African theologians should tell us why the special revelation is to be preferred to the general revelation when our people relate a lot more readily to the latter and both are one anyway? My fear and suspicion is that the true answer lies in Africa's colonial mentality which will take a long time to get rid of. Most African Christians have been led to believe that any knowledge of God they had before Christianity was nothing more than superstitious belief which does not really help in any way. True saving knowledge of God could only come through the gospel.

I have also asked what it is that Africans look for in Christianity that is not found in traditional religion more than material artifacts that are often presented in the same package with Christ. A chapter on "The Planting of Christianity" in my book *Origins and Development of African Theology* demonstrates that materialism is a major attraction. Most Westerners cannot imagine an "abundant life" without abundant materialism. But most African traditionalists believe that if one's "spirits" are on one's side, one "shall not want."²⁰ Proof of this is manifested by the present emphasis on spirituality in the Independent Church movement where much of traditional thinking and expression is encouraged and characteristic of the movement. It is also because of this tendency to contextualise the Christian faith that the independent churches are regarded as a lively source for a theology which expresses a genuine African perspective. Thus in these churches one hears more about the work of the Holy Spirit than any other name. This is the spiritual abundance that Africans are looking for, and it is believed that material benefits will naturally follow. In saying this, we do not mean that poverty is next to piety. Africans do not glorify poverty, yet they do not believe that it is a curse either.

For the religious Africans, both materialism and spirituality flow from the same source, God. God may work through nature to provide us with shelter and food; and may speak to us through any means, even through the written word. Traditional religionists are aware of God's magnitude. They believe that God is wealthy because all creation belongs to God.

The point is, for theology to be completely African, its practitioners should prefer and develop "traditional" theological thought forms to Western ones because the African world view is not the same as the Western. And as we all know, theological concepts hold more naturally when they are developed within a people's thought forms. Even new ideas begin to be spiritually meaningful when they have been appropriated to the mind's natural thought pattern. So, with respect to revelation, African concepts of God in traditional religion can best express African concepts of the Divine who is the same God who revealed Godself in both the special and general revelation. Both revelations are equally salvific although the traditional is more relevant to African needs than special revelation in the form it is being expressed. It appears that the only reason most Africans prefer Christianity is that it was presented as a superior form of religion, yet in fact, the benefits are the same because the Benefactor is one. The existing definitions of African theology are superficial because they operate on "non-existent Christian experience."²¹ This is why a new definition of African Christian Theology is absolutely necessary. The adjective "Christian" is

necessary in order to distinguish it from African traditional theology.

b. The New Definition

African theology is a reflective interpretation of what the biblical God is doing to enhance African survival through the agency of people who are informed by Scripture and traditional concepts of God who is revealed to us through the faith and life of Jesus Christ. This definition refers to what God is doing to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked. African theology is then interpreted and understood as the truth of how life will triumph over death, in our present and future as lived out by Jesus Christ. It speaks the vernacular of the African masses because it is the language through which we express our faith. It is to articulate God's actions of grace, justice, and providence that enhance survival. Both biblical and traditional religious beliefs take the matter of survival very seriously for it is the reason for an affinity for religion. Survival in this corporal life and our spiritual bodies is a top priority in African life and thought.

To be more specific, African theology emanates from insights gained in every day incidents in our lives. For instance, one day my grandmother, a peasant, was starving to death and she walked in the woods to look for anything that providence might give. She came across a bush full of ripe wild fruit. Her conclusion was that God had heard her supplication. The Shona would say *matenga andiwona* meaning: providence has favoured me. Some may say *midzimu yangu ineni*, meaning: my guardian ancestral spirits are with me. In each case, there is an assurance of continuity between knowledge of God as a benevolent God before Christianity and after she had accepted Jesus Christ. As a first generation Christian herself this providential act did not perplex her. It only confirmed that God cares for all humanity "even the most insignificant people like me," she said.

Survival is understood to mean sustained existence even when all the odds are against it. Most Africans believe that it is God alone who ultimately sustains life. In pre-scriptural Africa, one knew that a deed was of the Creator if it enhanced one's survival. Only God is the source of the good but any number of agents may be used to deliver the goods. The African can interpret what is good news for him or her depending on whether it enhances survival. Consequently theology should offer an African interpretation of survival in the light of God's grace and justice as revealed in the Scripture (God's raising Jesus Christ from death) since one of the African attributes of God is that God is provider.

c. An African Hermeneutical Principle

The future of African theology is found in the application of a

peculiarly African hermeneutical principle to our reading and interpretation of the Bible. This will have to be imaginatively evolved in light of a new epistemology in order to construct an African theology which speaks in such a language that the suffering and the poor masses can identify themselves in it.²² Although Africans are not necessarily a peculiar race, only a peculiarly distinctive African theological perception can speak to their needs. This can happen only if a new hermeneutics develops as part of their theological methodology.

Such African theology will still be universal because it reflects upon the actions of a God who is everywhere. However, it must first address the African condition. This author contends that it is no use for a theology to be universally sound and acceptable, when it is completely irrelevant to Christian believers in the local region where it is created. J. Cone's very first statement on the future of African theology indicates the need for a peculiar African way to interpret the gospel.²³

The future of African theology is found in its creative interpretation of the gospel for the African situation and in relation to the theologies of the poor throughout the world.²⁴

I also agree with Cone that a creative interpretation of the gospel (the Bible) does not necessarily exclude the African theology's concern about indigenisation and selfhood.²⁵ In fact, it is a creative articulation of these two elements in the light of the Scriptures that will result in a peculiarly relevant and authentic theology. African theology should be created through the use of an indigenous theological methodology which is dealing with native materials such as proverbs and the African experience itself.

However, the challenge is: can African theologians use their culture, a rather exclusive phenomenon and a despised one (in the case of Africa) as the context in which the Scripture is interpreted? Can such theology be faithful to both Christendom and its local social context? That goal may be difficult to attain but theology cannot and should not settle for any type of prefabricated thinking in the interest of conformity. Only a genuinely liberated, creative African theology can deal with that tension between particularity and universality without sacrificing its authenticity.

This challenge applies not only to African theologians but to all Third World theologies. Also herein lies the future of African theology which seeks to be completely "African" and absolutely "Christlike" at once, without either of these losing its original savor. Jesus' complete humanity and divinity has set the example of this ideal state

where the creature and its creator can achieve a divine union. This is how African theology can lead us to be sanctified by God.

When Jesus Christ taught in parables he cited specific historical events with characters with definite cultural limitations. Yet the truth that he intended to convey can be appropriated in every culture. African theology would be an example of this diverse theological quality if it did not focus on Africanisation. True Africanisation is extremely important but its purpose is only to convey the gospel message to the African masses in a way that enables the people to internalise the Word. Africanisation is a means to an end. The end arrived at by a gospel related to a particular social context is a full humanity.

The challenge to African theologians is to be highly imaginative in their interpretation of the gospel so that it speaks to local communities as well as reveal the universal truth. A new hermeneutical principle facilitates the treatment of cultural values in light of the gospel so that what is cultural remains within its cultural context while the "kernel" i.e the truth is free to be incarnate in any culture. This universality and particularity of truth could be the contribution of African theology to other communities. When Christianity was planted in Africa, this distinction between Christ's truth and the cultural ramification and relevancy was not clear.

It seems to me that such theological versatility can only occur when the concepts of selfhood and Africanisation are interpreted in the light of the gospel, which faces us even today. Such an interpretation is only possible when it is done by African people who are liberated from a colonial mentality. African minds enslaved by Western theological systems must be liberated from cultural-theological provincialism, to THEOLOGY, i.e. truth. We remind ourselves that culture is not theology. However the latter may be conveyed via the former without itself becoming culture. The distinction between the two should not be compromised because it is the lack of such a distinction that was one of the major weaknesses of Christianity when it was introduced to the African communities. Consequently African theology needs to be liberated in order for it to be liberative and develop into a meaningful word of God.

d. Liberation Perspective of African Theology

As a Christocentric theology,²⁶ African theology's creative interpretation of the gospel necessarily deals with the concept of liberation because that is Christ's mission to the world.²⁷ It used to mean setting humanity free from politico-socio-spiritual bondage, liberation can also mean salvation. I believe that since salvation is a household word in the African church of which Christ is the head, liberation²⁸ used synonymously with salvation becomes a major

ingredient of African theology. Canon Burgess Carr's introductory statement of *The Struggle Continues*²⁹ properly expresses the importance of the concept of liberation in the African church. At the Lusaka Assembly, he said:

The churches discovered that 'living for Christ and no longer for themselves' meant identification with the complex of liberation struggles that are going on in Africa. But the most startling discovery was the awareness of their own need for liberation. Lusaka will be remembered as the moment in history when the churches in Africa recognised their need to be set free by Christ in order to share in His liberating and renewing activity in Africa.³⁰

Because it is christ-centered, African theology must let Christ serve the people. Liberation is the service Christ has to offer because the suffering, poor, ill, captive, hungry and naked are bound by the political economic and social structures. These are among the people whom the Son of Man came to save (Matthew 1:12b). It is rather unfortunate that the term 'Liberation' seems to be confined to 'political freedom' only. Maybe this is what is more obvious to most people, but liberation means far more than the predominant usage which is necessitated by pervasive political oppression. Black theology in South Africa believes that the major Christian emphasis in Africa, especially in South Africa, is liberation because Black people there are suffering from oppression.³¹ Liberation as defined by both the exponents of Black theology and African theology who use the term, relates to the political, economic, social and spiritual contexts.³²

This demonstrates that Black and African theologies are closely related although African theology has a particular focus in Africanisation as the manifestation of their liberation from foreign dominating powers, both in ecclesiastical and secular terms. Therefore Africanisation is a form of liberation from colonial mentality to a full humanity as stated earlier. It is also liberation from cultural limitations and deprivation. But Black Theology's primary focus is political until all Black people everywhere are politically free.

A theology of Africanisation and contextualisation seeks to interpret Christ in such a way that He sets the people free to be their real selves, having been transformed within their social context by the love and grace of God through Jesus Christ. However, in Christ these separated SELVES are united in their common faith as a new humanity. Furthermore the church in Africa is calling for a liberated theology and that is why Lusaka declared:

We must call upon the churches in Africa to allow Christ to set them free: from theological conservatism so that we can understand,

interpret apply and experience the message of the gospel afresh.³³ Thus African theologians need to liberate themselves in their process of interpreting and theologising so that they do not let the dominant Euro-American theologies continue to harness their souls and minds or cloud their vision. A new hermeneutic is the way towards the liberation of African theology.

CONCLUSION

To conclude I contend that the future of African theology lies in a liberated African theological activity, producing a theology which is liberated to be both authentically African and Christlike at once. This is the one sure way it can produce refreshing and life-giving theological insights suited to the African genius, thought-forms and life-style.

One of the tests for a truly liberated African theology is whether the indigenous African churches will accept and utilise it in the development and interpretation of their doctrines and liturgies. The indigenous churches were the first to sense a theological discomfort in the mission churches which practiced a prefabricated theology. This imported theology was suppressive and repellant to a true African spirit of worship. No wonder the independent churches are among our major sources for African theology. They have deliberately set out to worship God through their cultural expressions, disregarding Western values in liturgy, for example. African theology is tested, but not necessarily sanctioned by whether African nationalists in general and African heads of state in particular will feel that it is enhancing the process for de-colonisation and humanisation. There is an acute case of colonial mentality both in some secular institutions and some churches in Africa. Several nations would like to see the church develop a humanising theology that would either challenge or gird various ideologies in Africa today.

Somehow, the evil of the white colonial oppressors has been unfortunately inherited by their black successors in some cases. African theology could sink roots in the African soil if it would take the role of a prophetic voice seeking to humanise and enhance political reconciliation where it is needed. One way to do this is through emphasis on the African full humanity after the example of Jesus Christ who came so that we may have an abundant life.

African theology is most useful now because many Third World nations are struggling to survive. The church can revitalise the spirit of self-reliance and non-alignment without creating enemies or political friction at home and abroad. Burgess Carr's first documentary report to the All Africa Churches Conference's Assembly expressed this need succinctly.

“Reconciliation is the primary mission of the church in Africa today. We believe that God is calling His church in Africa to be a reconciling influence among our people.³⁴

This is an extraordinary challenge. Its success lies in a proper articulation of liberation which sets humanity free to be creative and not just free from oppressive forces. Finally it is hoped that the African theological and political temper will gradually pave a way for the church in Africa to continue to be prophetic in the continent. If the church fails to prove to be relevant to the need in Africa, it may be regarded as a mighty force that fosters colonial mentality, continue spiritual and psychological enslavement, while depriving the people of the possibility of a full humanity.

FOOTNOTES

1. Segundo J.L.: *The Liberation of Theology* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1976).
2. Nyamiti, C.: “Approaches to African Theology” in *The Emergent Gospel* . He mentions the fact that time to define African theology and to try to agree on any particular definition is now passed. This is time to work on the nature, problems and method. See pp. 33-34.
3. Only Professor J. H. Cone’s article: “A Black American Perspective on the Future of African Theology” in *African Theology en route*. pp. 176-186, addresses the same concerns and needs.
4. *Ibid*, p. 176.
5. Gabriel Setloane’s article: “Where are we in African theology” suggests the direction which African theologians should follow. For him, Christology needs to be explained by African theologians in a manner that is relevant to the needs of the African believers. See his article in *African Theology en route*. pp. 59-65.
6. Appiah -Kubi, K. and Torres, E.: *African Theology en route*. p. 178
7. See chapters seven and eight in *Origins and Development of African Theology* (1985) by G. Muzorewa.
8. However it is not the final word. In fact this definition may be regarded as merely functional and not definitive.
9. Appiah — Kubi and Torres, *African Theology en route*. New York: Maryknoll. 1979. p. 83.
10. Fashole-Luke, “The Quest for an African Christian Theology,” in *The Ecumenical Review*, 27. 1975. p. 267.
11. Kurewa, “The meaning of African theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. (1975 pp. 32-42).
12. I was much surprised when many Christians in Zimbabwe reverted to traditionalism. Some members of the clergy also

- also turned to traditionalism during the seven years war in the country. They were persuaded to believe that their ancestor spirit has a major part to play in the whole experience. (1972 to 1979).
13. Psalm 136:13 and Deuteronomy 11:4. (RSV)
 14. Matthew 15:38 and Mark 8:9 (RSV)
 15. Luke 8:50-54.
 16. All the gospel narratives witness to the event.
 17. Setiloane's article, "Where are we in African theology" raises the same question. He also says "I cannot say I necessarily like where I am." See African Theology en route. p. 64.
 18. We understand the Trinity as the Christian doctrine that refers to the one being of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Claude Welch says "since the early centuries of the church it has been considered the primary and distinctive aspect of the Christian conception of God." See "Trinity" in A Handbook of Christian Theology. New York. The World Publishing Company. 1958. See also Welch's most exhaustive work on the Trinity: In this name the doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology. Welch gives a Christian perspective. Raymond S. Masha has also written a good article on the subject: "The Trinity in the African context," in African Theological Journal 9. No. 1. (April 1990).
 19. By the Incarnation, we refer to the Christian doctrine that God become a human being in Jesus Christ. Aylward Shorter's book: African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation (1977) urges African theologians to consider the nature of African Christian theology. Is it to be adaptation or incarnational?
 20. This is the sense in which the Psalmist says "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Psalm 23:1b.
 21. When tragedy hits an average African Christian family the survivors almost invariably revert to African traditional beliefs, after they have attended the funeral service in the church. The seven years of war in Zimbabwe demonstrated this.
 22. Luke 4:18, 19.
 23. Appiah-Kubi and Torres, ed. African Theology en route. New York: Maryknoll. 1979. p. 181.
 24. Ibid., p. 181
 25. Ibid., p. 181.
 26. Mbiti, J.: New Testament Eschatology in an African Background. London: Oxford University Press. 1968. p. 190.
 27. Luke 4:18-19.

28. I believe that although the word "liberation" is not in common usage, interchangeable with "salvation," both terms apply to the benefits of knowing Christ. We have already noted that for some theologians liberation is the central theme in the Gospels. Cone makes this point clear in *A Black Theology of Liberation*. On the other hand, most African theologians believe that salvation is the central theme in the Gospels. See Mbiti's article: "An African Views American Black Theology," *World View*. 1974.
29. The AACC's Third Assembly was held at Lusaka in May 1974. The theme was "Living for Christ no longer for ourselves." Carr was the General Secretary of the AACC for several years.
30. AACC, *The Struggle Continues*. Nairobi. 1975.
31. Tutu, "The theology of liberation in Africa," in *African Theology en route*. Appiah- Kubi and Torres eds. pp. 162ff.
32. Appiah-kubi, Muganbi, Carr, Mshana accept the use of the term relative to African Theology. See their individual articles in General Bibliography at the end.
33. AACC, *The Struggle Continues*. p. 14.
34. Burgess Carr, *A Report to the Executive Committee of the AACC*" Document No. 1. (March 1972).

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