

FACES AND PHASES OF PROTESTANTISM IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS: THE JACOBUS CAPITEIN HERITAGE

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Abstract

This essay explores the shape, form, tone, and outlook of Protestantism on the African continent. I present the argument that, by and large, 'African Protestantism' is of a different order for its Euro-American counterparts. In order to illustrate and pursue this line of argument, the case study of Jacobus Capitein, a 17th century African slave who was to later become the first Protestant minister trained in theology is advanced. Capitein, together with his work as a pastor at the slave castle called Elmina near the Ghanaian city of Cape Coast in Ghana, is held up as a mirror of African Protestantism. The essay concludes with a discussion about the prospects of Protestant Christianity in Africa.

1 INTRODUCTION, DEFINITIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

1.1 The broader theme

The theme of the consultation that gave birth to this essay was titled: 'Reshaping Protestantism in a global context'. I found it significant that this sentence did not have a subject; only an object, namely, Protestantism. The title suggests reshaping but does not specify who will, who should do it or who is doing it or how. Nor does the theme make any inherent value judgment of the nature or objective of such reshaping.

This gives the envisaged action a fascinating ambiguity so that it can suggest at least four possibilities, which are notable if the topic were to be addressed with African contexts in mind. Firstly, it can be interpreted as a call for us all to participate in the processes – a process already ongoing. For a long time the strategic, policy, doctrinal and ideological issues pertaining to the reshaping of Protestantism have been a matter believed to belong to some select centres, church councils and some

special people in the Protestant world. Secondly, the manner in which the theme was coined encouraged us to take careful note and account of an already reshaping Protestantism. Here, our main duty will be one of creative observation, documentation and structured analysis. Thirdly, the coinage of the theme suggests that it should be possible, if not desirable, for us to explore the theme while bracketing value (pre)judgment on the nature and objective of Protestant reshaping. In other words, our agenda is not merely how best to reshape Protestantism for some noble end, but one of objective observation of what has obtained, what obtains and to do this with a sober and open view to the future of Protestantism. Fourth, the theme coinage frees us – as members of the Protestant intelligentsia, especially those of European and American descent – of thinking that we have some ‘personal or national duty’ to re-assert, revive or oversee the reshaping of Protestantism either locally or globally. Needless to say that a theme such as ours should not be used merely as a canopy from under which we either sing praises to Protestantism – not even obituary praises – or seek to revive the good old Protestant religion. The former would be historically premature while the latter would be naïvely romantic.

- 1.1.1 *Basic understanding*

In many African contexts, the term Protestantism in its classical sense has lost some of its potency as well as some of its original meanings – that is, of being one of the three major branches of Christianity – these three being (Eastern) Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism. Originating in the 16th century reformation, Protestantism is chiefly characterised by such doctrines of justification by grace (alone) through faith (alone), the priesthood of all believers, and the authority and supremacy of the Scriptures as well as the ‘right’ of individuals to the Scriptures. Doctrinal variations have existed and still do exist between Protestants of different confessions from the earliest times. However the above-mentioned are some of the common threads that hold Protestants together.

- 1.1.2 *Africanist typology*

In his foreword to Inus Daneel's *Quest for belonging* (1988) the late David Bosch suggested that African Independent Churches (AICs) – that is, churches founded and sustained by Africans, African resources and African resourcefulness with little if any reference to outsiders beyond the Christian Bible – should be added as the fourth major type of Christianity and of Christian churches. This was a necessary and legitimate recognition of the size and impact of African Independent Churches in African Christianity. However, in suggesting that these churches be added on as one more type of Christianity, Bosch overlooked the fact that classical divisions of Christianity types had

themselves become practically meaningless in the African context. The very emergence and rise of African Independent Churches signalled not merely the arrival of a new Christian type, but was part and parcel of an ongoing process of overhaul for conventional Christian typology.

In many African contexts, people would not distinguish between Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox adherents. The main distinctions would be between mainline Christianity, Independent Christianity and the newer Charismatico-Pentecostal type Christianity – the latter being thus named for lack of a better word. These distinctions, rather than the conventional distinctions of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism would speak more eloquently in many African contexts today. The three groupings (mainline, independent and Charismatico-Pentecostal) denote overlapping and sometimes confusing realities and can therefore not be regarded in isolationist terms. In other words, most Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches would be regarded as belonging to one group – mainline Christianity. All of them originating, at least since the reformation, from the West, would be seen as formalistic churches (*Likereke tsa molao* – literally, churches that follow a set of laws) with historical and other links to Europe and America. No doubt these churches would regard themselves as greatly different one from the other in at least doctrine, history and practice. However, they would nevertheless appear very similar to local eyes when viewed against, for example, African Independent Churches (*Likereke tsa moya* – literally, churches that are led by the Spirit). The Orthodox Churches, especially those originating in Africa such as the Ethiopian as well as the Coptic Orthodox churches do not sit comfortably in the Africanist typology just intimated above. The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches would be seen as part of the mainline and historical mission churches. It would however be awkward to summarily classify African Orthodoxy as ‘mainline’. Arguably, the Ethiopian Orthodox church could be viewed as a ‘mainline’ church within Ethiopia but in terms of the African typology I am putting forward, so would the Protestant church of Mekane Yesus which is also Ethiopian.

In discussing the faces of Protestantism in Africa today, the first thing to note is the extent to which the classical three-part division of Christianity holds even less potency than it has ever done before. Instead a different three-part division has emerged – what I have for now, called the African typology – in its place. In terms of the latter, the main divisions within African Christianity have long ceased to be characterised along the familiar Protestant-Catholic-Orthodox lines. The main divisions are instead: mainline Christianity, Independent Christianity and Charismatico-Pentecostal Christianity.

1.1.3 *Understanding the logic of African Christian typology*

The African typology just submitted above is, technically speaking, of course not historically 'correct'. Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Christians are different, historically, doctrinally and theologically. They cannot and should not be conflated. However, when it comes to Africa certain distinctive factors – which might help us understand the seeming distortions – are noteworthy. The arrival of both Catholicism and Protestantism not only coincided with colonial conquest and slavery but both Catholicism and Protestantism were at a deeper level (ideological, theological and practical) part and parcel of the slavery and colonial projects. Furthermore, historical epochs preceding the reformation and their attendant paradigm shifts which had occurred in Europe – culminating in the enlightenment or modernity – had not been duplicated in African contexts. Although it is possible to derive Christian mission principles from the teachings of first generation reformers, there is general consensus that reformation of the local or European (catholic) church rather than mission outreach into far away lands was their primary focus. In this sense the reformation and by deduction Protestantism was primarily a national, at best European movement, was meant for the church in Europe. The outreach into foreign lands was initially merely a function of the colonial, conquest and discovery projects. Even when European Protestants migrated to foreign lands – such as the Puritans to America and the Huguenots to Southern Africa for example – they understood Protestantism mainly as part and parcel of their own internal identity with no built-in missionary dimension. The innate missionary potential of Protestant doctrines was 'discovered' and 'discharged' later – mostly reluctantly, often accidentally and almost certainly after some demonstrable political conquest of Africans had been secured (Chidester 1996).

Admittedly, once European Christians engaged in Christian mission their Catholic and Protestant colours soon showed not only in their teachings, but also in the way they exported their acrimonious battles there too. Indeed, colonial powers were either Protestant or Catholic and each would promote the religion of their state even as they pursued their colonial quests. In some African colonies Protestant colonial powers would initially not allow any Catholic presence and vice versa. Africans must have soon realised this and were subsequently confused by the battles, rivalries and divisions of a political and religious nature among the colonists themselves. However, from an African point of view many of the differences propounded passionately by Europeans appeared miniscule in significance, compared to the similarities of purpose, culture and execution showed by European Christians when it came to conquest and the belief that Africans were *less* or at most *differently* human than Europeans. Besides, for many Africans, it was really a matter of accident or conquest rather than intelligent choice whether they became Catholic

or Protestant – something that is of course true for some Europeans too. Neither the enlightenment nor reformation teachings had rid Europeans of the view that blacks and Africans were inferior – at best infants or noble savages and at worst something outside the scope of the fully human. Indeed, the enlightenment which influenced and nourished the Protestant reformation was also the occasion of some of the basic racist philosophies and typology which led to the thinking that Africans belonged to the lower echelons of the human species.

Therefore, not all the 'gains' of Reformation teachings were seen to pertain to Africans. For this reason many Africans failed to see the significant differences between the missionary bodies belonging to Protestant and Catholic factions on the one hand, and the difference between missionary and colonialist on the other. There is therefore some method in the African madness that sees Protestants and Catholics belonging to one group of mainline Christianity, namely *dikereke tsa molao* and the attendant three-part typology of mainline churches, African Independent and Charismatico-Pentecostal churches.

1.1.4 *Protestantism and fundamentalism*

Beyond, below and between the tripartite African typology which cuts across Catholicism and Protestantism, lies the reality of what some have called Christian fundamentalism – a complex phenomenon not always that well understood, which is global, respecting no geographical, cultural, national or religious boundaries. The link – alleged, accidental or real – between many Christian forms of fundamentalism and Protestantism can be traced to such typically Protestant concerns as (a) the view and usage of Scripture, (b) the individual's 'right' to Scripture and its interpretation, (c) Protestant views of culture and of revelation and finally (d) Protestant views of history and eschatology. It appears – on the surface at least – that Protestant fundamentalists could be characterised by the detail with which; and the extremes to which, and the stubbornness with which, they interpret and espouse such doctrinal matters as captured in the foregoing list – among others. When one adds to the mix, the particular exigencies presented by the context, history and time in question, it becomes clear that fundamentalism is a complex phenomenon often happening within certain confessional currents, but at the intersection of many currents. Indeed, forms of fundamentalism are by no means exclusive either to Protestantism or to Christianity.

In the Christian world, present-day USA has been suggested as the hotbed from which fundamentalism springs forth into the ends of the earth. Clearly however, even the USA has no total monopoly on the manufacture of different shades, permutations and types of Christian

fundamentalisms. Furthermore, while the initial outbreaks of fundamentalist-type Christianities in various parts of the world may be inspired by some evangelical USA-type Christianity, concrete expressions of it are often more innovative, local and contextual. Fundamentalism is a complex phenomenon which is not merely religious – it is certainly seldom mono-religious usually, harnessing a number of aspects of a number of religions or religious and cultural traditions, creatively weaving them into a new system. In this sense fundamentalism may arise out of Catholicism, European Christianity, African religion as much as it may arise in Islam. It may occur equally in the USA as it might do in Japan. That the USA has been seen as a prominent hotbed of (Protestant) fundamentalism might partly be a function of its status and place as superpower and therefore its ability to announce itself all over the world.

1.1.5 *Protestantism in Europe, Protestantism in Africa*

Before closing off this section, one must ask, in the light of the confessional permutations in African contexts, whether Protestantism is sufficiently described by simply expressing its classical teachings. It seems to me that there is more to Protestantism than what Protestantism says. The African experience of Protestantism would certainly seem to suggest this possibility. Euro-American Protestants working in African contexts did not always practise what they were taught. The context did not lend itself to becoming a carbon copy of Euro-American Protestantism. Much creativity and contextualisation was needed. Nor did European Protestants working in Africa always provide coherent explanations of what was 'Protestant' about some of their actions, statements, silences and non-actions. Clearly therefore, Protestantism in the African context, has meant more than (a) the sum total of its teachings, (b) its European face, (c) what it was initially meant to be and become. It now possesses a range of meanings, implications and consequences beyond what was immediately obvious or predictable. In this sense, to speak of Protestantism is to speak of a cultural, philosophical, economic and social movement type of entity. Some of the faces of Protestantism in Africa as will be the case in other contexts will therefore be extra-religious, if not in content, definitely in terms of consequences, impact, effects and implications. Though deriving from the same historical sources the word Protestant means some different things to Africans from what it does to Europeans. If the Protestantism of Europe implied protest against excessive papal authority; Protestantism in Africa was often silent in the face excessive and abusive colonial authority; if European Protestantism is a child of the high and cultivated cultures of the enlightenment; in Africa Protestantism was experienced mainly as a the vanguard or aftermath of colonial imperialism; if European Protestantism taught justification through faith alone, Protestantism in

Africa took a long time to accept that the African in his or her culture was as a worthy candidate for justification even if he or she had faith. In Europe Protestantism might have rallied against most forms of servitude and slavery but in Africa, Protestantism joined forces with the slave masters and traders, at times. If European Protestantism was led by the most learned, able, influential and cultured; African Protestantism was, with a few exceptions, simply led by the most doggedly zealous of European settlers often emanating from the lower echelons (even the margins) of European society.

2 PROTESTANTISM IN AFRICA: FACES AND PHASES

2.1 Case study: The story of an African Protestant pioneerⁱⁱ

In teaching an elective course on Church and mission in Africa at the Global Institute of Theology in Accra recently, I used two historical case studies, namely the story of Jacobus Capitein and the notorious story of the Xhosa cattle killing episode which occurred in South Africa. Both stories, I would like to suggest, present particular faces of Protestantism in Africa. For purposes of space saving, I shall use only the one case.

2.1.1 Context of the story

On a typically warm day, the boys loved to play by the river Benya not far from their home in Elmina Village. The river is itself not from the Atlantic sea into which the Benya is rapidly swallowed. This was the land of the Akan and they called the village Edina. These were the days before the Ghana became known as the Gold Coast – before Ghana was called Ghana. These were the days before the 1482 Portuguese arrival on the African coastline. Edina was already a thriving commercial town specialising in salt mining. Many peoples of West Africa met to do business in this town. It was a warm and vibrant place for any child to grow up in.

When gold was discovered, Edina became a centre for trading in gold. But this is precisely what attracted the Portuguese to Edina and they soon changed its name to *La Mina* (the mine) owing to the gold trade. With time *La Mina* became Elmina and the Portuguese settlers, like the Dutch after them, ruled it meticulously – dividing it up into several administrative sections. As a monument to their intention to settle and do business, the Portuguese built a fort/castle, Elmina Castle. The castle was built on a rock which stood, separated from Elmina Township by a canal, in a strategic place between the sea and the river Benya – making it secure from attack and access from both land and sea. The castle became a self-sufficient and self-contained home away from home for the Portuguese. It was also a base from which they would forage into the interior in search of trade and a home to which they would return without having to submit to any local authority. In time,

inside the castle were governors, clerical and domestic staff and eventually even chaplains. Elmina also formed a link between their home away from home and their ultimate home, that is, Lisbon.

2.1.2 *Enter the Dutch*

The year 1637 was significant. The Dutch fought and pushed the Portuguese off the coast, capturing Elmina town and Elmina castle. The Dutch had been trying to do this for a few decades already and were steadily becoming the superior maritime power, at least on the Atlantic coastline. Under the oversight of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) – a chartered trading company established in 1621, the Dutch consolidated their hold on the Atlantic coastline for decades to come. In the Elmina castle, the Dutch maintained the same arrangements as left by the Portuguese – including among the staff, a chaplain. Though appointed by the church in the Netherlands, the chaplain was nevertheless paid by the WIC so that the latter had effective 'hire and fire' authority over chaplains – a possibly tricky complication. For the locals living outside the castle, life went on pretty much as before, except that where you had the Portuguese before you now had the Dutch.

2.1.3 *Enter the Atlantic slave trade*

However, as the Dutch moved in, another, more lucrative avenue of trading and business was opening up and becoming more and more acceptable – the Atlantic slave trade. Not only was it becoming – for most of the maritime colonial powers of the times – more acceptable to trade in slaves but the slave trade was gradually fetching more money than other trades, including trade in gold. The WIC could not resist and soon got involved in the slave trade in an organised and large-scale manner. This was to continue throughout the seventeenth centuries – with abolition being proclaimed in the Netherlands in 1814 and only banned in the Dutch colonies in 1863.

There are at least 9 possible ways that one could become a slave at the height of the Atlantic slave trade; through (a) being African and or black, (b) birth – children born to slaves were automatic slave graduates owned by the masters of their parents, (c) purchase, (d) non-payment of debt (sometimes free-able after debt repayment), (e) punishment for criminal offences, (f) marriage to a slave, (g) selling oneself into slavery as a result of sudden or chronic insolvency, (h) becoming orphaned and lastly, (i) capture in war or sheer kidnapping by either African or European slave catchers.

2.1.4 *Enter J E J Capitein: An African Protestant pioneer*

Among the children often playing in the forests on the banks of the river Benya and on the beach front by the sea in the early seventeenth hundreds, was one who was later to be known as Jacobus Elisa Johannes (JEJ) Capitein – a child born at the wrong time – about 1717. One day whilst playing with his friends in the plush bushes alongside the river Benya, not far from the place where Elmina castle stubbornly overlooking the sea, JEJ was kidnapped and captured. Because he was a healthy-looking and strongly built kid, the capturers preferred him to all the other children he was with. He was easy to isolate, chase, catch, pin down. The identity of his capturers is unknown. They could have been European slave traders. They could have been fellow Africans who had discovered that there was money to be made from selling humans to Europeans camped at Elmina. Human memory being fickle and notoriously selective, especially the memory of children of seven or eight – which is the age that Capitein was – he later could not remember the precise details of his capture either. Indeed he needed the help of his capturers to refresh his memory. Maybe he was an orphan at the mercy of ruthless relatives who wanted to make quick money. Or was he perhaps literally snatched from his parents by European slave traders, Western movie style? Herewith his own and brief reconstruction:

As a child of seven or eight years, having been robbed of my parents either by war or by some other calamity, I was sold to an enterprising sea-captain, Arnold Steenhart, who had landed at a certain place in Africa ... for trade in slaves.

Upon acquiring many other adult and more useful slaves, Steenhart decided to give the kid Capitein, as a gift to his friend and fellow slave-catcher Jacob van Goch – a long-service employee and officer of the WIC. It is to Jan van Goch that Capitein owes the long convoluted if somewhat colourful name – Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein. Jacob van Goch decided to adopt the kid rather than keep him as slave. Maybe it was the lovely smile of the boy and the shy and polite way in which he looked at his owner. Perhaps it had nothing to do with the boy, but all to do with Jacobus van Goch's gratitude and respect for his dear fellow slave-catcher friend Arnold Steenhart who gave him such a special gift! It could have been a desire to experiment. What happens to a wretched slave who is exposed to sustained 'culture' and 'civilisation'? Whatever the reason, Jacob van Goch adopted the boy, cleaned him up, gave him a proper name, and took him home to The Hague in the Netherlands. There, Capitein grew up like any Dutch child – graduating from catechism to at least a Masters degree in theology at the University of Leiden – writing a dissertation on slavery and Christian liberty not being opposed to one another. The topic and

its author created a lot of interest, becoming a potent marketing tool for the WIC especially in justifying its involvement in slavery. On the 6th April 1742 Jakobus Elisa Johannes Capitein was ordained as a minister of the Reformed Church with the specific purpose of sending him as a missionary to – guess where – Elmina!

2.1.5 *Castle missiology*

The slave ship *De Catharina Galey* delivered J E J Capitein at Elmina on 8 October 1742. Elmina was different then. The WIC stranglehold on Elmina was even more suffocating. The whole village was a WIC protectorate. Elmina castle had itself been transformed from being a mere home away from home for the Dutch into a slave-holding castle. Though his brief was to minister primarily to the Dutch occupants of the castle, JEJ plunged into the local community as well – even seeking soon, the hand of a local girl in marriage. But the marriage was not to be as both the WIC and the Classis in Amsterdam decreed that Christians could only marry Christians. Instead the Classis arranged a Dutch wife for JEJ and shipped her to Elmina. Her name was Antonia Gingerdros. Capitein did his best to (a) fulfill his mandate to serve the Dutch merchants, civil servants and soldiers in the castle and (b) mount some feeble missionary initiatives in Elmina village. Regular services were led by him at the castle chapel – a chapel at whose door was mounted the words of verses 13 and 14 of Psalm 132, “For the Lord has chosen Zion. This is my resting place forever.” Communion was served as scheduled. Stung by what he saw as the low and questionable morals of the Dutch inhabitants of the castle, Capitein preached many a stern sermon in that chapel, reminding the inhabitants of the Christian and civilized culture they professed and possessed. He totally ignored the slaves in the castle, of course. These were outside the scope of his ministry – perhaps even understood to be outside the scope of Christian mission. Slaves probably did not have souls and therefore had no aptitude for either religion or salvation. In any case, if he was not expected to do missionary work in the village, he was probably forbidden to preach to the slaves. So he preached to the slave-catchers, slave holders in the chapel on the top floor of the castle while the slaves, packed like sardines, squirmed, wriggled and writhed in poorly ventilated, sanitationless dungeons below. Capitein walked past the dungeons every day as he went about his business of ministering to the Dutch. Did he look away? Or did he walk hurriedly past? Did he plug his ears so he did not hear the cries? Maybe he was hardened in his lack of feeling and persuaded in his doctrine that slavery and Christian freedom could coexist. Afterall, that was the gist of his dissertation.

2.1.6 *The demise*

Within two years of his arrival at Elmina, Capitein's morale and health declined steadily. His two-pronged ministry, mainly to the Dutch in the castle and of his feeble attempts at evangelism in Elmina town yielded many unanswered questions and produced in him many grievances. So he wrote distressed letter after distressed letter to the Classis in Amsterdam. Amsterdam had neither the will nor even the ability to help him. Feeling alone, forsaken and dejected, Capitein threatened to resign from his post. He was desperate and his behaviour was growing more erratic by the day. Indeed, it appears that his relations with his castle congregation plummeted and deteriorated into open hostilities until his chaplaincy remained in name only. For this desperate situation, the Classis started to employ desperate measures. Towards the end of 1745, Capitein received a consignment of goods from Amsterdam. As well as some of the books that Capitein had been requesting the Classis to send to him, the consignment was made up of various sorts of ham, tobacco, smoking pipes, wine and other forms of liquor. The very nature of items sent the signal that the Classis had no clue as to how best to intervene. Jacobus Capitein was on his own. Soon he could no longer get himself to function either as chaplain or missionary. He ventured into trade and business as an outlet for his frustrations. This was a bad move for Capitein lost money and went into serious debt. His downward slide accelerated.

2.1.7 Death of an African Protestant; birth of African Protestantism

On 1st February 1747, Capitein aged about 30 died. In the notice of his death there is not a hint given as to the possible cause of his death. Instead researchers offer a number of rumours and hypotheses: he was murdered by fellow Africans in Elmina. He was murdered by the Dutch in the castle. He did not actually die but denounced Christianity and Dutch culture went inland, returning to his pagan roots. But who and what killed Jacobus Capitein? Capitein died a long while before his physical death. Maybe he died the day he was kidnapped and captured. Was his mind messed up in the Van Goch household? Did they often remind him that he was a slave with whom they were experimenting? Was it the theology he received at the University of Leiden? Or was it the two faces of Protestantism he encountered – one in Europe and the other in Elmina? Maybe it was the piercing eyes of the packed smelly slaves whose hands clawed at the steel bars at the Elmina slave dungeons as Capitein passed by – the sounds of pain and sorrow mixed with the smell of urine and human excrement which filled the air! The answer is that Capitein was killed by all of the above. The choices available to him within the constraints of his extraordinarily challenging circumstances as well as his personality combined to send him to an early grave.

3 FACE TO PHASE: PROTESTANTISM THROUGH CAPITEIN

3.1 Protestantism as imperial religion

The story of Capitein demonstrates the entanglement between Protestantism, the commercial spirit and nascent Colonialism. This story illustrates how Protestantism was often part of the package of European settlement and European interests in Africa but was itself hardly meant for Africans. Most Protestant arrivals (in Africa) had a logic history and a context in Europe and in fact most of them arrived on the continent with no immediate or expressed intention to draw locals into the ambit. A careful reading of recurrent aspects of the history of Protestantism indicates that almost without exception, the early Protestant 'arrivals' in African contexts had no mission intention. Neither was there a mission intention in Capitein's return to Elmina – Capitein who was one of the earliest – if not the earliest well-informed and trained African Protestants. Over and above his normal duties, Capitein did engage in mission to the locals. The Protestantism of Capitein was therefore the Protestantism of imperial religion, meant to serve the travelling and exploring children of the empire. In this sense Protestantism was a spiritual accessory to the imperial project. This was captured in the complex and intricate relationship between the Classis in Amsterdam and the leadership of the West India Company. I wish to argue that the imperial factor stayed with Protestant Africa well after the days of blatant imperialism and European maritime rivalry. One is talking here of the tendency for Protestant religion to reserve its best resources and services for the elite and select few in society; and to view this as a recruitment method and a commendable trait.

3.2 Castle Christianity

The Protestantism of Capitein's times – which was some of the earliest exportation of Protestantism into Africa – was not only for Europeans alone; it was locked up in an artificially self-contained and self-sufficient 'castle'. Inside the castle, life went on 'normally' as the inhabitants needed to relate to the locals only in a utilitarian subject-object, merchant-merchandise manner. In this manner Protestantism was in Africa (for its own sake) but neither *of* nor *for* Africa as such. This mode of Protestant existence proved difficult to overcome for at least the next two hundred years. Even when deliberate mission was later engaged in, traces of the castle mentality persisted, with the exception that later the 'castle' moved from the edge of the sea into the village and was sometimes called a mission station. Another difference between the Capitein era castle and latter-day Protestant castles was that some Africans, once found to satisfy some criteria – some of them having little to do with Protestantism or Christianity per se – were selected and allowed into the castle. But the castle mentality persisted.

This is the heritage of a religion that would establish itself as a fortress right in the midst of an African community but refusing to engage in deliberate, structured, fundamental exchange and dialogue with Africans except in patronising ways.

Castle Christianity is aptly and comically captured in N'gugi wa Thiongo's *The river between* (1965). African Christians lived on the one side of the river while the rest of the Africans lived on the other side. Those caught attempting to traverse the 'between-space', that is, those who fell in love across the river and those who, though firmly established in the one side nevertheless identified with aspects of life on the other side would be disowned by both sides. The river became the in-between space where people from both sides met in love or in hate. These kinds of river meetings were discouraged but they were somewhat tolerated. However, traffic across the river was forbidden and those who dared to actually cross the river were vehemently disowned. This was the fate of one of the significant characters in N'gugi wa Thiongo's novel – the young girl who defied her zealously Christian father and sought to walk the path of Kikuyu womanhood; the path of female circumcision; arguing that Jesus would support her decision, and causing immense agony and divisions within her own family. In order to complicate and bring matters to a head, the novelist 'kills off' the brave young woman character of the book in a manner that hints at a questioning of the advisability of the girl's decision without ceasing from praising her bravery. She later dies due to complications and wounds derived from her circumcision school experiences. But a closer reading of the story leaves one with the feeling that perhaps the very existence of the river between, before, and after her sojourn at the circumcision school contributed more to her death than the circumcision school. Two communities existed in isolation from one another and the river symbolised the division. One was either in the one community or in the other – it was not possible to belong to both.

This castle Christianity syndrome has wreaked great havoc in African Christianity. Even when there were no missionaries remaining, resultant African churches have battled to emerge out of the castles, castles built this time not by mortar and brick, but by distortions and abstractions of reformed doctrine designed to control and exclude. Apartheid theology was one such famous distortion of the very pillars of Protestant theology designed to create and maintain a castle Christianity. The Calvinist doctrine of election was for example, interpreted to mean that white people were elected to lord it over black people. The same doctrine became the ideological base upon which ruthless conquest was conducted. It is these kinds of distortions that prompted at least two South African theologians to go on a rescue mission for Protestantism and Reformed theology – the one was

John de Gruchy in his *Liberating reformed theology* (1991), while the other was Allan Boesak in his *Black and reformed* (1984). Essentially both scholars made the point that reformed theology was better than and different from the Apartheid distortions of it. In his work, De Gruchy argues that the reformed theology which once liberated many was now in need of liberation itself, thanks to Afrikaner Christian distortions. Boesak sought to contradict the tendency, not exceptional to but particularly pronounced in South Africa, to make the reformed tradition a 'whites only' affair so that being black and reformed reduced one to second-class citizenship within the reformed family. It is noteworthy that though Boesak and De Gruchy were involved in essentially the same project, they each have revealing personal agendas. De Gruchy writes as an English-speaking South African Protestant anxious to correct the distortions of Afrikaans-speaking South African Protestantism. Boesak on the other hand, appears to belabour an obvious point – that of being black and reformed. But being black and reformed had been made problematic by Afrikaner interpretations and practices of Protestantism. It is therefore worth noting that being Protestant and black is not something that has come without complications. Black Protestants have not always had freedom, space or even desire to claim all of Protestant heritage. African Protestantism is therefore an ambiguous reality.

3.3 Torn and tormented, inside and outside the Castle

Both Jacobus Capitein and the young girl and main character in Ngugi wa Thiongo's book are characters caught personally, internally and emotionally in 'the river between'. They are illustrative of the African Protestant Christian. Both are 'allowed' into the castle but limited and unwelcome in several ways. Within the castle community the Jacobus Capiteins of this world are interesting, helpful, illustrative and exotic but seldom taken seriously. It is as if a little space inside the castle is set aside for them – much like the white Dutch Reformed Church and the Hervormde churches of South Africa created separate churches for Africans, Indians and coloureds. They themselves have a problem with who they are and who they ought to be, for they have a keen sense of life outside the castle, a life which holds out both its dangers and blessings seductively. Reflecting on this vexatious problem of being undermined and seduced by the very object of one's love and devotion, the late Gabriel Setiloane, a renowned African theologian, surmised that to sustain himself in the Christian fold and stay a Methodist for as long as he had done can only be explained in terms of witchcraft. Protestant Christianity must have bewitched him, he suggested. Setiloane had put his finger on an age-old problem – both the castle and the world outside it hold out promises and punishments to the bewilderment of the would-be African Christian.

Often this problem has been simplified into a problem of 'dual citizenship', being African and Christian at the same time. While helpful, this coinage tends to oversimplify, as if Africanity and Christianity existed in separate spaces. But the castle is erected right in the centre of an African village. To coin the problem in terms of the challenges of a dual citizenship suggests that all that is required of Africans are the grammatical, linguistic and cultural skills necessary, to translate from one citizenship to the other. This is the kind of diagnosis which I foundational to Kwame Bediako's (1995) and Andrew Walls's thesis that some early church fathers, like the first generation of African theologians engaged in religio-comparative and theological translation work between at least two traditions. But attempting translation and comparative work from within a culture that negates and derogates everything the translator is, is harder. It is in this sense that African Christians were not only torn but tormented. It is not merely that Capitein was required to render pastoral service to the Dutch inhabitants of the ship that was problematic. The very fact that he, an ex-slave, was now sharing a faith with slave-catchers and slave masters in a context where slaves were daily in view, was a constant reminder of who he was, who he could have been and what his fellow believers were capable of. Yet he was expected to and expected himself to be Christian; daily. There was tension between the beautiful and powerful reformed theology that Capitein had learnt in Leiden and its application at Elmina. The tension was not only outside of him, but inside of him as well.

If Africans were tormented and torn by the contradictions of castle Christianity, participating Europeans were themselves not left unscathed by the demands of its artificiality. In a recent historical novel on the life and times of Swiss Missionaries in Morija titled *Murder in Morija* (2003), Tim Couzens meticulously documents the personal toll that the (artificial) mission-station life took on missionaries. The book focuses on the life of a missionary E Jacottet. Apparently, two of his daughters dared to traverse the 'river between', the elder one with a possible history of sexual abuse eventually falling pregnant by a black seminary student and having to commit abortion while the other, his much younger daughter, has a passionate affair with a married, respectable and elderly colleague of Jacottet, by the name of Sam Duby. Sam Duby was the midwife of Sesotho literature just like Jacottet was a significant Sesotho linguist. To protect the image of the mission and to maintain family honour Jacottet decides to keep these events a family secret – a decision that eventually costs him his life, at least indirectly. Jacottet is murdered through poisoning. One of his daughters eventually becomes the prime suspect. The suspected daughter could have been hanged had she been convicted. She is never convicted, perhaps in order to avoid the hanging of a young white woman at a time when such a deed would have been morally scandalous and

politically incorrect. But Jacottet was killed not merely by the hand that put arsenic poison in his soup, but by the demands of the mission-station ethos, its artificiality and its totalitarian demand for missionaries to give up everything in order to serve.

Like Capitein, Jacottet was a victim of castle Christianity. Both were tasked with keeping the castle community together. The one castle was by the sea looking Europe-wards, the other castle sat smack in the middle a village in Lesotho. In order for 'the show to go on' both Capitein and Jacottet had to make enormous and dangerous personal sacrifices. They themselves were after all, the very faces and ambassadors of castle Christianity, needing to hold their 'little flocks' together in the face of uncertainty and contestations from hinterland and from within. Hence, Jacottet had no time for either his children or his wife – outsourcing huge chunks of his parental responsibilities to colleagues locally and abroad at his own dire peril. The point is that Jacottet was, at great personal cost, attempting to keep an artificial community together and so was Capitein. Both were captains of two 'mercenary' castles. In time, the contradictions of castle Christianity played out in their own personal lives and within their own souls. Both met the same fate – early graves.

4 RESHAPING PROTESTANTISM

Thus far we have dwelt on the problems of Protestantism in Africa. What about the positive side? There is indeed a positive side. The problem is that such a positive side does not exist in isolation and apart from the problems. The blessings of Protestantism in Africa are thoroughly mixed and entangled with its curses.

Capitein was an educated man – at his time, one in several millions! Who can deny the role of Protestantism in the development and provision of education for Africans? In translating parts of the Bible into the *Fanti* language and attempting to do some mission work among the locals in Elmina village, Capitein was inaugurating an African intellectual culture that cares for the community. In many parts of Africa the translation of the Bible and other significant texts such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress* became a Protestant burden – a burden in which Africans had a major role to play. Indeed the Protestant emphasis on making the Scriptures available in the vernacular through translation has long been credited with both the growth of Christianity on the African continent and the rise of African Independent churches. Capitein reveals himself to have been a pioneer in the provision of Scripture in the vernacular. But Capitein was also problematic in ways that mirror the problems of many of Africa's educated elite, to this day. Like many today, he was an uprooted person who felt confined by the castle within which he was assigned to work. His education was an

important aspect of his uprooting. After all, he owed his education to his enslavement. His relationship with both his adoptive 'parents' who were in fact his former slave masters and the Protestant religion were paradoxical. Both were at once the sources of his liberation and his enslavement. Protestantism was the religion that taught him that Christianity and slavery were compatible. He thought that it was worthy of his adoption and of sharing with Elmina locals. Two hundred years ago, Capitein faced the dilemma faced today by black theologians and African women theologians – the dilemma of being unable to shake off the hold of a religion (and its institutions) in whose name they have also been dehumanised. It seems that Capitein's love-hate relationship with Protestantism – which relationship led to his death – was to become a permanent feature of African relations with Protestantism.

The impact of the mission station, the school, the clinic and the army barracks, on African life has been far-reaching and in many ways irreversible. The impact of these constitutes the short-cut that eased and even allowed Africans into the train of modernity. Protestantism has a lot to say about this. Recently we have seen African scholars attempting to foreground the positive aspects of these phenomena. Some have even argued that, rather than destroy African cultures and peoples, Protestantism strengthened these and equipped them with skills to enter the modern era (Sanneh 1989). Such skills, it may be argued, manifest today, both in the kaleidoscopic spectre of African Church independency and in African independence of mind and effort in matters of politics and economics – where these exist; to the extent that they exist.

However, as indicated above, the blessings of Protestantism cannot be abstracted from its curses. The school, church and clinic have been mixed blessings and for that reason bitterly contested. With these institutions came the systematic denigration of local wisdoms and pedagogies. Even those who argue that the Protestant missionary movement strengthened African cultures will always add that Protestantism did this 'in spite of itself'.

In order to conclude, I return to the African typology cited earlier.

4.1 Mainline (Protestant) Christianity in Africa

There is a growing consensus that, like its counterparts in Europe and America, African mainline Christianity is in some form of decline, at least as far as numbers are concerned. It is of course very difficult to generalise on this score, for there are mainline Christian congregations that are thriving and adapting well to the demands of new situations. However, it is true that the vast majority of churches belonging to these churches are in a multifaceted crisis. Membership and numbers

constitute one such crisis – perhaps shared with, if not inherited from, sister churches in the North. It is certainly true that many mainline churches have fewer signed-up members than there are potential members. Several observers have indicated that over the years both the Pentecostal and the African Independent churches have been growing at the expense of mainline Christianity. The situation is made worse by the notion of membership used by many mainline churches – their understanding being that a member must be signed up and should belong to no other church or religion. In many African contexts, this does not always happen. On the contrary, many people would rather belong to several churches and even more than one religion at the same time. This stems not from dishonesty but from religious pragmatism in situations where spiritual survival is as important as material survival, if not more and, where the former is blatantly and closely interlinked with the latter.

But there are other signs of decline. There is a decline of influence – with many African governments being weary of religions in general and Christianity (and Islam) in particular. The deepest sign of crisis is perhaps evident in the apparent lack of theological innovation and in what is increasingly appearing to be bankrupt theological education. It is also evident in the poverty of ritual and spirit in the liturgies of many mainline churches, forcing their members to go into hasty and often poorly digested borrowing from other traditions and religions, sometimes resulting in theological incoherence which could be deadly. But mainline Christianity should not be written off too hastily. While signs of decline and crisis are everywhere apparent, there are also vigorous signs of adaptation especially in the area of liturgical experimentation. The face of mainline Protestantism is changing rapidly so that one must speak of the many and rapidly changing faces of mainline Protestantism. This branch of African Christianity might soon not be that distinguishable from either African Independent or the Charismatico-Pentecostal churches. Indeed we must be careful not to create walls that are too high and hard between the various types of Protestantism on the continent. There is a lot more exchange and symbiosis between and across different churches than our neat divisions can account and cater for.

The now renowned African, black and more recently African Women's theologies have emanated from mainline Protestantism. But these are marginal theologies even in Africa with traditional reformed theology as interpreted by Europeans and people of European descent remaining hegemonic. It is also questionable either whether African liberation theologies have done enough to liberate and rescue Protestant theology or whether such a project is feasible at all. For African and black theology to be liberational it may be necessary to go beyond the boundaries set by Protestant (or Catholic) theoretical

and contextual parameters in ways that our liberation theologies have not done yet. The CIRCLE of concerned African women theologians has deliberately chosen to engage in theological reflection which, while foregrounding the experience of African women, goes beyond the borders of Christendom. Similarly, black theology at its most radical, was put forward not merely as an internal voice of protest but as a different path using a different set of theological categories within and without Christendom. However, it is true that in the final analysis even these radical theologies have not wandered too far from the kraal of Protestant and Catholic orthodoxies.

One of the problems with the 'theological rescue missions' on behalf of Protestantism is that these missions have been divided from within. Hence, although Boesak and De Gruchy both engage in rescue missions they do so in divided and mutually contestable ways – the former from a black Protestant's stance while the latter does it from a liberal so-called 'English-speaking' theological stance. While each sought to address distortions of and divisions within Protestantism, the sharp contrasts in their individual agendas reveal another level of Protestant contestations beyond the Apartheid Protestantism versus Orthodox Protestantism divide.

4.2 African independency

As far as Africa is concerned, the alleged Christian shift of gravity from North to South is usually grounded on the growth of this section of the African Christian landscape. However, it is important that we not only take the statistical numbers given by the David Barretts of this world with a pinch of salt – not least for Africa, but more significantly, that we need to be critical of the ideology driving a Northern constituency to document and broadcast these statistical figures. Clearly there is North-American need being fulfilled by the periodical religion-adherence number crunching that is done by the likes of David Barrett. It is significant that the manufacture of numbers and statistics which ostensibly 'promote' the religious 'image' and 'dignity' of the South is being done from a centre in North and not in the South. But there are those, in Europe and in America who are mortified – for less than noble reasons – by the figures, real or alleged, of Christian growth in the South. These are the types who find it disconcerting to realise that the long established Northern hegemony in theological knowledge production might be slowly slipping away from their hands. Such types would also retain in them a deep-seated distrust of the ability of Southerners to produce anything good. Many of them would of course be smart enough not to say this openly – there are a myriad more 'rational' explanations for their disdain of possible Southern success. It is therefore important that we analytically detail the reasons both for the enthusiasm with which number-crunching theology is being

manufactured in the North and for the chagrin with which it is sometimes dismissed in the North as well. Only thus can we begin to grasp some of the ideological issues at stake in this number-crunching game.

There are Southerners who have enthusiastically and unquestioningly seized the statistics and have proceeded to use these to assert the integrity and significance of their religious experience for the world. They certainly have every right to seize the rare theological and historical opportunities provided by the favourable statistics to put in a good word for Africa. However, care must be taken that we do not buy into a dubious statistics regime and even more care that we do not buy into an ultimately anti-African ideology behind the charming statistics. The renaissance of Southern Christianity must be based on something deeper and more local. There are for example other narrative and qualitative ways of discussing religious developments in the world than the contestations and deductions that are emerging around statistics.

There is of course no question that African Independency and African Pentecostalism are vibrant and relatively unfettered by historic Protestant (or Catholic) limitations – at least in a non-self-conscious way, which is both good and bad. Good because they owe no debt to historical Protestant conventions and therefore they are free to be creative. Bad because though they think they are free of historical Protestantism, Protestantism is the basis of many of their dogmas and practices, yet they remain dangerously ignorant of this, which means they remain ignorant of a significant aspect of what makes them who they are.

But the significance of these churches must not be confined to the issue of numbers – for numbers, as hinted above, are slippery and oftentimes fleeting. Like the Coptic Orthodox members many of these churches appeal directly to biblical apostolic traditions for their legitimacy. They do this for various reasons – which reasons need fuller exploration. One of the reasons for taking this apparent historical and theological short-cut from Accra to Jerusalem, cutting out Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, is sheer frustration with the 'requirements' that have historically been put before these churches for them to 'qualify'. They also have a deep memory of painful, prolonged and enforced tutelage as well as exclusion at the hands of those who called themselves heirs of Luther and Calvin. The short cut from Soweto to Jerusalem is therefore not merely an ignorant move, but also a subversive one of protest and frustration.

Unlike mainline Protestantism they do not shun the 'space between the rivers'. In fact that is where they thrive. Their role as spiritual clinics and workshops of the soul and the body makes them tremendously

attractive to a membership which is no longer exclusively working class, but is increasingly drawing on migrant, urban, disorientated and alienated peoples from various social levels and backgrounds. It is now being discovered that these churches are not as apolitical as they have always been thought to be. Nor are they beyond criticism, in the manner that was suggested by some of their early enthusiastic observers.

4.3 Charismatico-Pentecostal Christianity

African contexts produce their own unique brand of Charismatico-Pentecostal Christianity. If African Independency is big, there is growing consensus that Charismatico-Pentecostal Christianity is the fastest growing wing of Christianity not only in Africa but in other parts of the world as well (see Harvey Cox's *Fire from Heaven* (1995)). This wing of African Protestantism is born out of both external and internal factors. Externally it borrows heavily from the US evangelicalism – especially tele and tent evangelism of the Jimmy Swaggart and T D Jakes type. Internally it is born out of conditions of poverty, real and artificial needs, as well as a thirst for a coherent and relieving sense of history and eschatology in the midst of harsh but tantalising socio-economic realities with no apparent end in sight. The pull of this form of Christianity is its promise to tame globalisation and put it to the service of God and to the service of the post-modern person. Hence, technology is used overtly and materialism and consumerism blatantly and openly espoused in worship, pastoral care and life in general. The promise to tame globalisation is the selling point of Charismatico-Pentecostal Christianity. This is an immensely attractive proposition and the Charismatico-Pentecostal prominently displays the artifacts and gestures that indicate that this promise can be fulfilled. As in African independency, sickness and healing are transformed into public and spiritual experiences rather than private and medical experiences. People are given the freedom – momentarily at least – to own up to being unwell, beyond somatic and biological unwellness, and to do so in public. But this face of Protestantism has many other 'uses'. Apart from being a post-modern garage for the soul, they are also spaces wherein visible and vital 'global skills' are taught and caught. Here people learn not only to speak in unintelligible tongues of the Spirit, but also to learn vital languages of communication – something vital for migrants, refugees, displaced and homeless people. They are also taught the outward gestures of acceptable self-articulation and self-expression – dress and speech being but two examples. Here people are also given rudimentary theological and communication skills – enough to go speaking about the Lord in the streets soon.

Whether the Charismatico-Pentecostal can deliver on its promises is another matter. Its attraction rests on its promises and its ability to

display its promises and to *initiate* its members into the outward forms and gestures of success. Indeed whether it delivers or not may not matter as long as it can create significant spaces and moments where and when people feel that these promises are reachable. In fact, the survival gestures and the skills intimated above – which gestures and skills are both taught and caught – in Pentecostal type churches are good enough for many. Often, these churches have been written off as indicators of 'right-wing religion' or worse still as pockets of fundamentalism. Such massive generalisations do not begin to do justice to many of these churches. The overwhelming members of these churches are people who have been failed by the non-right-wing churches such as conventional Protestant churches. In situations of untold violence, slum and vicious cycles of poverty, conventional Protestantism has had little – other than a dry, rational and often uncontextual gospel to offer the young and the dying. It is these 'garages of the soul' and 'spiritual clinics' that have stepped forward to provide the destitute and desperate with tangible promise.

It seems that it is inside *not* outside the tents and cathedrals of these tabernacles of charismatic and Pentecostal churches that the future of Protestantism is being decided today. The stubborn assumptions that these churches are small, born of (theological) conservatism and right-wing politics are astounding in their one-sidedness. Though right-wing politicians have not resisted the temptation to abduct some of these churches for their purposes; and although there are some charlatans posing as leaders of these churches, there is no compelling and sustained evidence that these churches are altogether conservative either in their politics or on their theology. They are of course not beyond error or criticism. In this regard questions may sometimes be raised about the manner in which they handle the desperation of the poor and the destitute for who these churches have become an important refuge.

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ENDNOTES

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- 1 Certainly the 'second arrival' of Catholic religion since 'Catholic' Christianity has been in Africa during the first four centuries long before the advent of Islam in North Africa. Indeed, this pre-colonial Christian presence in Africa probably accounts for the century's old existence of both the Ethiopian and Coptic Orthodox churches of Africa.
 - 2 The story is retold, reconstructed, compressed and summarised by me based on the much longer and fuller version provided by Dr David Nii Anum Kpobi in his *Mission in chains: The life, theology and ministry of the ex-slave Jacobus E J Capitein (1717-1742) with a translation of his major publications*. 1993. Boekencentrum: Zoetermeer.