

**THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY
IN
AFRICAN THEOLOGY
AS A
MISSION OF EMPOWERMENT**

BY

ROY MUSASIWA

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ABSTRACT

The thesis links African Theology with three notions: identity, mission and empowerment. Out of this linkage arise three interrelated themes that dominate the thesis.

Firstly, different African theologies can be read as different modes of the quest for identity. The thesis demonstrates how the quest for identity in African Theology fits into political, philosophical, religious and other quests for identity in Africa, which are driven by historical factors such as the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism. The responses of inculturation and liberation theologies to these historical factors of disempowerment leads to the conclusion that being Christian can be both liberating and fully compatible with being African.

Secondly, the quest for identity in African Theology properly belongs to the notion of mission understood as *missio Dei*. This conclusion is derived from an examination of critical aspects of *missio Dei*. These include determining the purposes of *missio Dei* as being the restoration of the *imago Dei* and the salvation and liberation of humankind. The conclusion is also derived from acknowledging that *missio Dei* is effected through *missiones ecclesiae* and *missio hominum*.

Thirdly, constructing mission as *missio Dei* leads to the notion of the quest for identity as a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission. A multidiscipline theoretical framework of empowerment leads to a stipulation of ways in which African theology, through a quest for identity, is empowering or can empower its interlocutors. At the same time the mission of empowerment becomes an empowerment for mission. This is especially significant in the light of the acknowledged southward shift in Christianity's centre of gravity. That shift implies African Christianity having a missionary responsibility that extends to the rest of the world.

The quest for identity in African Theology is fraught with ambiguities, dilemmas and risks. But this is a price various African theologies are willing to pay in order both to help uplift the historically disadvantaged Africans and also to secure the future of Christianity on the continent.

FOREWORD

Embarking on and completing a PhD thesis is a major undertaking which no one can successfully accomplish without the assistance of others. This has been true of me to a very large extent. I therefore gladly express heartfelt gratitude to the many people without whose assistance and support this task would not have been accomplished. Many contributed in ways that are not immediately obvious, and yet that were vital. It would not be possible to mention them all. However, there are those whose assistance and support deserve a special acknowledgement.

- Of all people my wife Sylvia made the greatest sacrifice. She willingly looked after the home in my absence while also working to maintain the family. She had to endure long periods of loneliness and made other sacrifices too numerous to mention. She believed this thesis is crucial enough for God's work to warrant the sacrifices. I hope the results will be found worthy of her sacrifice and faith in me.
- The Trustees of Domboshawa Theological College graciously granted me two years of study leave. They continued paying my salary for the first six months of the year 2000, and covered my medical aid and pension contributions for the remainder of the two years. To them I owe a debt of gratitude.
- I thank all the staff of Domboshawa Theological College for sacrificially carrying additional responsibilities to make up for my absence. In particular I thank Phineas Dube for undertaking to be acting principal for the two years. Daniel Button and Silindiwe Zvingowanisei, as academic dean and registrar respectively, played significant roles during my absence. The contribution of all other staff members was no less significant. They continually assured me of their prayers. The fact that the college continued running smoothly in my absence gave me peace of mind to concentrate on this work.
- Not having a scholarship meant that I had to rely on a number of sources to finance my studies. The Domboshawa Trust in the United Kingdom contributed significantly to my studies, as did a number of personal friends. To you all, a big thank you.
- Dr Anthony Balcomb gladly accepted the task of being my supervisor. His assistance was more significant than I can adequately describe here. I express my thanks for the valuable time we spent discussing my ideas and for making available to me some useful resources from his own library. Other lecturers in the School of Theology, University of Natal, assisted in many ways, including stimulating my thoughts during doctoral seminars. I especially benefited from Dr Isabel Phiri's personal library and from her helpful ideas on African Women Theology.
- Dr Andrea Fröechtling volunteered her services as language editor. She gave valuable suggestions on various grammatical and theological points and also lent me valuable books from her library. She has been a real inspiration to me. My sincere gratitude for this labour of love.

While I thus acknowledge the input of all these people, all the ideas and any shortcomings in this thesis remains my responsibility.

Following the advice and practice of Greek scholar J.W. Wenham (1965) the words quoted from the Greek New Testament are without accents, which in many cases are superfluous to the written meaning of the words.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
ACP	Africa Christian Press
AFER	African Ecclesiastical Review
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity) [Vatican II]
AICs	African Initiated/Instituted Churches
AJET	African Journal of Evangelical Thought
ATF	African Theological Fellowship
AU	African Union
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCT	Bulletin of Contextual Theology
CUP	Cambridge University Press
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi (Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, 1975)
IMC	International Missionary Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRM	International Review of Missions
ISB	Institute for the Study of the Bible
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
JACT	Journal of African Christian Theology
JCT	<i>Journal of Constructive Theology</i>
JTSA	Journal of theology for Southern Africa
KD	Kairos Document
KUN	Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen
LG	Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution On the Church [Vatican II])
LMS	London Missionary Society
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa' Development
NY	New York
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OUP	Oxford University Press
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SASO	South African Students Organization
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SPROCAS	Special Project for the study of Christianity in an Apartheid Society

SRC	Student Representative Council
SRC	Student Representative Council
TEE	Theological Education by Extension
UNISA	University of South Africa
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front

CHAPTER ONE

MAPPING THE WAY: RATIONALE, PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 ORIENTATION

The topic of this thesis is ‘*The quest for identity in African Theology as a mission of empowerment.*’ It links African Theology with three notions: identity, mission and empowerment. Out of this linkage arise three themes that dominate the thesis. Firstly, it will be argued that different African theologies can be read as different modes of the quest for identity. This reading is not meant to suggest that they are *only* a quest for identity, for the theologies can be read in terms of other frameworks as well. Secondly, this quest for identity properly belongs to the notion of mission understood as *missio Dei*. Thirdly, the purpose of this *missio Dei* is, *inter alia*, the empowerment of African people in a variety of ways and for different purposes.

African Theology, identity, mission and empowerment are therefore all concerns that this thesis sets to deal with. The rationale for dealing with these themes will be discussed in section two of this chapter. Each of these themes, of course, represents a vast body of knowledge and research. Section three will therefore define the scope and set the limitations for this thesis. This will be followed by section four which will provide the presuppositions and perspectives which together define the character of the thesis. Section five deals more specifically with the methodological approaches of the thesis. Section six is like a map to guide the reader through the rest of the thesis by giving a synopsis of each chapter, and therefore indicating the shape of the whole project.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE THESIS

This thesis was motivated by processes which fall into two categories. The general motivations arise from my personal context which raised the issue of identity to an existential level of personal, spiritual and academic interest. The biblical motivations arise from my interacting with the Bible as a ‘believer-reader’ (Grenholm & Patte 2000:passim) in my journey to seek understanding of the mind of God on the vital issue of identity. The explication of these two categories of motivation will help to define where this thesis is ‘coming from’ and where it is ‘going’.

1.2.1 General motivations

The rationale for this thesis is to relate to each other two realities that are of crucial importance to me. Firstly, as a Zimbabwean African I was raised in a colonial environment under conditions of racial discrimination second only to the South African apartheid system. We grew up as despised people, and very often despised ourselves as well. As I was growing up I sensed the extremities to which my fellow Africans either strove to be as 'white' in outlook as possible, or strove to rebel against 'whiteness'. Those who aspired to be 'white' in outlook despised their own mother tongues as soon as they became proficient in English. Whiteness became a measure of how beautiful a girl was, with 'compliments' like '*wakanaka somurungu*'¹. Such a compliment was enough to make many girls and young adults spend whatever money they could on expensive skin lightening creams that destroyed their natural pigments in return for a lighter skin. Nobody could lighten the whole body, so many people had what was jocularly identified as 'Fanta faces and Coca-cola legs'. The opposite sentiment became especially evident during the decade of the 1970s, when the Zimbabwean war of liberation was in progress and the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement from South Africa was beginning to be felt across the Limpopo². Some Zimbabweans were now affirming 'blackness', and expressing contempt for 'whiteness'. Expressions like 'Black is beautiful' became more common. The two sentiments had an uneasy co-existence. Zimbabweans were experiencing symptoms of an identity crisis.

The second reality is my being an African Christian theologian. From this angle I developed a high degree of interest in African Christianity in general, and African Christian theology in particular. The study of Kwame Bediako's *Theology and identity* (1992) raised my awareness of how much the issue of identity is central to various inculturation theologians that he analyses. The book, however, left me frustrated, for it never problematised the concept of identity itself – a concept which my upbringing had made me curious to know more about. My preliminary investigation into the concept began to reveal so much complexity that I knew further investigation into that category of thought is warranted. I also began to wonder whether the hermeneutical key of 'identity' could also be applicable to other kinds of theology in Africa, such as Black Theology and African Women Theology, that Bediako did not analyse in his book.

¹ This is a Shona expression for being 'as beautiful as a white lady'. The Shonas are the largest tribe in Zimbabwe.

² The Limpopo river marks the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Apart from African Theology I also developed an interest into the field of Missiology. This interest led me to carry out some research for an MTh programme (Musasiwa 1990). My interest at that time was to investigate how 'missionaries' can contextualize the gospel in Zimbabwe, my home country. Further reflections and teaching since then led to a deep awareness of a historically influenced but erroneous assumption that mission was primarily something only Christians from rich and technologically advanced countries can do. The fact that Missiology as a discipline is marginalized in many theological institutions in Africa betrays this assumption. Too few theologians in Africa identify themselves as 'missiologists' even though a lot of what they espouse has high missiological implications. I have come to sense that behind the marginalization of Missiology in Africa lies the identity crisis that African theologians are so much wrestling with. African Christians feel battered and powerless, and hence the predominant belief that mission is for rich and powerful Christians from overseas. Gifford (1998) shows that there is still a strong presence of overseas missionaries in Africa, and his book perpetuates the very misconception of what a missionary is by its assumption that a missionary is necessarily someone who has gone from one country to another.

All this gave rise to the question that forms the rationale for this thesis: What is the relationship between the quest for identity in African Theology and Christian mission? A supplementary question is whether meeting Africa's need for an empowering identity is not in fact the mission that African Theology is setting out to achieve.

So much for motivation arising from the general context of life and study. This context, among other things, helped me to read the Bible with a particular interest in what light it would shed on issues of identity. From those initial readings arose greater motivation for this thesis.

1.2.2 Motivation arising from Bible readings

Several biblical accounts point to people whose identity was completely transformed by virtue of their apprehension of the power of the transcendent. Two illustrations, one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament, will make this point clear.

Deuteronomy 26 begins by giving instructions for the offering of 'firstfruits'. When the basket of fruit was set it down in front of the altar the person making the offering was to make the following declaration (Verses 5-10):

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.

This declaration struck me for several reasons. Firstly it testifies to very humble, almost insignificant beginnings, for the Jewish people. In terms of the super powers of the day³ the Hebrews in Egypt were nothing more than a band of slaves who were descendents of ‘a wandering Aramean’. These people were not only insignificant. They suffered a great deal according to this declaration. They were made to suffer through hard labour. In terms of their ‘insignificance’ and their suffering, these Hebrews at this time of their history provide us with a paradigm of Africa – the greatest suffering and the most despised continent in the world.

The second significant feature was these people’s apprehension of God as the greatest reality and the greatest power. ‘So the LORD brought us out a Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders’, goes part of the declaration. There is no sense here that these Hebrews became a great nation by virtue of their worthiness, craftiness or militancy. It was their conviction of the reality of God and of the fact that this God had chosen them and was on their side that prevented them from sinking into oblivion.

We note, thirdly, how the reality and power of God permeated into all aspects of their lives. There was no dualism here, no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the socio-political. The same power of God operated to deliver them from slavery (political), to give them land flowing with milk and honey (economic) and to help them worship God (spiritual). By operating in all spheres in the lives of these people God transformed their identity from that of

³ Egypt and Assyria (and succeeding empires in the Tigris-Euphrates valleys) were the superpowers of the day equivalent perhaps to America and Russia during the days of the Cold War. According to Gottwald (1985) the history of the ancient Near East beginning shortly after 3000 B.C.E. had its focal points ‘in the Nile Valley and in the middle and lower Tigris-Euphrates valleys’ (:64). The important empires (or superpowers in modern terminology) were therefore those of Babylon, Assyria, Neo-Babylon and Egypt (:64-65). On their part the Hebrews, even after their settlement in Palestine, remained as ‘colonial’ and ‘neo-colonial’ victims of superpower rivalry. ‘After the brief flowering of Israel as a united kingdom under David and Solomon, its weakened divided branches were drawn increasingly into imperial diplomacy and warfare’ (:68). In many ways, therefore, ancient Israel remains a suitable paradigm of African history since the days of slavery. Chapter two will go into the details of this history.

slaves into being a powerful nation. This reading encouraged me to believe that God would empower Africans with an identity that would transcend the Afropessimism⁴ of the continent.

The second illustration of a biblical witness to God's power to transform identity comes from Acts 4. Peter and John appeared before the powerful body of Jewish rulers called the Sanhedrin.

Normally that would have been an intimidating experience. It was this same body that had successfully pressured Pilate into crucifying Jesus. The Sanhedrin is now angry with them for preaching about Jesus and healing in his name. Peter and John have already spent a night in prison.

And the story proceeds (verses 5 – 12):

The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone". Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

I derived important lessons about the power of a changed identity from this episode. Peter and John are described here as 'unschooled, ordinary men'. They were after all only Galilean fishermen. It is not surprising that the rulers were 'astonished' to see how courageous these men were. In the light of this I had to ask how despised Galileans, unschooled and ordinary, came to believe in themselves to the extent that they could challenge Jewish rulers who could have easily sent them to their death as they had when they pressurize Pilate to crucify Jesus. Two answers are suggested by the passage quoted above.

Firstly, we are told that these men 'had been with Jesus'. Conversely, Jesus had chosen to be with them. By the ordinary world standards Jesus, whose mission was to establish the kingdom of God, should have chosen Judea in the South, rather than Galilee in the North as a base for his ministry. Judea had 'important' people, like the 'rulers, elders and teachers of the law' referred to in the above passage. It was in Judea that the Sanhedrin was based and where the temple and the priestly

⁴ This term is the subject of fuller discussion in chapter two.

class were to be found. By contrast Galilee was the land of the poor and exploited peasants. The fact that Jesus, the 'Son of God' chose Galilee as the base for his ministry, and Galileans as the majority of his disciples, illustrates the conviction of liberation theologians that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. When those poor and oppressed people get gripped with that conviction the result is an enhanced self-concept, a belief in themselves resulting in the sort of courage displayed by Peter and John.

But there is a second reason to explain the change in Peter and John. We are told in the passage that Peter responded to the interrogation of the Sanhedrin when he was 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. These disciples had God's power available to them. They were not transformed merely because they had good ideas but supremely because they had God's power. That means they were open to such power – the power of the transcendent.

These and other passages from the Bible motivated me to investigate the extent to which the quest for identity in African Theology could be a mission of empowerment. But because of the magnitude of the subject, some limitations became necessary.

1.3 SOME NECESSARY LIMITATIONS

We began this chapter by indicating the general scope of this thesis. We have also indicated its interdisciplinary nature, linking the fields of African Theology and Missiology around the related issues of identity and empowerment. This calls for some necessary limitations, as the field of investigation would be otherwise so wide as to be unmanageable in a thesis of this nature. The limitations must come in several areas.

Firstly, there is the limitation on which African context the thesis is to deal with. Africa is a very complex reality in factors such as language, historical experiences, racial composition, cultural orientation and a host of other variables. It is therefore not possible to deal with Africa as though one were dealing with a monolithic reality. Mofokeng (1990:169) is correct when he says that it is not enough to identify Africa as a single geo-cultural context for theology:

We should go further and find an answer to the question: which Africa constitutes the home of this theology? The Africa of the powerful, the rich and the free or that of the powerless, dispossessed and chained? ... We have to ask: Whose culture and religion are we dealing

with, that of the powerful and the rich or the poor and the politically weak? ... [E]very class has its own cultural and religious preferences and emphases.

Here Mofokeng is mainly focussed on a class analysis as a starting point for doing theology. My concern is wider, but still takes seriously Mofokeng's question, 'Which Africa constitutes the home of this theology?' The first broad answer in terms of this thesis is that it is Africa South of the Sahara. This excludes the Arab North of Africa, whose history and cultural orientation fall outside the scope of this thesis. This, however, is still too wide a context thus making further limitations necessary.

Secondly, there is the limitation in the area of African Theology to be investigated. This is a growing field both geographically and conceptually. Geographically we have theologies emanating from different parts of Africa, done by people who have a claim to being African. This thesis will concentrate its analysis on *black* African theologians in the English speaking parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. As the thesis progresses it will become clear that these theologians share enough commonality of context to warrant being analysed in one thesis. However, there are still many dynamic variations even within this context. What binds them in this thesis is the quest for identity in a context of marginalization. Theologians from Francophone and Lusophone areas of Africa are also writing from this context. However, linguistic inaccessibility determined their exclusion from the main thrust of the thesis. Conceptually we have Reconstruction Theology, Translation Theology, Black Theology and African Women Theology, Environmental Theology and others which could also qualify to be read from the perspective of identity. In the interest of depth, however, this thesis will limit itself to an analysis of some significant representative theologies in Anglophone Africa, namely Translation Theology, Black Theology and African Women Theology. A discussion of the naming of these theologies follows in section 1.6 below.

Thirdly, the main focus of this thesis is limited to written theologies. There are oral theologies that could have legitimately been highlighted. In particular, the exclusion of AICs does not mean that they do not have a theology. Walls (2001:49) rightly says:

There is evidence of creative informal theology all over Africa, carried out by people who did not realise they were theologians ... Among those informal theologians were some of the founders of the early African Instituted or 'Spiritual' churches, and the problem they addressed was essentially the gap between theology and worldview. At the time, they were commonly seen as being on the margins of Christianity, on account of the extent to which

they reflected traditional world-views. In fact, many of them were at heart radically Christian: they were seeking to actualise the saving activity of God in Christ in the world, as large numbers of Africans saw the world.

This assessment affirms that AICs have a form of theology, and that they are highly relevant to any discussion of the quest for identity in Africa. Yet what is currently available on AICs is literature written *about* them, and not *by* the AICs themselves. Moreover, most of what is written is by westerners, or people whose roots are in western countries⁵. Yet AICs cannot be completely excluded if the quest for African identity is to be discussed meaningfully. In chapter two they will be discussed as an example of a quest for identity in African Christianity.

This introduces a fourth necessary limitation. The thesis is concerned about the quest for identity in African *theology*. In one sense, as already intimated, all Christians are theologians, if by theology we mean having an understanding of how to relate to God. Therefore a quest for identity in various church traditions in Africa would be a fruitful research exercise. However this thesis has had to be limited to black Africans who are consciously practising and writing theology in the English speaking parts of Sub-Sahara Africa.

The limitations in the area of Missiology are obvious from the topic itself. Evangelism, church planting, and various kinds of social service are understood to be different kinds of mission. This thesis is only concerned about the quest for identity as a *mission of empowerment*.

All these limitations, while necessary, are not absolute. In order to build theoretical frameworks around various key words in the topic, and to critique the chosen theologies, it will be necessary to bring into the thesis key thinkers both in Africa and in other parts of the world, covering even disciplines which are outside Christianity. The application of all this thinking will, however, be limited to the chosen areas.

1.4 PRESUPPOSITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Third world theology has successfully established the impossibility of neutral, value-free theologizing and recognized the importance of theologians foregrounding their contexts and

⁵ The most authoritative works on AICs currently available are those by Daneel (1971, 1974, 1984, 1987, 1989), Barret (1968), Turner (1979), Sundkler (1976) and Oosthuizen (1999). None of these is an indigenous African, let alone a member of any of the AICs.

declaring the presuppositions and allegiances that condition their work (Frostin 1988:190 cf Young 1991:x). In other words contextual theologizing must include an analysis of one's own context as a theologian. Frostin (:190) rightly says that the 'main liability of established theology ... is that it fails to reflect critically on its own context, interests, and political functions'. It is for this reason that I have started this thesis by foregrounding my context without falling into the danger of contextualism by which context becomes the primary, overruling authority in any hermeneutic engagement (Bosch 1991: 497f). This section takes the process further by articulating the presuppositions and perspectives that arise from that context and determine the character of this thesis.

1.4.1 An emic Christian faith perspective

Kraft (1979:293) points out that an *emic* perspective is that of 'inside participants in a given culture' in contrast to an *etic* perspective which is an analysis of a cultural situation from outside it. On the basis of this valid distinction Kraft (:293) proceeds to say that an emic Christian theology is 'a specific cultural variety of Christian theology appropriate for those immersed in it but lacking in comparative perspective (like monocultural western theologies)'. While the general gist of Kraft says is acceptable, it does not follow that an emic Christian theology must necessarily lack a comparative perspective. This thesis has an emic Christian faith perspective in the sense of being done from the point of view of a committed Christian faith. At the same time it interacts with non-Christian perspectives, including perspectives of people like Okot p'Bitek who are antagonistic to the Christian faith on the African continent. The thesis is also an emic perspective in the sense of being committed to a black *African* Christian perspective. Yet it also interacts with theologians, historians and educators from other parts of the world, or those whose roots are not African. This is therefore an emic perspective which is consciously aware of the presence of the 'other'.

A committed Christian perspective does not make a pretence of value-free objectivity. Young (1991:ix) helpfully explains that the 'nineteenth century challenged the "historicity" of the Bible, and in response theological research became obsessed with the "facts", and theological thinking with the declaration that Christianity is a historical religion'. Times have changed and perspectives have shifted.

We have become aware that to speak of ‘facts’ apart from interpretation is simply impossible. History is a form of narrative and all narrative constructs involve a process of selection, judgment as to what is significant, discernment of cause and effect, and interpretative patterning. In other words the fact that we tell the story means that we ‘create’ history, and our own interests and concerns affect the process.

(Young 1991:ix-x)

It is for this reason that Grenholm and Patte (2000:8-9 cf Bosch 1991:496-8) rightly speak of the legitimacy of ‘giving a role to religious experience and perception in critical practice’ and letting that religious perception become ‘the integrating factor for our interpretive practice’. This does not then mean a loss of academic credibility or the compromising of facts to suit presuppositions. Rather it means being aware that ‘presuppositions or prior commitments’ will influence what one regards as significant and what one emphasizes – in short one’s interpretation (Young 1991:ix-x).

The Christian faith perspective described above will therefore be the integrating perspective in this thesis. It interfaces with all the other perspectives, including the resistance and liberation perspective that we now consider.

1.4.2 A resistance and liberation perspective

The reality of oppression and marginalization that forms the context of this thesis leads to a resistance and liberation perspective to theology. Chapters four to seven, which constitute the heart of this thesis will amplify this perspective. In this section we merely seek to give the gist of the perspective.

Firstly, liberation is part of the salvation that God seeks for, and offers to, humankind. This conviction arises from the theology of *imago Dei*. If God created human beings in his own image he maintains an interest in the safeguarding of that image. Oppression and marginalization are acts of robbing from people the dignity and respect that belong to all human beings by virtue of their creation in the image of God. God therefore rises to defend the poor, oppressed and marginalized people. It is for this reason that Liberation Theology talks about the ‘preferential option for the poor’ to express the perception that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. Sometimes God acts directly to rescue his people from all forces that oppress and demean them. Very often, however, God equips the oppressed to become agents of their own liberation.

This Liberation perspective emphasizes what Grenholm and Patte (2000:41-42) call the ‘subversive thrust’ to Scripture and theology according to which

social, economic, political, and religious structures of authority presupposed, advocated, or rejected by the text, as well as the traces of struggles for justice behind and within the text, are most significant (studied by methods of social, economic, political, feminist, and postcolonial critical studies).

This gives rise to the second point under this perspective. Domination of one group by another will lead to covert or overt resistance by those who are dominated. This has been widely recognised even by secular researchers who have dealt with the increasingly popular field of power relations from the perspective of different disciplines. The perspective of two such researchers will be utilized in this thesis.

The first such researcher is James Scott, a sociologist whose major works⁶ offer new and helpful perspectives on resistance to domination. Scott (1990) relativizes the notion of hegemony in such a way that it ceases to be deterministic over subordinates. For him hegemony and domination form part of what he calls the ‘public transcript’ (1990:20) but this is by no means the whole reality. A generally invisible and even more potent reality for him lies in what he calls the ‘hidden transcript’ – a concept that has given a subtitle to his book. The hidden transcript constitutes calculated ‘arts of resistance’. These ‘arts of resistance’ in response to domination make the dominated agents of their own liberation – or at least agents of subverting domination even in subtle ways not noticeable to an outside observer. They are not mere victims waiting for external liberators. The dominated may appear weak but, as the title of Scott’s other book (1985) suggests, these weak people also have their own weapons. Petersen (1999:210) has a succinct and helpful summary of Scott’s thinking:

We have already seen something of how Scott understands and accounts for coded resistance: it is the calculated strategy of the dominated in the face of repression which mobilizes forms of resistance that avoid any open confrontation with the structures of authority being resisted. Resistance is strategically coded, but it is fully conscious. Its genesis lies therefore in the ‘hidden transcript’: in the subterranean feelings, thoughts, discourse, gestures, dreams, rituals and social practices of the dominated. The space of the hidden transcript is that of a dissident subculture, fuelled by the continual slights, indignities, humiliations and forced deference required by interaction with the dominant in the public transcript. It involves the creation of a social realm, a free space ... in which such a transcript can be rehearsed and safely spoken.

⁶ *Weapons of the weak* and *Domination and the arts of resistance*. See bibliography.

But it involves, too, the creation of counter-ideologies as elaborate as those of the dominant ideologies.

Based on this thinking Scott dismisses any notion of the ultimate triumph of hegemony – the ideological domination of one group by another in such a way that the dominated lose their own consciousness and adopt the ‘false consciousness’ forced on them by the dominant group (1990:72). For Scott the coded resistance which he calls the ‘hidden transcript’ remains a conscious form of resistance even though, for the sake of survival, the resistance must remain hidden from the surveillance of the dominant group until it can, even on rare occasions, safely be brought out in the open. The existence of the hidden transcript proves, according to Scott, that the dominated have not really accepted the existing dominant order and are always watching out for opportunities to resist it. For this reason the dominated cannot properly be said to have ‘false consciousness’. The dominated are not as fooled into submission as the dominant groups might imagine from their observation of the ‘public transcript’.

Scott’s denial of any notion of hegemony is problematic. The identity crisis in Africa includes domination of some western cultural practices which have no demonstrable value for Africans, and where there is no political or military compulsion to enforce those practices⁷. This suggests the existence of a western cultural hegemonic order – a colonization of the minds of at least some of the Africans. It is this colonization of the mind that, for example, led Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) to write his book on the decolonization of the mind. But having said this, Scott’s overall perspective on resistance remains useful for this thesis. It corroborates the point of view that domination leads to resistance, and that the dominated in many cases retain agency in the project of their own liberation.

The second perspective is provided by the Comaroffs (1991). Theirs is a study of ‘domination and reaction, struggle and innovation’ based on the colonization of the Tswana people of South Africa during the period 1820 – 1920 (:xi). At the heart of this study is ‘colonization of consciousness and the consciousness of colonization in South Africa’:

It traces the processes by which Non-conformist Christian missionaries, among the earliest footsoldiers of British colonialism, sought to change the hearts and minds, the signs and practices, of the Southern Tswana.

⁷ Chapter two will include some newspaper quotations that illustrate this reality.

(Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:xi)

The location of the study adds weight to our theme of the quest for identity in Africa. However this study has relevance to any situation of sustained domination of one cultural group by another.

Whereas colonial domination is normally seen in physical or militaristic terms the Comaroffs, without minimizing the physical brutality of most colonial situations (:4), help us to see the subtler side of colonialism – the attempts to capture ‘the hearts and minds, the signs and practices’ of the colonized. For the Comaroffs (1991:15):

The point ... is that the essence of colonization inheres less in political overrule than in seizing and transforming ‘others’ by the very act of conceptualizing, inscribing, and interacting with them on terms not of their choosing; in making them into the pliant objects and silenced subjects of our scripts and scenarios; in assuming the capacity to ‘represent’ them, the active verb itself conflating politics and poetics.

Power over the hearts and minds of the colonized is exercised by a continuum process which at one end is called *hegemony*, and at the other *ideology*:

[W]e take hegemony to refer to that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies – drawn from a historically situated cultural field – that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it. ... In a quite literal sense, hegemony is habit forming. For these reasons, it is rarely contested directly, save perhaps in the roseate dreams of revolutionaries.

(Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:23)

In order for such a hegemonic state to develop the dominant group will control various ‘modes of symbolic production: over such things as educational and ritual processes, patterns of socialization, political and legal procedures, canons of style and self-representation, public communication, health and bodily discipline, and so on’ over a long period of time (:25). Through constant repetition over this period of time the imposed symbols become the normal way of life for the dominated. They become ‘so habituated, so deeply inscribed in everyday routine, that they may no longer be seen as forms of control – or seen at all. It is then that they come to be (un)spoken of as custom, (dis)regarded as convention’ (:25).

Ideology, the other end of the power continuum, is ‘an articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs of a kind that can be abstracted as the worldview of any social grouping’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991 :24). While all such social groupings will have their own ideologies, it is the

dominant, in this case the colonizing, group who will protect and enforce their ideology using all the power at their disposal (:24). Colonization of culture therefore moves along the continuum from ideology to hegemony. What differentiates one from the other is 'the factor of human consciousness and the modes of representation that bear it' (28). Ideological domination becomes successful to the extent that the dominated are no more conscious of their domination – that is to say, when the symbols of domination have been submerged below the level of consciousness and have thus become part of hegemony (:29). That, for the Comaroffs, would be the ultimate in the colonization of consciousness.

Fortunately, for the colonized, there is no such ultimate success for the colonizers. The process of colonization of consciousness is accompanied by a 'consciousness of colonization':

[J]ust as hegemonies and ideologies shift over time and space, so the contents of consciousness are not fixed. On the one hand the submerged, the unseen, the unrecognized may under certain conditions be called to awareness; on the other, things once perceived and explicitly marked may slip below the level of discourse into the unremarked recesses of the collective unconscious.

(Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:29)

This is where resistance to colonial domination becomes an ever-present reality. The dominated are by no means passive victims. For the Tswanas of South Africa, their consciousness of colonization led to what the Comaroffs (:11) describe as a 'long conversation' between the dominators and the dominated in which 'each party was to try to gain some purchase on, some mastery over, the other'. The resistance of the dominated 'consisted in a complex admixture of tacit (even uncomprehending) accommodation to the hegemonic order at one level and diverse expressions of symbolic and practical resistance at another' (:26). Moreover, in this long conversation:

many of the signifiers of the colonizing culture became unfixed. They were seized by the Africans and, sometimes refashioned, put to symbolic and practical ends previously unforeseen, certainly unintended. ... Here, then, was a process in which signifiers were set afloat, fought over, and recaptured on both sides of the colonial encounter.

(Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:17-18)

In short colonial hegemony was never total. It was 'always threatened by the vitality that remain[ed]' in the dominated people (:25).

We have somewhat simplified the complex analysis of the Comaroffs, but have said enough to indicate two things that are important for our theme. Firstly, the Comaroffs help us to appreciate the extent to which colonialism was a threat to African identity at the psychological level. It went beyond controlling the land and the labour of the colonized for the enrichment of the metropolis. It sought total cultural control of the minds and hearts of the colonized using both the 'agentive' power of ideology and the 'non-agentive' power of hegemony (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 22). Secondly, the Comaroff analysis also acknowledges the agency of the colonized in seeking to survive physically and psychologically through the complex mixture of creative accommodation to the oppressive system and various forms of covert and overt resistance to, and subversion of, domination. In this perspective Africans become shapers of their destinies, and are not merely victims of cultural and other forms of imperialism. Although Africans have suffered the 'colonization of their consciousness', they have also had a 'consciousness of colonization' which has helped them to resist that colonization in many ways.

Scott and the Comaroffs were writing from different contexts and with different purposes, yet their works as analysed above show points of similarity that enhance the resistance and liberation perspective of this thesis. They both maintain the agency of the oppressed in the project of their own liberation rather than constructing them as helpless victims of oppression. They affirm that domination leads to resistance, and that such resistance usually takes subtle forms not noticeable on what Scott calls the 'public transcript'. The two differ in their understanding of the meaning and reality of hegemony. For Scott hegemony in the sense of the naturalized, taken-for-granted and unconscious domination as understood by the Comaroffs is unreal. The dominated remain conscious of their domination, and their resistance, even if coded, is equally conscious. However, their difference here lies merely on the level of conceptualization. Their thinking converges on the fundamental issue that dominant forces are not guaranteed ultimate and settled success at least on the level of ideology. That is why oppressors always have to maintain their vigilance, or what Scott (1990:passim) calls their 'surveillance' of the dominated.

The real problem with the views of Scott and the Comaroffs is that they easily lead to the conclusion that Christianity itself is part of colonial domination, and that its acceptance by millions of African people is evidence of colonial 'hegemony' in the Comaroff sense of the concept. In chapter three we will be entering into debate with non-Christian African critics who are precisely of

this viewpoint. We therefore need to interrogate the viewpoint of the Comaroffs (1991) in particular since it is based on the assumption that the missionaries, who are one of the subjects of their book, were out to ‘colonize the consciousness’ of the Tswanas. The natural conclusion is that the Tswanas who became Christians, and indeed all Africans who are Christians, are colonized and that as long as they remain willing Christians they are not yet ‘conscious of their colonization’ and are therefore under colonial ‘hegemony’.

It must be noted that the Comaroffs are writing as historical anthropologists and not as Christians. Theirs is therefore a ‘view from the outside’ which can at some significant points differ from the ‘view from the inside’ (Balcomb 1998:passim). It has already been pointed out above that this thesis adopts an ‘emic’ Christian and African perspective which in some few instances differs from the Comaroff’s ‘etic’ perspective. Chapter four of this thesis will be analysing the views of, *inter alia*, Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh who convincingly argue that Christianity in its expression is more of an African religion than a western one. This is quite apart from the fact that Christianity did not originate from western Europe in the first place, and the added fact of its pre-colonial origins in Africa. The universality and particularity of the Christian faith make it a translatable faith, making it possible for African Christians to claim it as legitimately ‘theirs’ rather than being a ‘foreign’ religion hegemonically imposed on them. Such Christians would not even see themselves as ‘very willing *victims*’ (Balcomb 1998:4, italics mine) of the missionary message but very willing adherents of their own faith.

This, however, is not to deny that the Bible and the Christian faith as a whole have been abused for colonial and other oppressive ends. They have been abused, continue to be abused, and are indeed abusable for these ends as chapter five will make clear. At the same time Christianity and the Bible are usable in liberative ways, and the coming of Christianity to Africa became one of the strongest catalysts for the rise of the nationalist movements.⁸ This was not the outcome intended by those missionaries who were the ‘footsoldiers’ of the colonialists, but liberation is part of the essence of the Christian mission as will be argued in chapter six. In supporting Bediako’s views, Balcomb (1998) is right in saying that this ‘surprise’ feature of the gospel ‘underlines its inability to be controlled by any one culture or ideology’ (:13). It is in this light that the ‘solely adversarial nature

⁸ The role of Christianity, and of the West generally, in awakening Africans to their identity will be covered in chapter three of this thesis.

of the relationship' between the missionary message and those who accepted that message 'would need to be questioned' (:14).

This questioning, however, does not detract from the Comaroff's overall perspective on domination and resistance which is in line with the point of view of this thesis. It is a perspective that posits that domination has a negative effect on identity. Yet it is built into human nature that such domination will provoke resistance and a quest for identity by the dominated. Theologizing needs to accent the whispers and voices of such people in their quest for identity; which brings us to the third, related, perspective.

1.4.3 The marginalized as interlocutors of theology

In his characterization of the 'new paradigm' of Third World liberation theologies, Frostin (1988:5-6) put the choice of the oppressed as interlocutors of theology as the very first of 'five interrelated emphases'. The preferential option for the poor, Frostin emphasizes, goes beyond ethical considerations of helping them. Rather this is a preferential option that carries fundamental epistemological consequences. It means perceiving reality from the point of view of the oppressed. It is therefore doing theology from their perspective and answering the questions that they are asking. This accounts for Liberation Theology talking about 'the epistemological privilege of the poor' (:5). Indeed the choice of *social relations* as opposed to *ideas* like revelation etc as a point of departure in theologizing creates the strongest contrast between liberation theologies and the standard western theologies.

Doing theology from the perspective of the oppressed has several implications. It means re-reading history to give prominence to the oppressed as actors, rather than just as 'acted upon' people – which is what the standard western oriented Christian histories have been guilty of. Secondly, it also means giving epistemological value to the ideas of the oppressed and marginalized. Thirdly, it means being 'socially engaged'⁹ with them. This is a way of doing theology that is in itself a quest for an *African* theological identity.

The question that naturally arises is how this perspective can be applied to a thesis like this one whose focus is on the quest for identity in African Theology, rather in African Christianity

⁹ In the South African theological scene this expression has been popularized by Gerald West (e.g 1997b, 1999a, 2001) in his various writings on biblical hermeneutics.

generally. There are two answers to this question. In the first place this thesis has already chosen as its chief interlocutors African theologians in their quest for identity. These are theologians who would not normally feature in standard western oriented theological curricula – except perhaps as optional courses for those who might be curious enough to want to learn about marginal theologies and the ‘exotic’ cultures they represent. In the second place this perspective will be used to evaluate these very theologies in terms of their relationship with African Christianity generally. To what extent do they effectively adopt the oppressed as their interlocutors? A question will be raised again and again in the thesis, for example, on whether these theologies show evidence of being socially engaged with their interlocutors.

1.4.4 A critical postmodernist perspective

A theology which is done from a conscious faith perspective, and which legitimizes the marginalized finds an ally in a modified form of the postmodern perspective.

Lytotard (1984) who ‘remains the most influential voice of postmodern philosophy’ (Sim 1998:7) had the following to say about postmodernism:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives¹⁰. ... [The metanarrative apparatus of legitimation] is being dispersed in clouds of language narrative elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.

(Lytotard 1984:xiv)

This statement at once introduces us to the positive as well as the problematic features of postmodernism. The rejection of metanarratives is the rejection of ‘many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structured over the last couple of centuries’ (Sim 1998:xii). On the positive side this is liberating to the marginalized voices of the Third world; the grandnarratives or universal theories of the western culture since the Enlightenment have had the effect of silencing alternative voices and insisting on oppressive conformity to western ‘standards’ of economics, theology, politics and other fields. Postmodernism with its valorization of differences

¹⁰ Postmodern literature also refers to these as grandnarratives.

recognizes the local narratives or what Lyotard in the above quotation calls 'clouds of language narrative elements' which can each separately, and in non-judgmental interaction with others, claim validity in its own right.

An application of this positive element in postmodernism can be seen in the case of Michel Foucault for whom 'there is a particular interest in marginalized groups whose difference keeps them excluded from political power' (Sim 1998:6). This thinking amounts to the kind of resistance against domination that is advocated in this thesis. It validates the resistance to stifling totalization which denies people their individuality and their freedom of self-expression.

This does not make postmodernism as such an unqualified blessing. 'One of the best ways of describing postmodernism as a philosophical movement would be as a form of scepticism – scepticism about authority, received wisdom, cultural and political norms etc ...' (Sim 1998:3). The logical outcome of this scepticism would naturally include the need to fundamentally question the 'grand-narrative' of Christianity itself or its relativization to local situations with no presumed validity for others. This runs against the assumption of this thesis on the universality of Christianity and its contextualized expression in different cultures. This stance would be impossible if, as postmodernism insists, '*all* meaning were potentially open to contest, *all* power potentially unfixed' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:xii).

Our stance is therefore that postmodernism would only be appropriate for our context in a modified form. The Comaroffs (1991:xii) describe this as 'critical postmodernism' in which they find some value:

On the one hand, we believe, some of the lessons of critical postmodernism have to be taken very seriously: among them, (1) the need to address the *indeterminacies* of meaning and action, events and processes in history; (2) the admonition to regard culture not as an *overdetermining*, closed system of signs but as a set of polyvalent practices, texts and images that may, at any time, be contested; (3) the invitation to see power as a many-sided, often elusive and diffuse force which is always implicated in culture, consciousness, and representation; and (4) the importance of treating the writing of histories as a generic mode of making both the past and the present (*italics in the original*).

The presuppositions and perspectives described above link up with the methodological considerations considered below to form the research methodology for this thesis.

1.5 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The late David Bosch, a celebrated South African missiologist, remarked that different theologies of mission form a 'multicoloured mosaic of complementary and mutually enriching as well as mutually challenging frames of reference' (Bosch 1991:8). He goes on to say that at points different understandings of mission may conflict with each other, making it necessary for every missiologist to take a stand for those interpretations that are in harmony with his presuppositions – presuppositions which must remain revisable (:18). This project is being carried out in fundamental agreement with this stance. African Christian theologies are all seen, on close analysis, to be wrestling in different 'mutually enriching as well as mutually challenging' ways with the question of identity.

This presupposes a methodology for this thesis that is in line with the presuppositions, perspectives and purposes of the thesis as discussed above. The methodology consists of mutually enriching and correlated processes which include data collection, biblical interpretation, contextual theology, historical inquiry, and postcolonial criticism.

1.5.1 Data collection

In a thesis of this nature the primary means of data collection had to involve an extensive literature search. The focus on African Theology required a wide consultation of written sources by African theologians in the English speaking regions of sub-Saharan Africa ranging from the 1960s to the present day. The field of Missiology required its own widespread literature search of various authors in Africa and beyond. This created an opportunity for fostering a rich dialogue between Missiology and African Theology in this thesis. This dialogue was put in a wider context that required a historical search, non-Christian writings and a current media search in Zimbabwe.

Literature search was also required in order to build up various theoretical frameworks required by the topic, particularly in the areas of identity and empowerment. The perspectives which determine the character of this thesis also called for a literature search. These include the biblical perspective, resistance and liberation, and the critical modernistic perspectives.

This thesis interprets the current discourse around the African Renaissance as evidence of the continuing quest for identity in Africa. Therefore in order to supplement the literature search I took

the opportunity of attending a conference on 'The African Renaissance and the Christian Faith' held at Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, 9-15 September 2001. That conference created a wonderful opportunity to interact with African delegates from West Africa, East Africa, South Africa, Francophone Africa and two African-American delegates who were regarded by the conference as being Africans in the Diaspora. More importantly, that conference accorded me the opportunity to carry out in depth unstructured interviews with Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Kwame Bediako – two renowned African theologians whose works form part of the core of this thesis. The fact that one of them is a male and the other a female theologian, one fitting in the inculturation mould and the other in the liberation one, was especially beneficial for this research.

Collecting data in these various ways is however, only a part of what this research has called for. The data had to be processed through a multilayered framework ranging from biblical interpretation to postcolonial criticism which we now briefly describe.

1.5.2 Biblical interpretation

The emic Christian faith perspective described earlier includes respect for the Bible as 'Scripture' (Grenholm & Patte 2000) or 'sacred text' (Draper 2001). The Bible is approached from a 'believer-reader' perspective (Grenholm & Patte 2000:passim). The Bible has become perhaps the most significant text in the part of Africa that constitutes the central concern of this thesis. For Bediako (2001:2) 'Scripture ... is the authoritative, normative deposit given to us of the divine-human encounter that lies at the heart of our faith'. He goes on to describe it as 'our road map' (:2) and 'our story' (:3). Scripture therefore affects the behaviour and perceptions of millions of people on the continent. Therefore African Theology must be conducted in dialogue with Scriptural texts. This dialogue, according to Grenholm and Patte 2000 (:39-40) must be conducted in the 'trusting relationship of a truly heteronomous dialogue':

Heteronomous dialogue with someone requires the establishment of a trusting relationship. Heteronomous dialogue with a text requires a view of the text as Scripture. Heteronomous dialogue with someone requires that I 'learn this person' with full respect for his or her mystery as an Other who always surprises me with new views, new insights, new perspectives, different from mine. So with a biblical text. When I read a text as Scripture, I respect its mystery, expecting that it will surprise me and challenge my views. Conversely, this intersubjective learning requires that I bring to the other person or to the text my own views, insights, perspectives into conversation, with the confidence that they will be respected and affirmed in their differences. In the trusting relationship of a truly heteronomous dialogue,

I gain new perceptions about an aspect of life, not because I have had to abandon my views for those of the other person or text, but because I now also view my perception of this aspect of life from the perspective of the other person or scriptural text. We now understand each other about the subject matter of our dialogue.

At the same time Grenholm and Patte (2000), Draper (2001), West (2001) and others have successfully argued that respect for the Bible as Scripture or sacred text is not incompatible with a critical reading of the same. The ‘tri-polar exegetical model’ suggested by Draper (2001:153-158 cf Grenholm & Patte 2000:35) consisting of ‘distantiation’, ‘contextualization’ and ‘appropriation’¹¹ gives us a good example of accepting the Bible as sacred text while also critically (academically) reading it. It is some such process which Bosch (1991:181) is advocating by saying:

The profound dissimilarities between then and now imply that it will not do to appeal in a direct manner to the words of the biblical authors and apply what they said on a one-to-one basis to our own situation. We should, rather, with creative but responsible freedom, prolong the logic of the ministry of Jesus and the early church in an imaginative and creative way to our own time and context. One of the basic reasons for having to do this, lies in the fact that the Christian faith is a *historical* faith. God communicates his revelation to people through human beings and through events, not by means of abstract propositions. This is another way of saying that the biblical faith, both Old and New Testament, is ‘incarnational’, the reality of God entering into human affairs (*italics in the original*).

It is the ‘distantiation, contextualization and appropriation’ suggested above that saves us from the danger of ‘biblicism’, by which some imagine that the Bible is accessible directly to us as ‘the word of God’ without consideration of the original contexts of writers and readers, and the context of the reader-believer. The assumption in this thesis is therefore that epistemological privilege must be accorded to both the Bible-in-context and the reader-believer-in-context.

This leads us to the related issue of contextual theology as a methodological consideration.

1.5.3 Contextual theologizing

To say that all theology is contextual is true only in so far as theologians are consciously or unconsciously influenced by their social, ecclesiastical, geographic and historical contexts, among others. At another level, however, we talk of contextual theology to describe a methodology that

¹¹ By ‘distantiation’ Draper (2001) means readers allowing ‘the the text to speak for itself by creating space or critical distance between themselves and the text’ (:155). Contextualisation ‘focuses specifically on analysis and evaluation of the context of the reader/hearer today’ (:157). The stage of appropriation ‘brings together the horizon of the text and its community and the horizon of the reader and her community, and mediates a new consciousness leading to a new praxis’ (:158).

consciously foregrounds and utilizes context as part of the theological process itself (Frostin 1988: 2-20, West 2001:169-180, Draper 2001:149-168). The obvious question which arises is, 'What context is contextual theology concerned about?' The usual answer which says, 'the totality of the context' can be helpfully broken into several aspect for analytical purposes.

There is the context of the Bible as one of the primary sources for Christian theology. The original writers and readers were immersed in socio-cultural, political, geographical and historical circumstances that conditioned what they wrote and heard. Secondly, there is the context of those who have formulated Christian doctrine over the centuries. Many Christians cite the Nicene and other creeds without realizing the intense theological battles, arising from historical and other circumstances, that conditioned the creedal formulations. The third context is that of today's theologian – a context that also conditions what s/he understands biblical and other texts to mean.

Draper (2001) explains the reason for the emphasis on context as being 'the fundamental understanding that there is no neutral or absolute meaning of a text or, for that matter, of any human communication' (:149). Therefore we need to understanding what was going on (historical setting) in communications that happed before, for example at the time various biblical texts were produced. Also, 'we need to be aware of the way in which our common assumptions about society distort our ability to hear a message from another society (particularly one speaking two thousand years ago)' (:151). This is part of understanding and consciously utilizing context in the process of theologizing. To oversimplify the process, it means having the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in another.

Yet, 'putting things in context' does not fully come to grips with the complexity of the process we are describing. Many people have understood contextualization as a process whereby ideas developed in one context (for example the theology developed in the West) can be applied in terms that make sense in another context (in our case the African context). This methodology assumes a giving and a receiving context, the role of the latter being merely that of understanding what comes from the former with no contribution to the content of what is being communicated. This traditional understanding of contextualization has been heavily criticized by Nolan (1988), one of the leading figures in the contextual theology that was part of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

Nolan (1988:25-27) describes the gospel as having a shape and some contents. The traditional understanding that he criticizes sees the content of the gospel as coming from outside while the present context gives local shape to the message. For him it must be the other way round. His stance is: 'You do not incarnate good news into a situation, good news arises out of a situation' (:27). He argues that it is the shape of the gospel, the fact that it must be good news, that comes from the Bible or the received understanding of what the Bible says about the gospel. But it is only the situation in which the gospel is lived that can determine what is good.

Nolan is unfortunately operating in an either-or mode of thinking. The content of the gospel comes either from outside or from within the present context. The shape of the gospel comes either from within the current context or from outside it. When it comes to the content of the gospel this thinking becomes particularly problematic. It relativizes the gospel to a degree where it might not be recognised as the gospel by any two groups of people. To the right wing white people during the days of apartheid good news would have been the perpetuation of white privileges at the expense of the blacks. Would that then qualify to be good news? Nolan seems to be aware of this pitfall in his thinking, and tries to get around it by saying that good news qualifies to be good news only if it is good news *for* the poor, according to the Bible. This, however, is a welcome admission that the Bible must supply at least part of the 'content' of the good news. What would be more helpful would be to adopt a dialogical stance whereby both the Bible and the context of the exegete define what becomes good news. The present context alone cannot supply the content of the good news.

The theologian obviously does not approach the Bible with a blank mind. He or she comes with needs and presuppositions that condition, and are in turn conditioned by, the reading of the Bible. Out of this mutual conditioning arise hermeneutical keys that continue to be refined as the context changes and the understanding of the biblical texts grows.

This thesis is utilizing the hermeneutical key of liberation which is further refined by a reading of African Christian theology from the point of view of what Bediako (1996:427) calls 'the hermeneutic of identity'. The idea of identity in turn needs to be fertilized by a cultural-anthropological-philosophical inquiry which we now turn to.

1.5.4 A cultural-anthropological-philosophical inquiry

The concept of identity is a highly complex one. A theological analysis on its own does not do justice to its complexity. Therefore discussing a quest for identity in Africa requires a supplementary methodology of cultural-anthropological as well as philosophical inquiry. These inquiries have been necessary in order to determine the meaning of identity, and what factors go into the creation of identity consciousness.

On the cultural-anthropological side Hiebert (1985) was chosen not only because of his acknowledged specialization in this field, but also because of his extensive missionary experience. On the philosophical side the intention was to emphasize works done in Africa by Africans or those whose which are particularly focussed on African religions and philosophy. Appiah (1992:289), Samkange (1980) and Tempels (1959) became useful examples of African philosophy, or at least philosophy whose context is Africa. However, in order to bring in a Christian philosophical angle to the discussion on identity Tillich's (1954) ontological analysis was also utilized.

This analysis constitutes part of chapter three, and therefore will not be discussed at this point.

1.5.5 Historical Inquiry

The quest for identity in Africa arose from a historical context of marginalization. It did not arise in a vacuum. This makes historical inquiry a necessary part of the methodology for this thesis. However, a historical inquiry also raises the issue of historiography. What is the proper way to conceive African history in general, and African church history in particular?

In line with the perspectives given above, this thesis puts emphasis on history from the point of view of the underside. Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1992:65) is right in complaining that although

Christianity's centre of gravity is shifting from the northern to the southern hemisphere ... the frequently recorded history of the Christian missionary movement has not yet been written in its entirety from a consistent Third-World perspective. This history, which in large part paralleled the history of European expansion, is always depicted as a movement from the European Christian 'centre' to the pagan periphery of Africa, Asia, and Latin America...

On this basis she correctly advocates that the 'church history of the Third World must not be the familiar missionary story but the account of the creative reception and incarnation of the Gospel in

the different regions and cultures. It must be written from the viewpoint of the suffering and oppressed peoples of the Third World' (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992:66).

In agreement with Verstraelen-Gilhuis this thesis adopts the view that reading history from the perspective of the marginalized is a means of assisting their quest for identity. Maluleke (1996a:37) is right when he says that the 'exploration of alternative histories of Africans is and should be more than just a mechanism for creating a theological turf that displaces the West from the centre, important as that may be. It is a genuinely necessary exercise in the development and flowering of authentic African theologies'.

In reviewing the historical background to the quest for identity in Africa, emphasis will be placed on the perspective of The Comaroffs (1991) whose reading of African history highlights the agency of the oppressed. In assessing the quest for identity by African theologians one of the evaluative questions will be whether their historiography is consonant with their liberative and empowering purpose. It is in this respect, for example, that the works of Lamin Sanneh (1983, 1985, 1993, 1995) become important for this project. His perspective is that the 'translation' role of those who received the gospel was more important than the positive or negative contributions of the western missionaries. In this way the African is 'seen as a subject, and not as an object or passive victim of history' (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992:78).

Postcolonial criticism is one of the tools for looking at the past of African societies in a way that highlights the marginalized.

1.5.6 Postcolonial criticism

From all that has been said so far it should now be clear that in this thesis '[t]he voices that reflect a different social and cultural construction of reality are most significant' (Grenholm & Patte 2000:42). Such voices will be accentuated by, inter-alia, the methods of postcolonial criticism.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to develop a postcolonial theory or to enter into a protracted dialogue with the theories that have been developed so far. Rather the thesis seeks to recognise that the African postcolonial voice is part of the quest for identity that is going on in the continent. This recognition will be done by highlighting the thinking of Mazrui (1986) in the course of discussing

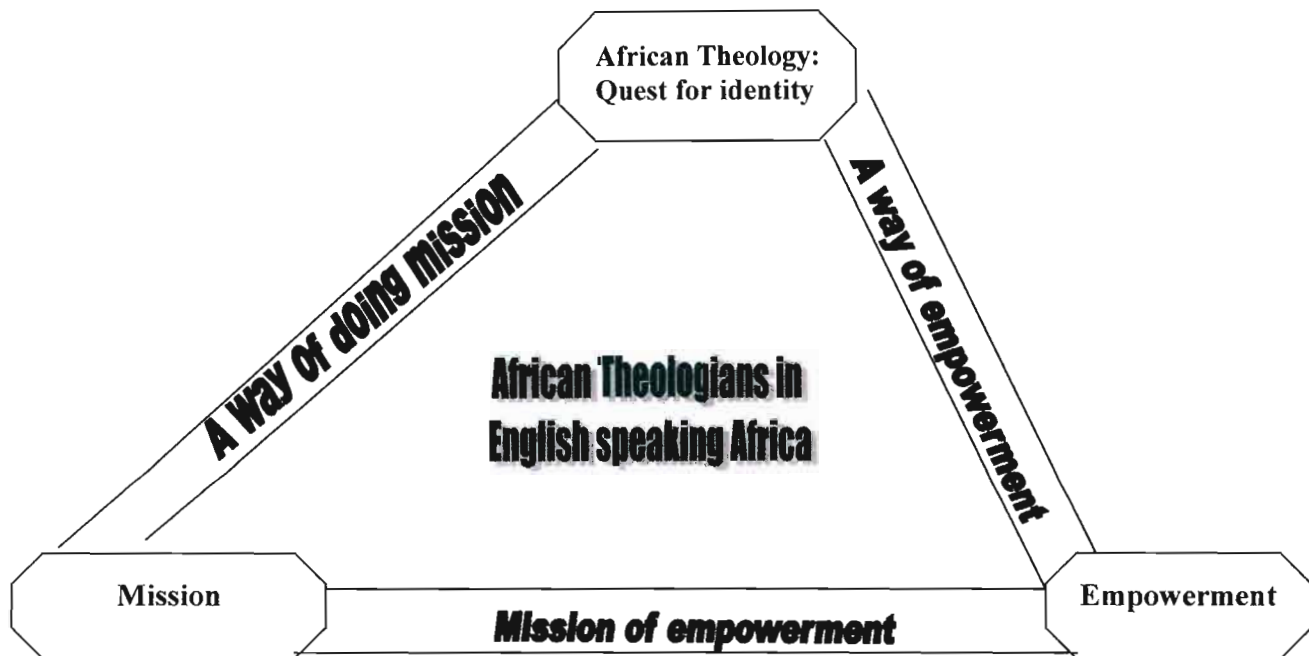
the meaning of identity (chapter three) and by including the work of a postcolonial biblical critic, Musa Dube (2000), in the course of discussing liberation theologies in Africa (chapter five).

In order to put the writings of these people into perspective a general exposition of postcolonial criticism will form part of chapter three.

The exposition of these five methodological principles has set the stage for a brief look at the shape of the project.

1.6 THE SHAPE OF THE PROJECT

We began this chapter with an indication of the main concepts that arise from the title of the thesis: ‘The quest for identity in African Theology as a mission of empowerment’. A diagram that captures the shape of the project in a perhaps oversimplified way would look like the following:



At the centre of the project are African theologians in English speaking Africa who are the main interlocutors of this thesis. This immediately raises the issue of Africa as the context of the project. What is it about Africa that gave rise to an intense quest for identity in African theology? Chapter two sets out to answer this question. It goes into the historical background to the quest for identity

in Africa which includes slavery, colonialism and the marginalization of Africa in the New World Order. The chapter establishes that Africa's psychological wounds are mainly inflicted on her by outside forces, but that there are also some wounds that are self-inflicted. That chapter provides an opportunity for sketching a range of African responses to the identity crisis in order to provide a broad canvass against which the particular responses of African theologians can be seen in clearer focus in later chapters. Among these responses is that of the African Instituted Churches which constitute a vibrant lived theology of identity.

Chapter three prepares for those responses by African theologians by problematizing the concept of identity itself. It explores the complexity of the matter of identity, and its importance to Africans in particular. A multi-discipline theoretical framework (*inter alia* anthropology, African philosophy, religion and political science) is employed to explore the meaning of identity. A conclusion is reached that identities in general are 'complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities' (Appiah 1992). This is followed by a discussion of four manifestations of the quest for African identity - the Black Consciousness Movement, Négritude and African personality, African traditional religions and philosophy, and finally postcolonialism. These are then made to dialogue with the Christian faith in particular. After facing objections that have been raised against the role of the Christian faith in the shaping of an African identity the ground is laid for a full discussion of the emergence of an African Christian identity. This chapter is therefore essential preparation for the next two chapters which focus on the quest for identity in African theology.

The quest for identity in African theology focuses on issues of culture, race, gender and class – all of which are areas in which the marginalization of Africans has been strongly felt both before and during the advent of the New World Order (Mugambi 1995). African theologies which focus mainly on cultural issues will be typified in this thesis as *inculturation theologies* while those which focus on issues of race, gender and class (or socio-political issues) will be classified as *liberation theologies*. This classification is not watertight; indeed African theologies cannot be that neatly categorized. It will be seen in the course of this thesis that some liberation theologians in Africa include cultural dimensions in their theologising, while some inculturation theologians also recognise the importance of socio-political liberation. In the same way reconstruction theologians like Mugambi are still building their thinking on the liberation paradigm (Maluleke 2000b). Another

difficulty is that some theologians are themselves hard to put in particular categories; for example Desmond Tutu fits in the categories 'black', 'liberation' or 'reconstruction' theology (see Tutu 2001:43-44). Nevertheless it has been found useful for analytical purposes to divide those African theologies chosen for analysis in this thesis into two broad categories– the inculturation and liberation theologies.

Chapter four focuses on the inculturation response to Africa's identity crisis. The chapter answers the question of how the quest for identity is manifested in this branch of African theology whose main focus is on the Africans' cultural identity. A definition of inculturation theology is explored. Inculturation theologies are then divided into two categories. On the one hand there are the early 'indigenization' theologies typified by Idowu. On the other there are the 'translation' theologies represented by Sanneh and Bediako, with Mbiti as a bridge between the two.

These theologies have successfully established that the missionaries who came to Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries did not begin on a *tabula rasa*. God was already active in Africa before the missionaries came. The gospel had already been prepared for through Africa's cultures and religions. When it finally came the gospel was translatable into African cultures and idioms so that Christianity could legitimately claim to be an African religion. It is this translatability that has caused the phenomenal growth of the church in Africa. Moreover this translatability of the gospel ensured that the agentic role of the African Christians became a more important factor than the missionary factor, whatever the faults of the missionaries might have been. Whatever the shortcomings of this translation theology, there can be no doubt that it significantly advances the quest for identity in African theology through a hermeneutic of identity that seeks both the Christianization of the African tradition and the Africanization of the African faith.

Chapter five focuses on the quest for identity in the liberation theologies of Africa whose main focus is the struggle against political, economic, race and gender oppression.. Two such liberation theologies are discussed in this chapter. These are the South African Black Theology and the *African Women Theology*. They are both discussed against the backdrop of the methodology of Liberation Theology in general. Having discussed this liberation methodology, the chapter raises the fundamental question of how this liberation can be said to be a quest for identity.

Black Theology's answer to this question is then given. Black Theology is a hermeneutical struggle against forces that oppress and dehumanize people on the basis of their black colour. A theology of humanization, it is argued, must be recognized as a theology of identity. It is a theology that foregrounds black experience and that calls for an identity that comes through self-affirmation. In the light of the location of this theology in South Africa, the chapter discusses the question of whether this theology still has a meaningful agenda in a post apartheid South Africa with one of the most democratic constitutions in the world.

The hermeneutic of struggle links African Women Theology with Black Theology in the mould of Liberation Theology. However, the object of the struggle for African Women Theology is sexist oppression manifested through patriarchal structures and the androcentric privileging of maleness in Africa. The overall goal of the humanization of women in Africa also makes this a theology of identity.

Looking at both of these theologies the chapter concludes that liberation takes the form of seeking a restoration of the dignity and worth that belongs to the oppressed. This liberation takes on both psychic and structural dimensions. The call on the oppressed to break their psychological chains is seen as an important step towards transforming them into agents of their own liberation. The theological legitimation of this process is examined and the conclusion is arrived at that the cultivation of African authenticity in the face of dehumanization is part of God's will. In the course of articulating these ideas the chapter points out some shortcomings of these theologies.

Having demonstrated the centrality of the quest for identity in various African theologies in chapters four and five, the burden of chapter six is to show that this quest is in fact a part of mission. A review of missiological literature clearly shows that the concept of mission has become a *cause célèbre*. However, such a review justifies the understanding of mission as *missio Dei*. The chapter defines this key concept and explains its conceptual development in the history of Missiology. In the process the chapter reconstructs the traditional western understanding of mission in such a way that the quest for identity, especially as far as African Christianity is concerned, is seen to be a part of *missio Dei*.

To arrive at the link between mission and the quest for identity the chapter discusses four implications of *missio Dei*. These are:

- *Missio Dei* for the restoration of the *imago Dei*.
- *Missio Dei* for the salvation and liberation of humankind.
- *Missio Dei* effected through *missiones ecclesiae*.
- *Missio Dei* embraces *missio hominum*.

This then opens the way for the chapter to discuss the quest for identity in inculturation and liberation theologies of Africa as part of the *missio Dei*.

Chapter seven marks the climax of the thesis. Building on the argument developed from chapter four to six, the chapter establishes that the quest for identity in African Theology is primarily a mission of empowerment and secondarily an empowerment for mission. The chapter utilizes the concept of empowerment to link the quest for identity in African Theology (chapters four and five) with the concept of mission (chapter six).

The chapter begins by building a theoretical framework of empowerment consisting of four interrelated concepts of power. These are:

- The spiritual model of empowerment: Vital participation in the power of the transcendent.
- The educational model of empowerment: Critical consciousness as a source of empowerment for humanization.
- The ontological power of being itself (as already discussed in chapter three).
- The Socio-political model of empowerment: Liberation.

It is on the basis of these four models of power that the chapter argues that the quest for identity is in itself a mission of empowerment and also an empowerment for mission. At this stage we then revisit the inculturation and the liberation theologies considered in chapters four and five and assess the extent to which they qualify to be designated as both a mission of empowerment as well as an empowerment for mission.

Chapter eight then summarizes the findings of the thesis as a whole and its contributions to the fields of African Theology and Missiology. It also makes recommendations for further areas of

research. With this introduction we are ready to consider Africa as the context for the quest for identity.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AFRICAN CONTEXT AS A SETTING FOR THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

This challenge demands courage, determination, and faithfulness on the part of African Christians and theologians in their struggle for the spiritual, social and cultural liberation of African peoples, and in their contribution towards the expansion and strengthening of the *Missio Dei* and the kingdom of God in this historically disadvantaged continent (Nasimiyu-Wasike & Waruta 2000:9-10).

2.1 ORIENTATION

How did the quest for identity become an acute issue for black Africa? The first purpose of this chapter is to account for this quest for identity by giving the historical background as well as summarising the current situation. This account will show that the identity crisis in Africa arose from a combination of external and internal factors.

The external factors arise from the many ambivalences resulting from Africa's contact with the West. Centuries of the slave trade were to be followed by colonialism. These events simultaneously created and shattered the African identity. Even more ambivalent, it will be discovered, was the role played by the western missionaries of the 'Third Opportunity'¹². On the one hand they engaged in cultural imperialism, seeking to westernize their African converts. On the other hand they unwittingly supplied their African converts with the very tools they would use against the 'colonization of [their] consciousness' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:passim). Another external factor to be discussed is the neo-colonialism prevailing under the globalization of the so-called New World Order¹³ which continues to perpetuate the unequal power relations between Africa and the West. While globalization promises Africa more of the western consumer goods, it is in effect

¹² Church historians and missiologists (for example Bediako 1992, Waruta 2000) describe three epochs or 'opportunities' for the coming of the Christian faith to Africa in a significant way. The first opportunity lasted from the Apostolic times until the invasion of North Africa by Moslems in the 7th century. The second opportunity came with the Portuguese explorations of the 15th century ending with the collapse of the Portuguese power in the 16th century. The third opportunity is the great missionary expansion of the 19th and 20th centuries that more or less coincided with colonial expansion into Africa by the West.

¹³ The New World Order is a complex phenomenon which is to be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. The term as used in this thesis includes globalization and world domination by western countries which resulted from the collapse of the Communist power block in the late 1980s.

consuming more of Africa's resources and contributing to Africa's poverty and disease – in short to greater 'afro-pessimism'¹⁴.

Afropessimism, however, did not result only from external, western forces. This chapter will also look at some internal dynamics which added potency to the question Africans are constantly asking: 'Who are we?'

The second purpose of the chapter is to indicate the nature of the quest for identity in Africa. The bulk of this thesis will be taken up exploring the response of African Theology to Africa's historical and current context. This chapter will seek to situate this quest in a broader framework so that African Theology is not seen as the sole agent for addressing the question. The chapter will therefore indicate some ways in which this quest has been a concern in non-Christian circles as well as within African Christianity generally.

The critical issue of defining what we mean by *identity* will be reserved for the next chapter. For now it is time to turn to the historical factors of disempowerment for Africa.

2.2 HISTORICAL FACTORS OF DISEMPOWERMENT

The gist of this thesis is that the quest for identity is a mission of empowerment. That presupposes an existing situation of domination and exploitation. The history of Africa's contact with the West provides ample illustrations of such domination and exploitation. This section will show that Nasimiyu -Wasike and Waruta (2000:10) had good reasons to describe Africa as a 'historically disadvantaged continent'. But the history of Africa's contact with the West also shows various ways Africans sought to resist or creatively interact with forces of domination for survival and the safeguarding of the integrity of their personhood. The first glaring illustration of such a history is the slave trade.

2.2.1 The Slave Trade

The enslavement of Africans in the modern era began with the Portuguese in mid 15th century (Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopaedia 1986: 17-18) and lasted for three and half centuries (Paris

¹⁴ This term has gained greater currency in recent years, and describes negative feelings both of western countries towards Africa, and of African countries towards themselves, resulting from the many socio-economic problems associated with the continent.

2001:24). Spain, England, France, Holland, Denmark and the American colonies all entered the trade at various periods.

Paris (2001:24), an African-American and therefore himself a descendant of slave parents, talks of this trade in human 'cargo' as 'the European crime against humanity' in which

approximately 25 million Africans were stolen from their homeland, packed like sardines into the bellies of slave ships and after suffering the hell of the so-called 'middle passage', were sold on auction blocks to the highest bidder.

Although this was not the first time that slavery was practised, it was indeed the first time that this was associated with race. As Bosch (1991:227) says:

In the ancient Roman Empire as well as medieval Europe slavery had little to do with race. After the 'discovery' of the non-western world beyond the Muslim territories this changed; henceforth slaves could only be people of color. The fact that they were different made it possible for the victorious westerners to regard them as inferior. ... It has been estimated that the number of slaves sold to European colonies amounted to between twenty and forty million. And all along the (assumed) superiority of westerners over all others became more and more firmly entrenched and regarded as axiomatic.

This brief overview reveals a very inhuman way in which Africans were treated by western countries – despite the fact that such countries had by now had an entrenched Christian (both Catholic and Protestant) tradition. This inhumanity, quite apart from its brutal physical side, went to the very core of African identity. It turned Africans into saleable cargo, highly sought after on the auction floors. Even where they might still be regarded by some as human beings their 'inferiority' to westerners would be taken for granted.

This is not the whole story, however. Slavery had its own ambivalent side as far as African identity was concerned. In the first place, according to Mazrui (1986:107-109) it helped to awaken the Africans to the fact that they were a distinct (id)entity. After all, they were being targeted for this trade *because* they were somehow different from those who were to benefit from their labour. The same point holds true for colonialism, the next big phase in Africa's contact with the West. Such historical developments created an awareness of difference, and as will be argued in the next chapter, such an awareness of difference is an essential part of the feeling of identity.

The slave trade did something more for the identity of at least those Africans who were actually taken into slavery. It gave them an awareness of the spiritual resources they already had as Africans to be able to resist and survive their ordeal. According to Paris (2001:24):

The lamentations and longings of African souls were expressed in word, song, music, dance and story. The spirituality of the people appeared in each of those genres. In fact, every creative activity expressed in some way or other their communion with God and God's realm of spirits – the primary source of their power to endure, resist and transcend the evil they experienced.

These slaves therefore became aware of an identity that transcended their tribal origins, and the fact that their Africanness had already endowed them with the power to survive. This insight might legitimately be extended to those who survived the European onslaught while they remained on the continent.

For African theologians slavery and colonialism were to add potency to the question: 'Who are we? Can we call ourselves Christians when those who enslaved and colonized us also purported to be Christians? When you adopt a religion brought to you by oppressors can you then still maintain your Africanness?' These questions are already anticipating what is to come. We must, however, add to their weight by considering colonialism as another issue forming a rich background to the African quest for identity.

2.2.2 Imperialism and colonialism

When the slave trade came to an end, Africa's relationship with the West was characterised by imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. It would be useful therefore to give an exposition of these terms and how they relate to the quest for identity.

According to the Collins Pocket English Dictionary a *colony* is 'a territory occupied by a *colony*', that is a 'group of people who settle in a new country but remain under the rule of their homeland'. This then gives rise to the concept of 'colonialism' which the *New Oxford Dictionary* defines as 'the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically'. We can expand the dictionary definition in the light of history to talk about colonialism as the policy which was adopted by western countries of forcibly or cunningly gaining and maintaining political hegemony and economic control over other territories and their peoples. This usually included maintaining a military presence and exerting

cultural pressure upon colonies, which made the cultures of the colonising powers the norm for judging levels of civilisation. The colonized were defined, *inter alia*, as barbaric, inferior and uncivilized savages. The closer the colonised came to the culture of the colonisers, the more civilised they were judged to be. Thus colonialism encouraged self-deprecation on the part of the colonised.

Imperialism is inseparable from colonialism. The *New Oxford Dictionary* defines it as the ‘policy of extending a country’s power and influence through colonization, use of military force or other means’. For our purposes we will take imperialism as the ideology that motivates and justifies colonialism, which in turn is the subjugation of other peoples under the hegemony of the metropolis. British imperialism was justified on the basis of the three Cs – commerce, civilisation and Christianity. The motive of commerce was not the upliftment of the wider empire but for the benefit of the metropolis. Civilisation, as already explained above, presupposed a negative judgement of non-westerners as being uncultured, uncivilised or primitive. Christianity became a vehicle for civilising those peoples, in the sense of westernising them. Implied in the above brief exposition is the issue of ‘colonization of consciousness’ which Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) say a great deal about and is summarized in chapter one of this thesis.

Gradually the quest for identity in the face of colonial domination took the form of nationalism. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines *nationalism* as ‘patriotic feeling, principles or efforts; a policy of national independence’. This definition implies a strong feeling of identity with and loyalty towards one’s people and one’s culture accompanied by a need for self-determination and ownership of the land of one’s birth, especially where this was once denied as in the case of colonialism. People sharing common backgrounds and who are experiencing common circumstances within a common territory come to share a sentiment of loyalty to the nation, the unity that bonds them and identifies them as separate and different to other nations. Such commonalities which produce the consciousness of nationhood included race, language, historical experience, economic and political creeds and even common enemies.

In the part of Africa which is our concern many nations are made up of two or more ethnic groups with diverse backgrounds. Yet the common race consciousness and the common historical experience of oppression generated state nationalisms which gave impetus to uprisings and wars of

independence. The common racial consciousness and historical experience of oppression went beyond states to embrace Pan-African nationalism.

Our analysis so far shows that nationalism and Pan-Africanism as a quest for African identity came as a reaction to imperialist and colonialist domination. It is a great paradox of African history that external domination whose strategy included the 'colonization of consciousness' at the psychological level (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991) and 'divide-and-rule' on the organizational level (Mazrui 1986) should in fact have become the catalyst for African identity and African unity. Mazrui in particular (1986:107) points out that colonialism which was 'closely linked to that process of fragmentation which created conflicting identities' also 'inadvertently fostered Pan-Africanism as a consequence'. As an example, 'Nyerere was known to argue in a way which suggested that if the imperialists divided (as a policy] in order to rule, they also united (in effect) by the very act of ruling' (Mazrui 1986:108) It was this very external rule that created among Africans the 'sentiment of oneness.' From this Mazrui (:109) concludes that 'Europe's supreme gift to Africa is neither Christianity nor western civilisation — it is African identity.' It was an identity that in turn empowered the Africans to successfully fight against colonialism so that, beginning with Ghana in 1957, one country after another achieved independence from colonial rule.

In describing the background to the quest for identity, we have so far made passing references to the missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries. In view of our focus in this thesis on the role of African Theology in this quest, this missionary background requires special attention, a matter to which we now turn.

2.2.3 Missionary Involvement and western Value Setting

The catalytic role of the 19th and 20th century missionaries to the quest for identity in African Theology arises from four considerations. Firstly, in people's perceptions and in reality they were inseparable from colonialism. Secondly, they brought with them negative images of Africa. Thirdly, some of their motives were questionable. Fourthly, some of their methods were questionable. We look at each of these factors in turn.

The link between missionary work and colonialism has been articulated by several writers, from non-Christian as well as Christian traditions, representing various interrelated disciplines such as historical anthropology (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991), postcolonial biblical criticism (Dube 2000),

African Theology (Bediako 1992) and Missiology (Bosch 1991). With reference to the colonization of the Tswana of South Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991 (:xi) classify the LMS among 'the earliest footsoldiers of British colonialism'. That this also applied to other colonial situations in Africa is clear from what Bosch (1991:304) says:

As it became customary for British missionaries to labor in British colonies, French missionaries in French colonies, and German missionaries in German colonies, it was only natural for these missionaries to be regarded as both vanguard and rearguard for the colonial powers. ... Whether they liked it or not, the missionaries became pioneers of western imperialistic expansion.

The missionaries themselves gave weight to this perception by at times petitioning the governments of their home countries to extend protectorates to areas where the missionaries were working, 'often with the argument that unless this happened, a rival colonial power might annex the territory' (Bosch 1991:305). This was so much so, according to Bosch (:305) that the thinking of that time was that 'to colonize is to missionize' and vice versa. In other words '[t]he propagation of the faith and colonial policies became so intertwined that it was often hard to distinguish the one from the other' (228).

The second factor has to do with the images of Africa that the missionaries brought with them to the continent, images that were to affect both their motives and their methods. Bediako (1992:225-228) explains that the missionaries who came to Africa were already conditioned by the fact that until the 19th and 20th century missionary era the West's experience of Africa had been in the context of the slave trade. That alone had fixed in the missionary mind an inferior image of the Africans. Furthermore, the belief in the Great Chain of Being had put Africans as the lowest category of human beings following 'White, 'Red' and 'Yellow' races (:227). Their 'racial, social and cultural inferiority to European peoples' (:226) was taken for granted. In terms of religion there was also a fourfold division that put Africans in the worst category:

In the fourfold division of 'Christian, Jewish, Mahometan, Pagan' the fourth category was in a class of its own for being devoid of monotheism, a major consideration in the test of religion. From what was known of the peoples of Asia and Africa, they came within the category of pagan. However, whilst the Indians and the Chinese could be accounted 'civilised' pagans by virtue of being literate, Africans were believed to be without literature, arts, sciences, government, laws, and also cannibalistic and naked, and so were reckoned to be savage and barbarous pagans, '... as destitute of civilisation as they are of true religion'. These ideas formed part of the stock of knowledge and persisted in the intellectual climate of Europe well

into the nineteenth century, when they became fused with evolutionary and racial theories of human achievement, civilisation, history and progress.

(Bediako 1992:229f).

In sum, the image of Africa that missionaries brought was one of being uncivilized heathens, with no culture, and with religions devoid of any monotheistic conception of God. Everything about pre-Christian Africa was therefore regarded as being 'either harmful or at best valueless', and Africans converted from paganism would be taken as a '*tabula rasa* on which a wholly new religious psychology was somehow to be imprinted' (Bediako 1992:226).

This leads us to the third consideration: that of missionary motives. In the light of the foregoing, Bosch (1991) is right in saying that missionary motives included some questionable ones. One such motive was a cultural one – imparting in the poor Africans a superior culture, in fact civilizing them:

Small wonder that, particularly in the nineteenth century, the adjective 'poor' was increasingly used to qualify the noun 'heathen'. ... The patent needs of the 'poor heathen' became one of the strongest arguments in favour of mission. The glory of God as missionary motive had first been superseded by the emphasis on his love. Now there was yet another shift in motivation – from the depth of God's love to the depth of fallen humanity's pitiable state. Love had deteriorated into patronizing charity.

(Bosch 1991:290)

The project of 'civilizing' the heathen Africans was taken as part of the West's 'manifest destiny'. Bosch (1991:298) explains this as the 'the conviction that God, in his providence, had chosen the western nations, because of their unique qualities, to be the standard-bearers of his cause even to the uttermost ends of the world'. This meant that the general cultural superiority of the West became intermingled with the missionaries' religious superiority. Such a combination would ensure that the 'reshaping of the entire world in the image of the West' (:292) would be taken for granted, the missionaries remaining 'blind to their own ethnocentrism' (:294). According to Bediako (1992:228), the Christianizing and civilizing motives became inseparable: 'Since the technical and cultural achievements of Europe were now generally and confidently identified as the fruits of Christianity, it seemed appropriate that to effect the salvation of Africa, Africans must be given the total package of Christianity and (European) civilisation'.

The above discussion also suggests yet another missionary motive: the creation of docile subjects for the colonizing powers. Bosch (1991:306) describes how the colonial state enforced 'physical obedience with the aid of punishment and laws' while the mission secured 'the inward servility and devotion of the natives'. This can best be seen in the discussion of the fourth area, that of missionary methods.

Comaroff and Comaroff 1991 (:6) call the LMS 'the most active cultural agents of empire, being driven by the explicit aim of reconstructing the "native" world in the name of God and European civilization'. The process of doing this, as discussed above, was the 'colonization of consciousness'. Waruta (2000::129) adds weight to what they Comaroffs say on this issue through his description of how the missionaries approached the task of educating the Africans:

The missionaries developed an education system according to their own cultural, theological and philosophical backgrounds. Their educational systems were actually meant to create a new African in the missionary's own cultural, theological and philosophical image. Culturally, the missionaries believed that they represented a superior culture to be swallowed by their students in total. Everything African was regarded primitive, dirty or barbaric. Everything European was to be imitated as superior, progressive and noble.

It is a missionary approach such as this that makes Dube (2000:14) assert that 'mission understood as a westernization process in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was inseparable from European cultural imperialism.'

In fairness it needs to be said that the above exposition of the missionaries' association with colonialism, their preconceived image of Africa, their motives and methods does not articulate the whole story. Had the purpose of this thesis been a general evaluation of missionary work a lot that is positive in missionary work would have needed to be said. Our purpose here has been to select those features of missionary work that provide a background to the quest for identity in Africa. What we have selected provides that background in two ways.

Firstly, the missionary factor and the general western value-setting in fact, and ironically, stimulated the quest for African identity in the very African population that was the target of westernization. western value-setting, as we have said above, meant that the 'primitive' Africans were to be 'civilized' as part of the western 'manifest destiny'. Among other things this meant that they had to be given a western education, couched in the languages of the colonial powers. One of the

unintended effects of this is that Africans were henceforth equipped with linguistic and literary tools to be able to communicate with one another. Given the fact that Africa's land mass consisted of hundreds of distinct tribal groups, it took the western value-setting we have been describing to create the feeling among Africans of belonging to one another. Apart from the language factor, western value setting equipped Africans with ideological tools in their quest for identity. The missionary 'gospel' was one of equality before God; the western values included prosperity through educational advancement. In that way:

It is a process in which the 'savages' of colonialism are ushered, by earnest Protestant evangelists, into the revelation of their own misery, are promised salvation through self-discovery and civilization, and are drawn into a conversation with the culture of modern capitalism – only to find themselves enmeshed, willingly or not, in its order of signs and values, interests and passions, wants and needs. Even the established modes of protest open to them speak in ringing Christian terms – terms like civil rights, civilized liberties, freedom of conscience.

(Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:xii)

The ambiguities of western value-setting are adequately captured in those words by the Comaroffs. While Africans were indeed westernized, they were also given tools to fight against western domination. It is not surprising that the first generation of African leaders who were prominent in the struggle against colonialism and who assumed the presidency of their countries after independence were mainly products of mission churches. Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Hastings Banda of Malawi, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and a whole host of first generation presidents of various African countries were educated in 'mission' schools.

Secondly the missionary factor and western value-setting account for the agenda at least of the early indigenous theology in Africa. Chapter four will make clear that the agenda of theologies of Idowu and Mbiti, among others, was to overcome the negative effects of western ethnocentrism and to demonstrate the value of pre-Christian African religions and traditions. That is why, according to Bediako (1992), such theologies should be designated under the category of the theology of 'identity'.

So much for historical background. The quest for identity in Africa, however, also finds its continuing momentum in current affairs, particularly Africa's marginalization in the New World Order.

2.3 MARGINALIZATION OF AFRICA IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

In a previous section we talked about the western impact on Africa generating African nationalism which in turn led to the struggle for independence from colonialism. The formal end to colonialism, however, did not hail the end of the struggle of the formerly colonised countries. *Neo-colonialism* is a term used to describe the indirect forms of domination and control by the western powers over developing countries following the end of formal colonialism. According to Dube (2000:48-49) neo-colonialism in the New World Order is just a new form, a mutation, that allows the persistence of the old imperialistic motive. The *New Oxford Dictionary* defines *neo-colonialism* as 'the use of economic, political, cultural or other pressures to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies'. On the economic front western powers maintain control over developing nations through the use of Transnational Corporations. On the cultural front neo-colonialism maintains a hold over subject nations through a control of their minds and preferences. Whereas Britain, France, Spain and Portugal were the main perpetrators of colonialism, the USA is now probably the largest neo-coloniser through wholesale export of culture, technological trends and Transnational Corporations. This makes the quest for identity and empowerment in Africa a continuing process.

Neo-colonialism, with its consequent marginalization of Africa, is a strong feature of the New World Order. The mix that constitutes the 'New World Order', according to Maluleke (1996:38, note 26) includes 'the disintegration of the USSR, with its numerous direct and indirect consequences, the demise of apartheid, the reunification of Germany, the moves to create a "unitary" Europe, and the multiplication of "democratic" governments in several Third World countries.' The term 'globalization' is commonly used to capture the essence of the New World Order. Magesa (2000) correctly captures the main feature of globalization as being western domination, characterised by 'Euro-American ethnocentrism and dominance' (:158). The impact of this globalization on Africa is considerable. Here we examine two features which particularly stand out: economic marginalization and cultural domination.

We look first at economic marginalization and its devastating social consequences for Africa. Referring to globalization Oduyoye (2001:19) laments 'the replacement of cross-continent slavery with keeping Africans in Africa to slave for the building of European economies'. She continues (:19): 'With globalisation, Africa's economic marginalisation seems complete. The only way of

survival offered to the people of the continent is to continue to use their natural resources to benefit Europe'. This kind of analysis is echoed by Magesa (2000:152) who describes the nature and effects on Africa of western dominance in the New World Order:

It means that with only one giant politico-economic coalition on the world scene, differing systems of thought on sociopolitical-economic organization from the 'non-aligned' countries, if marginalized by bipolarity before, will be even much more so in the future

Magesa goes on to illustrate this fact by referring to Africa's enormous debt crisis which forces African countries to submit to the will of the creditors. What results from all this, says Magesa (2000:152) are 'chains of poverty and dependency reminiscent of slavery and colonialism'. For Paris (2001:24) the neo-colonialism which characterizes the New World Order is a

a synonym for economic dependency, political instability and systemic racism. In a world-wide market place of opportunity, African peoples still lack the necessary conditions for adequate access to the means for a viable human life. Wherever they appear in sizeable numbers, disproportionate percentages of African peoples suffer every kind of deprivation and impoverishment.

It is clear from the voices quoted above that although globalization came with a promise of prosperity for all, it has in fact brought more poverty to Africa. The reasons for this are complex and their elucidation is not part of the purpose of this thesis. They obviously include sheer greed, whereby the powerful western countries exploit the vulnerable African and other Third World countries. Another reason, more relevant to this thesis, is that globalization is a way of refashioning the whole world in the image of the West – a continuation of the goals of colonialism in a new guise. The result is that Africa is being forced to adopt political and economic systems developed in the West but without the psychological and cultural roots necessary to sustain those systems. According to Tandon (2000:internet) 'the system of democracy developed by the West has many defects. We need to try other forms of democracy, such as participatory or communitarian forms'. Furthermore what Mazrui (1986:14) saw before the New World Order had been born has now been intensified:

The kind of capitalism which was transferred to Africa was itself shallow. western consumption patterns were transferred more effectively than western production techniques. western tastes were acquired more quickly than western skills, the profit motive was adopted without the efficient calculus of entrepreneurship, and capitalist greed was internalised sooner than capitalist discipline.

The poverty generated for Africa under the New World Order has other terrible social consequences including crime, disease and conflict. Tandon (2000:internet), an economics Professor from Uganda sums up the situation well:

Even as its proponents speak of increased prosperity and investment confidence, the process of globalisation breeds violence and conflict when it continues to produce inequality, poverty, environmental destruction and unprecedented concentration of economic power for a few while the majority are marginalised and excluded. Africa is a victim of this sad phenomenon of globalisation.

Tandon then proceeds to describe violence in Africa as a consequence of globalization. He attacks as inadequate the 'dominant theory [that] tends to emphasise the *internal* factors within a nation as the root causes' and advances as the main cause of conflict, 'exploitation by foreign capital under conditions of free market'. He argues that the 'big monopolies and oligopolies that control the markets' create conditions of unequal trade relationships leading to the poverty that then generate violence in Africa. Poverty and the debt burden, argues Tandon, lead to a 'struggle for resources' which 'manifests itself in the struggle for state power'. The capitalist ideology of the free market system is a 'myth' that legitimizes the unequal exchange between what Africa contributes to the market and what it receives in return. Africa then becomes 'weak and impoverished because its rich natural resources are taken away from the continent at a fraction of their value'.

The economic marginalization described above has already intimated the cultural marginalization that accompanied the economic marginalization. Because of the West's economic power over Africa, the information super-highway brings more images of the West to Africa than the reverse. Television and the internet are the biggest channels by which the West is able to prescribe to Africa human values such as consumerism and individualism. In this way Africa is slowly but surely being shaped in the image of the West.

Two questions arise from our survey of globalization. Firstly, what is its impact on African identity? Secondly, what response has globalization triggered in Africans as they define their identity in the face of overwhelming global odds?

One point of view adopted in this thesis is that any kind of domination or oppression has a double effect on the identity of the oppressed. Firstly, it has the effect of robbing them of their authentic identity – of making them live on borrowed and therefore inauthentic identity. Secondly, oppression

will sooner or later, directly and indirectly lead to resistance and an asserting of the very identity which oppression tries to steal. The western domination under globalization has this double effect on the identity of Africans – effects which we again saw demonstrated in earlier and cruder forms of oppression such as slavery and colonialism.

Magesa (1998:320-332) is right in saying that oppression, quite apart from any harmful physical, political or economic effects it might have, robs the oppressed of their ability to define themselves and their reality. The context of his article is ‘Africa’s struggle for self-definition during a time of globalisation’. In it he addresses different aspects of globalization – economic, political, social and religious. In each of these aspects he seeks to counter globalization’s negative impact on African identity. Advancing the same argument in another article Magesa (2000:161) sees the major problem with globalization as being its ‘unipolar’ characteristic, hence essentially a world order of ‘uniformity and conformity’ which is ‘extremely amenable to the continual subjugation of Africa’. Magesa is pointing to the fact that in the globalized world order Africa is expected to be western in political, economic and social outlook, and therefore to live on borrowed identity. Kā Mana (2001:12) describes this entrapment of Africa in a westernized global system as a dragnet:

Africa is in the dragnet. We have left our own world to enter the world imposed on us by others. Africans are no longer sold into slavery, nor are they any more under colonial rule. Yet Africa suffers under an economic captivity. The west dictates the terms for development. Nations are forced to accept western prescriptions, such as structural adjustment programmes, western definitions of good governance, in the struggle against poverty. Yet so long as African nations are in the dragnet, we get deeper into debt and we have only an illusion of development.

Kā Mana is giving us a good indication here that identity issues include politics, economics and all other areas of life. Having left its own world of economics and politics and entered into the dragnet – a world imposed by others – Africa finds itself in a worse predicament than before. That predicament may include Africans reading all reality with western spectacles. Tutu (1997:43-44) is right in saying that this is a form of brainwashing:

Too many of us have been brainwashed effectively into thinking that the westerners’ value system and categories are of universal validity. We are too much concerned to maintain standards which Cambridge or Harvard or Montpellier have set, even when these are utterly inappropriate for our situations. We are still too docile and look to the metropolis for approval to do our theology, for instance, in a way that would meet with the approval of the West.

So far we have described the impact of the oppression of globalization on the identity of Africans. In so doing we have already touched on the second area of consideration – how Africans are responding to this threat to their identity. They are firstly naming the enemy. In the words of the Comaroffs considered above, they are demonstrating a ‘consciousness of colonization’. This naming the enemy is a powerful form of resistance, for, as we saw earlier, resistance which takes symbolic form is as potent as the resistance which may take physical or organizational form.

Africans are doing more than symbolically protesting at globalized oppression. They are also proposing organizational strategies for survival – strategies which are truer to African identity. For example, Tandon (2000:internet) insists that

Whilst it is impossible to return to the past, there are valuable insights that the past provides (such as the manner in which, in pre-colonial times, the people of Rwanda and of Somalia used to resolve conflicts amongst themselves), that could be the starting point for self-generated and endogenous institution-building. Only then will Africa move from violence to enduring peace with justice.

Tandon therefore calls for ‘partial de-linking, and partial re-negotiations of the terms of integration into the world market’ and for ‘imaginative alternative forms of production at the economic level and governance at the political level’. Paris (2001:25) makes a strong plea for independence from white control on the premises that ‘[w]herever there have been black churches or organisations not fully owned and controlled by blacks, whether in the Caribbean, the United States or Canada, strong prophetic, political and nationalist leadership rarely developed’. What is needed for the thriving of black identity and leadership is a ‘spiritual context of freedom and independence’. It is that freedom and independence that will make blacks rise above the role of being mere ‘custodians’ of white initiated ‘sacred traditions’ and to ‘empower or embolden their people to struggle against the principal cause of their suffering.’

The *practicality* of what Kā Mana, Tandon, Paris and others are proposing in the light of the domination of Africa by the West in the New World Order could be a moot point of discussion in another context. Our purpose here has been to illustrate from their views that oppression gives rise to resistance. Oppression does not just create victims; it also turns victims into agents of their own liberation. At the same time, victims of oppression sometimes find themselves implicated in their own oppression, a point we now turn to in the next section.

2.4 THE AFRICAN IDENTITY CRISIS: SOME SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS

In our discussion so far in this chapter, the quest for identity has been portrayed as arising from externally inflicted wounds – slavery, colonialism and the neo-colonialism that characterises the New World Order. There is a sense, however, in which the quest for identity also arises from self-inflicted wounds. We use here two areas to illustrate this theme: conflict and governance.

Talking about conflict in Africa, Tandon (2000:internet) is right in saying that ‘over the years the nature of conflicts in Africa has changed. The anti-colonial wars and border conflicts have given way, by and large, to intra-state, or civil, wars’. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo in which rival parties are being assisted by Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola on the one hand, and Rwanda and Uganda on the other hand stand as embarrassing examples of Africa’s failure to solve its own problems. Tandon’s analysis, summarized in the previous section, has tended to blame the oppressive forces of globalization for the poverty and violence that have become endemic in Africa. To a large measure Tandon defends his thesis very well. However, in another sense Africans have to take responsibility for allowing western powers to manipulate them instead of merely adopting a victims mentality as his article tends to encourage.

A better perspective, and one that touches on the issue of identity, is that offered by Mazrui (1986:108-109):

When Africans decide to unite against colonialism and racism, they stand a better chance of sustaining that unity and sometimes achieving really substantive results. Pan-Africanism of liberation, concerned with gaining independence for Africa and ending white minority rule, has basically been a success story. On the other hand, when Africans decide to unite for the sake of economic development or shared regional facilities and utilities, unity is less likely to be sustained. Post-colonial African history is littered with the debris of economic communities and common markets and indeed sometimes political unions which did not last very long. This includes the most promising economic community of them all at the time it was launched, the East African Community involving Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. At some levels it was even more integrated than the European Economic Community. But one by one the legs of solidarity were removed — and the table of solidarity finally collapsed in 1977. Pan-Africanism of integration, of uniting for Africa’s development rather than Africa’s liberation, has basically been a failure.

Indeed unity for Africa’s development has so far proved to be an insurmountable problem. It is rather ironical that the ‘sense of commitment to the cause of Africa is stronger when Africans are

conscious of external threats than when they are left on their own' (Mazrui 1986:109). This underscores the point made earlier that it took external agencies like slavery and colonialism to instil in Africans their sense of identity and unity. The welcome liberation from those agencies has left Africans not only divided but in various states of conflict which exacerbate other existing problems like poverty and disease. The point needs to be underscored that external agencies of domination are not innocent when it comes to some of the underlying causes of conflict in Africa. The divide-and-rule strategy of colonialism has merely taken new and subtler forms. Nevertheless if the behaviour of Africans becomes determined by external forces this would point to a fragile identity which in turn would point to the quest for identity as an unfinished project.

The second self-inflicted wound we need to examine is governance. One cannot read Paul Gifford's well-researched *African Christianity* (1998) without coming to a realization that Africa is in a sorry state of affairs. Socio-political factors like neo-patrimonialism and other forms of corruption and maladministration in Africa have combined with the historical factors we have already examined to give rise to a severe case of 'Afropessimism' (Gifford 1998:324). These factors have combined to make many ask of Africa the same kind of question that Nathaniel asked to his brother Philip: 'Can anything good come out of Africa (John 1:46)? Is there something inferior about being African to make so much externally and internally generated suffering evident on the continent?

One of the objects of this thesis is to enquire into how the various African theologies have dealt with these identity issues, and how this quest for identity is in itself a mission of empowerment for Africans. This particular chapter, however, tries to situate this quest within a broader framework of the quest for identity in Africa as a whole.

2.5 IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN AFRICA

Having looked at the external and internal factors that provide a background for the quest for identity in Africa, it is now time to look at the actual manifestations of the identity crisis and how it is reflected both outside the Christian faith and within it.

2.5.1 The quest for identity outside the Christian faith

Outside the Christian faith there are many interesting manifestations of the identity crisis, and a quest for identity in Africa. Here we will only need to look at examples coming from the media, and

from the world of politics. Other African manifestations of the quest for identity such the Black Consciousness Movement, Négritude, postcolonialism criticism, African religions and philosophy will be considered in the next chapter where the concept of *identity* itself will be our main focus.

African media and the quest for identity

For our example of public media reflecting an identity crisis and a quest for identity, we turn to Zimbabwe which has, since the year 2000 played a leading role in Africa in the area of reclaiming the African heritage. While the most dramatic and most widely publicised example of this has been the reclaiming of the heritage of land¹⁵, the media has been reflecting the debate concerning other aspects of the African heritage. Even when the debate sometimes becomes acrimonious, it presupposes a general agreement that Zimbabwean Africans have lost much of their traditional heritage and way of life. What is bitterly contested is whether to accept this as an expected outcome of cultural change and the 'global village' in which we now live or to reassert 'traditional' African values, however those may be defined.

We begin with a television series¹⁶ that is still currently (as of June 2002) running. The English version of it is called 'National Ethos' and features Claudius Mararike, a University of Zimbabwe lecturer in the department of Social Sciences who is the programme presenter. His regular guests are Gukwe Vimbai Chivaura (UZ lecturer in the Department of English) and Tafataona Mahoso (chairman of the Zimbabwe Media Ethics Committee). A Shona version facilitated by more or less the same people is called *Nhaka yedu*¹⁷. The main purpose of these programmes is to say to the Zimbabweans: 'Let us reclaim our lost national heritage!' The discussants are obviously carefully

¹⁵ There is a widespread view in many international media that Zimbabwe's land reform programme was a ploy by the ZANU-PF party to win the 2000 parliamentary elections and the 2002 presidential election in the wake of the rise of the MDC – the first opposition party since independence in 1980 to have a realistic chance of unseating the ruling party. The merits or otherwise of this argument are not the point at issue here. What cannot be disputed is the fact that land is at the heart of the Zimbabwean African heritage and identity and that land dispossession was one of the main causes of the first (1890) and the second (1970-1980) wars of liberation popularly known in Zimbabwe as *chimurenga*.

¹⁶ 'Zimbabwe Television' which flights these programmes is government controlled and its views mainly reflect those of the ruling ZANU-PF party.

¹⁷ *Nhaka yedu* is a Shona expression for 'our heritage'.

chosen to present this one view, an issue which makes the outcome of all their discussions rather predictable. Their consensus includes the following points¹⁸:

- Our geographical, intellectual and cultural space has been occupied by westerners. Zimbabwe's clash with European countries, the four European members of the Commonwealth and USA are a result of Zimbabwe's attempt to reclaim her space and the resistance of occupying forces which are interested in securing the European interests in Zimbabwe.
- These spaces are inter-related. When you are standing on colonised geometric space it will affect how you think (intellectual) and how you live (cultural). Therefore liberation must be total. We cannot be intellectually and culturally free unless we also take possession of the land; possessing the land is not enough unless we also become intellectually and culturally free.
- The totality of the African space is incompatible with European space. One example they gave is traditional African education which takes the form of a *dare* (a circular arrangement which assumes mutual sharing as opposed to the western classroom arrangement which assumes the dominance of the teacher with the rest having to be listeners). They point out that general cultural incompatibility leads to contradictory assumptions and therefore misunderstandings. For example the African culture of hospitality (accommodating visitors) led Rhodes to believe that he had been given title deeds to our land by king Lobengula. The incompatibility between the two spaces must also be taken to include incompatibility between Christianity (western) and African Traditional Religions.
- The purpose of studying history must be a re-discovery of who we are and a return to our cultural roots.

This cultural revivalism is also reflected in a stinging *Daily News*¹⁹ editorial of 12 August 1999. It had a catchy and suggestive heading: '*Identity crisis worsening*'. The first five paragraphs capture the essence of the whole editorial which is too long to reproduce here:

¹⁸ This summary reflects the discussions on this programme which took place over the period February to May 2002. This is the period just before and after the March 9-11 presidential election when the Zimbabwean land issue was at its most intense.

¹⁹ The *Daily News* is Zimbabwe's only daily independent newspaper whose views are generally pro-opposition and highly critical of the ZANU-PF government.

THE weekend Press report that home-owners in the new suburbs of Warren Park North and New Marlborough have petitioned the City Council to scrap Shona street names and replace them with English ones would be amusing, if it was not so tragic.

It is tragic for its negative implications on our cultural identity as Africans. Coming as the suggestion does, from adult black men and women, and nearly 20 years into independence, the petition speaks volumes about our baffling and strenuous efforts to reject our true identity.

These efforts at denial have turned the Shona people, in particular, into the shameful butt of derisive jokes in the region. They are chided -perhaps deservedly so – and ‘referred to by the Ndebele as *othathekhile*, loosely meaning, ‘a spineless people’.

And although it would still have been a display of crass stupidity for anyone to write such a petition as long as they are in Zimbabwe, it would have made some sense if the call had come from people of British descent. Then we would have asked, with a hearty laugh: “Where do these people think they are – in Britain? To the misguided residents who now have the dubious honour of having made absolute fools of all Shona people, we can only ask: ‘Who do they think they are – Black Englishmen?’

There exists among the indigenous population of this country, particularly the Shona, an identity crisis of mammoth proportions - a problem which is receiving curiously little attention from the government.

The editorial proceeds to ridicule the propensity of Shona people to continue giving their children English names, to speak only in English even in their own homes and to dress in a western style at international conferences. It notes that devaluing African culture in favour of foreign cultures undermines the very purpose of the costly war of independence and says: ‘It is as if some of us made the supreme sacrifice to achieve the freedom to de-Africanise ourselves and make ourselves even more English than the English’.

This sample of opinions shows that cultural revivalists in Zimbabwe are disturbed by the domination of westernism. Yet, ironically, the same sample shows that these same cultural revivalists are caught in the ‘dragnet’ of westernism, to recall Kā Mana ’s vivid image. In spite of the fact that language is the highest reflection of cultural values, the cultural revivalists find themselves compelled to use the medium of English in order to reach the widest audience. One of the panelists on the television programme referred to is a professor of English at the UZ! We note also how the most articulate cultural revivalists are themselves highly educated in the western system of education, and utilize the western media to spread their message. This reflects a schizophrenic love-hate relationship with the West – Africans wanting to assert their identity, but doing so mainly on European terms.

Interestingly it is Bill Saidi, the deputy editor of the same *Daily News* referred to above who on 5th June 2002 made a scathing attack on African revivalists, hence representing the view of those who advocate that cultural change, even in the western direction, should be accepted as a normal part of our globalized world. His article was suggestively entitled: ‘Now, will the real, real African please stand up?’ In this article Saidi attacks what he calls some African leaders’ obsession ‘to be so African that everything they ever learnt or loved about western culture is ostensibly obliterated from their personality’:

That obsession is hypocritical. Joseph Mobutu changed his name to Mobutu Sese Seko in a campaign in which he virtually ordered his compatriots to shed their European names and adopt authentic Zairean ones.

They did, in their millions, including my very favourite rhumba musician, Franco. Meanwhile, the authentic-named Mobutu Sese Seko continued to loot his country’s authentic wealth while his people, presumably very proud of their authentic names, watched helplessly as their children died, authentically, of hunger.

African leaders who are loudly anti-western sometimes show the chinks in their armour in very unusual ways: some are in love with French wines, if not French women, ordering both directly from France: others have their suits tailored by distinguished Italian tailors in Italy. Their wives shop exclusively at Harrods in London or in New York’s Fifth Avenue or Gucci in Rome, nowhere else. Others book seats well in advance to watch Test cricket at Lord’s in London. Still others have permanent prestigious seats at La Scala, the opera house in Milan.

Yet back home, they howl at their young people who love rap music, miniskirts and tight jeans and tattoos on their behinds.

Saidi proceeds to advocate for freedom, including freedom from poverty, as being the highest value, and one which should be seen as the most important reason for the war of liberation. This leads him to end with biting sarcasm: ‘Still, African leaders tell their people their authenticity will save them from poverty. Even George Speight²⁰ of Fiji would laugh at that’.

Saidi is fundamentally questioning the sort of ‘authenticity’ that calls for a return to ‘traditional’ cultural values because he perceives it as superficial. It does not solve Africa’s grave problem of poverty, and those who call for authenticity are betraying a taste for western values in many ways.

²⁰ George Speight, an ethnic Fijian, led a coup which overthrew Mahendra Chaudhry, the ethnic Indian prime minister of Fiji in May 2000 on the grounds that the interests of ethnic Fijians were not being sufficiently represented. Fijian Indians who constitute 44% of the population of Fiji control most of the commercial activities of the country while ethnic Fijians constitute most of the landowners. George Speight was later tried and found guilty of treason for which he is now serving a life sentence.

At the same time Saidi himself is also superficial in some aspects his analysis. He does not ask himself whether the failures and contradictions of those who call for authenticity must necessarily invalidate the concept of authenticity itself. There are doctors and teachers who fail to live by the ethics of their professions. Yet that does not invalidate the medical or the teaching profession. On a deeper level still, there are Christians who fail to live by the Christian standards. Again that does not invalidate the Christian faith. Nor does Saidi look at the example of Japanese and other Eastern nationalities who have authentically kept to their national traditions while also successfully adapting to the demands of the globalized economy.

Without intending to settle the above debate one way or the other, we have hopefully said enough to show that the issue of identity in Africa remains a highly contested one. The media is merely reflecting what is going on in the wider society.

If the media reflects the quest for identity at a popular level, African political leaders are now doing so more formally through the ideology of the African renaissance.

African renaissance and the quest for identity

From the discussions above it is clear that Afropessimism is generated by the many socio-political problems on the African continent. From being seen as the 'dark continent' in the 18th and the 19th centuries, Africa has now acquired the reputation (or is it the notoriety?) of being the continent worst affected by poverty, disease (particularly HIV-AIDS) and a host of consequent social ills.

In Africa, 340 million people, or half the population, live on less than US \$1 per day. The mortality rate of children under 5 years of age is 140 per 1000, and life expectancy at birth is only 54 years. Only 58 per cent of the population have access to safe water. The rate of illiteracy for people over 15 is 41 per cent. There are only 18 mainline telephones per 1000 people in Africa, compared with 146 for the world as a whole and 567 for high-income countries.

(Nepad 2001:1)

As for disease, Africa is known to be carrying nearly two-thirds of the world's HIV-AIDS infected population and the mortality rate arising from that cause alone. The picture is worsened by death arising from diseases of poverty such as malnutrition. The misrule, *coups d'état*, inter and intra-state conflicts which have generally characterised a number of African countries have added to the negative image of Africa.

All this has spurred African leaders, spearheaded by president Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, to embark on the ideology of the African renaissance whose programme of implementation is known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development – NEPAD²¹ for short.

The concept 'Renaissance' comes from a French word for 'rebirth' and describes the 15th

European transition from medieval times (popularly associated with the 'Dark Ages') to modern times (Columbia Encyclopedia 1993:2301). The rebirth or awakening that was ushered in by the Renaissance included an emphasis on education, the arts, philosophy and a general belief in the importance of the individual. The period is therefore associated with the rise of humanism which contrasted with the theocentric nature of medieval thinking (Chambers' Encyclopaedia 1959:598). The application of this concept to Africa was first mooted by 'a great Christian pan-Africanist of the 1920s, James Kwegyir Aggrey (of Gold Coast, now Ghana), whom Thabo Mbeki acknowledges as a source of his own inspiration' (ATF Conference Statement 2001:40).

The ideology of the African renaissance is meant to be both an inspiration and a challenge. It is meant to inspire hope in the future of Africa. If Europe awoke from the Dark Ages, developed industrially, banished poverty and generally became 'enlightened' then surely there must also be hope for Africa in this regard. But the idea of 'African renaissance' also poses a challenge to African countries. The renaissance does not come about simply by hoping that it will happen. It requires united action, hard work in the economic area, the elimination of Africa's costly conflicts, the rule of law and democratic governance (Nepad 2001).

How do these concepts associated with the African renaissance relate to the quest for African identity? Two observations will suffice. Firstly, as intimated above, 'African renaissance' is an attempt to remould Africa's image in a positive direction, thereby eliminating the Afropessimism (Dark Ages) associated with the continent. That the African renaissance and its Nepad programme are associated with a quest for identity is clear from the Nepad founding policy document (2001: 4):

Modern science recognises Africa as the cradle of humankind. As part of the process of reconstructing the identity and self-confidence of the peoples of Africa, it is necessary that this contribution to human existence be understood and valued by Africans themselves. Africa's status as the birthplace of humanity should be cherished by the whole world as the

²¹ This acronym has gained wide currency since its introduction and is therefore now commonly written as Nepad.

origin of all its peoples. Accordingly, the New Partnership for Africa's Development must preserve this common heritage and use it to build a universal understanding of the historic need to end the underdevelopment and marginalisation of the continent.

Closing the World Economic Forum's Africa Summit in Durban on 7th June 2002, Thabo Mbeki summed up this hope for a better African image when he said that Nepad is in the process of defining Africa differently from the way history has defined her in the last 500 years. It is still too early to assess the impact of the African renaissance and its Nepad programme. It certainly holds much hope for Africa. If it succeeds then it will reverse the negative trend observed by Mazrui (1986)²² that Africa achieves unity only when there is an external enemy to fight, but is unable to unite for its own development.

At the same time, a serious question has to be posed concerning the African renaissance, even at its early stages of development. Does the African renaissance seek to develop Africa in an African way or is it seeking to follow the trails of Europe? Nepad speeches and conference statements put a heavy emphasis on partnership for *economic* development with all other objectives being made to serve this overarching goal. The envisaged economics is the neo-liberal capitalism of the free market as *prescribed* by the Bretton Woods institutions – the World Bank and the IMF²³. There are initial indications that the partnership that is being sought with the West for Africa's development will only be achieved on terms set by the West, both in terms of economics and governance. In that case Africa may be co-operating in the project of remoulding it in the image of the West. If that proves to be the case, to what extent will this be an *African* renaissance? Moreover, is the underlying assumption correct that says that the more western Africa becomes the more *developed* it must be seen to be? There is a danger that *development* is being read in mainly economic (industrial, technological and monetary) terms. If Africa loses her spiritual values in the name of the African Renaissance, that would be a sad loss indeed. This is where the contribution of Christianity to the quest for identity in Africa should be seen as vital.

²² Mazrui's views on this and other issues to do with African identity will be the subject of fuller discussion in chapter three.

²³ Some people sarcastically refer to the IMF as the International Mother and Father to indicate their frustrations with its paternalistic prescriptions.

2.5.2 The quest for identity within Christianity generally

So far we have seen that the African context, both historically and in terms of its current socio-political positioning *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world has generated a quest for identity in the society as reflected in the media, and among African politicians as indicated by the ideology of the African renaissance. We now need to make a *preliminary* assessment of African Christianity's contribution to this quest. From chapter four we will be focussing on the contribution of African Christian *theology*, in its formal sense, to this quest. Our concern here is to look at two examples from African Christianity in general to the quest for identity. African Instituted Churches reflect some aspects of lived theology in Africa whose quest for identity would require a thesis on its own. Since this thesis is concerned with African Theology in its more formally understood, written sense we can only make a short summary of the contribution of the AICs and the moratorium debate to the quest for African Christian identity.

African Instituted Churches

African Indigenous Churches present perhaps the clearest example of how Christianity can be a potent force in the quest for African identity. Daneel (1987) is a recognised authority on these churches, and it is appropriate that we base our evaluation of these churches mainly on his work. Daneel calls them African *Independent* Churches to emphasise 'their independence in organization, leadership and religious expression from western-oriented historical (also called 'mainline') or mission churches' (:17). The word 'independent', however, has the unfortunate effect of making 'mission churches' the normative basis upon which the identity of other churches is determined, as if those churches which are not mission churches are deviations from the norm. For this reason we go along with Petersen (1995:15-17) in calling them African Instituted Churches²⁴. They are churches which have been initiated by Africans to enable Africans to experience the gospel in their own indigenous cultural context.

With these churches 'we are dealing with the very real and genuine *heartbeat of indigenized African Christianity*' (Daneel 1987:17, emphasis in the original). They represent African Christians who are 'unwilling to exchange African customs for western customs in order to be regarded as true Christians' (Nolan 1988:3). They arose because, in the perspective of Idowu (1965:43), 'the

²⁴ The expression 'African Initiated Churches' is equally acceptable and will be used interchangeably with 'African Instituted Churches' in this thesis.

prefabricated, imported liturgies' of the mainline churches were sterile and unable to reach the emotional depths which these African Christians expected. Spiritually hungry Christians looked to the church for satisfying food, but were instead fed 'to a great extent, on stuffs which were alien to their constitution. Thus it was that spiritual hunger inevitably led to spiritual revolt.' This indigenous Christianity, however, is also a result of the 'creativity and originality' of these churches and not just a result of their reaction to the mistake of missionaries and mission churches (Daneel 1987:19). It is their indigeneity that accounts for their rapid growth to '7000 groups with millions of followers' throughout Africa (:25). In South Africa alone, according to Nolan (1988:2f), 'they now represent some 30 per cent of the black population and about 31 per cent of all Christians'. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular led to a discovery of several aspects of the Christian faith which are compatible with African culture but which many missionaries had tended to conceal. For example 'there was in Scripture a spontaneity, a vitality and a dynamic which was apparently largely lacking in the rigid structure of the missionary agencies' (Daneel 1987:84f). After a thorough analysis of the causes behind the growth of AICs Daneel (1987:101) concludes:

The Independent Churches' real attraction for members and growth derive from their original creative attempts to relate the good news of the gospel in a meaningful and symbolically intelligible way to the innermost needs of Africa. In doing so they are in a process of, and have to a large extent already succeeded in, creating truly African *havens of belonging* (emphasis in the original).

The evidence of these churches being *indigenous* is therefore overwhelming. The difficult question to face, however, is whether these churches can also be characterised as *Christian*. Controversy rages over this question. Daneel (:180-188) analyses the views of people like Oosthuizen who refused to accord these groups normative Christian status on the alleged bases that Scripture is not central to their teachings, and that their leaders have usurped the role of Jesus as the Messiah. Daneel's rejects these criticisms of the AICs as being unnecessarily harsh and condemnatory (:186). His impression is that 'what is being evaluated is a caricature rather than the empirical facts' concerning these churches (:186f). When Sundkler and Martin made a sustained empirical study of these groups they radically altered their former negative evaluation of them and acknowledged them to be both legitimately Christian and contextually effective (:187f).

From all this it is reasonable to conclude that at least many of these churches have a genuine Christian thrust. In terms of Walls' analysis (1996:6-7) of the nature of the Christian faith, their

biggest success is in the area of the ‘indigenization principle’ – that of making the church a place to feel at home for their members. Walls (:7) expresses this principle as follows:

[I]t is of the essence of the Gospel that God accepts us as we are, on the ground of Christ’s work alone, not on the ground of what we have become or are trying to become... We are conditioned by a particular time and place, by our family and group and society, by ‘culture’ in fact. In Christ God accepts us together with our group relations; with that cultural conditioning that makes us feel at home in one part of human society and less at home in another.

In terms of this ‘indigenization principle’ the AICs must be commended for their style of worship and their church polity which are culturally appropriate and attractive to their members. They have made it possible for their members ‘to be Africans and Christians at the same time; to call the name of God in an atmosphere of spontaneous joy and cheerfulness; and to pray as Africans naturally would pray’ (Idowu 1965:44). In short they conform to the ‘socio-cultural norm’ which, as Petersen (1995:32) says, makes them acceptable on that level to Black theology, Liberation Theology and African theology:

Black theology with its norm of ‘the authenticity of black experience’; Liberation Theology with its norm of ‘the option for the poor’; and African Theology with its norm of the ‘authenticity of African culture and religion’, all agree – on the basis of these norms – that the African Indigenous Churches represent a necessary starting point, interlocutor, and site of reflection that is normative for the construction of any indigenous, contextual and liberatory South African theology.

The shortcoming of some of these churches, however, is in the other challenge – the ‘pilgrim principle’ which Walls (1996:8) explains as follows:

Not only does God in Christ take people as they are: He takes them in order to transform them into what He wants them to be. Along with the indigenising principle which makes his faith a place to feel at home, the Christian inherits the pilgrim principle, which whispers to him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.

Elsewhere Walls (1980:215) explains this as the principle of making the church ‘conform to standards outside itself – standards which can cut across anyone’s pattern, a process which reminds the Christian that he has no abiding city, no home on earth’. Some Christians in the ‘mainline’ churches have accused the AICs of syncretism because they perceive the AICs as compromising with unchristian cultural values and practices in the process of making their churches indigenous.

Mbiti (1969:236) who is generally sympathetic to AICs nevertheless says that '[s]ome of them have incorporated traditional practices which are clearly not Christian and which drown and reduce their Christianity to a very low level'. He, like so many other critics of AICs, does not spell out what these practices are. At the moment this therefore remains a perception lacking researched evidence and criteria as to what makes values and practices 'Christian'. What cannot be denied, however, is that the AICs are an illustration of the emergence of, and quest for, the African Christian identity.

Within the 'mainline' churches the moratorium drive, at least while it lasted, also presented evidence of a quest for Christian identity in a different key.

The moratorium debate

It was the identity issue that was at the centre of the moratorium debates that took centre stage in African ecumenical Christianity during the decade of the 1970s. Wakatama (1976) explains moratorium as the call for the withdrawal of missionary personnel and funds from Africa as a way of enabling the church in Africa to find its true identity. This moratorium call resulted from prolonged control of churches by missionaries and the alien cultural forms that accompanied the gospel.

Musasiwa (1990:119) explains that when missionaries planted churches in Africa they also created systems that tended to perpetuate their control of the churches. Leadership was maintained in the hands of the missionaries who employed African pastors and evangelists as their personal assistants. Such pastors, evangelists, teachers and other mission employees reported to the missionaries on their work and not to the churches with they pastored. Behind this control by missionaries lay the power of the dollar which the missionaries had and the Africans did not.

As for alien cultural forms missionaries felt that maintaining worship and other patterns based on their home churches was the best way to ensure that the churches they founded would maintain doctrinal purity so that they do not lapse into paganism.

The result was that, whether or nor the missionaries espoused 'indigenous principles', most mission churches retained a close formal similarity to the western churches that sponsored them, even if they were officially led, supported and propagated by nationals.

(Kraft & Wisely 1979:xxii)

Furthermore, the mission station approach was one of extracting converts from their natural environment, thereby anglicising them in the process of Christianising them. While the children were at mission schools, for example, they were taught directly and indirectly to despise their own culture as primitive, and to admire the western culture (Musasiwa 1990:122). An example of this is that there was a time in Zimbabwe when it was more popular to have an English name than a Shona or Ndebele one. Girls bought powerful skin lightening creams that destroyed pigments in an effort to make themselves as 'white' as possible. The sign of being educated was how well one could speak English, especially if one was able to use long words and even pretend not to understand one's own language. In one mission school this writer attended he was made a 'Shona monitor' whose job was to 'book' any students he discovered speaking in Shona and submit their names to the principal for Friday detention with hard labour.

Wakatama (1976:55-57) graphically illustrates the problem of the imposition of foreign cultural forms by the use of a story of what happened in Nigeria concerning 'the talking drum':

In Nigeria some evangelical Christians found themselves in serious conflict with the rest of the community. The village had a 'talking drum' which was the symbol of their unity. Whenever there was something of great importance, the elders of the village broadcast it over this drum to everybody.

After this drum was old and damaged the village decided to make a new one. The making of a new tribal drum is something of major significance in which all adults of the village are expected to participate by contributing money and food for the festival that goes with it. Everybody was involved in preparing for this important occasion in the life of the village. The Christians were conspicuous by their absence.

When the elders of the village asked them why they were not taking part, they said they were Christians and, therefore, would not participate in such heathen activities. This infuriated the elders who saw it, primarily, as a lack of patriotism and a rejection of the village authority. They demanded that Christians be ostracized since they thought themselves better than everybody else in the village.

The Christians saw themselves as faithful believers being persecuted for their faith. They received much encouragement from the missionaries who admired them for 'standing up against heathen worship'. The conflict between the Christians and the rest of the village was, therefore, heightened. Whereas before the village elders had respected the Christians and left them alone, they now saw them as a threat to their authority and to the unity of the village.

Wakatama then points out that the same missionaries who encouraged the cultural isolation of Nigerian Christians found nothing wrong with saluting the American flag every fourth of July. The

flag was so highly esteemed that it would be hoisted on the properties of many American churches. This was a serious contradiction in the attitude of the American missionaries. From this analysis Wakatama (:57) concludes:

Africa needs a theology which deals with theological questions like this one which are peculiar to Africa. Foreign missionaries cannot produce such a theology. Africa's own sons need to be trained so that they in turn will be used by the Holy Spirit to teach a pure doctrine within the context of their culture and worldview. Only thus can the church have a truly African Theology.

It is a quest for such a contextually relevant theology and church experience that mainly accounts for the moratorium call for the withdrawal of missionary personnel and finance. Kane (1981:182f), following C. Peter Wagner, lists four reasons why the concept of moratorium is valid. These are firstly, 'western cultural chauvinism', secondly 'theological and ethical imperialism', thirdly 'paternalistic interchurch aid' and lastly 'nonproductive missionaries'. The hope was that such a moratorium would result in self-determination and a real sense of identity among the Christians. Regardless of the success or otherwise of this call, it indicates that the concern for African Christian identity was felt among mission churches in Africa, albeit to a lesser extent than among the AICs.

Various kinds of African theologies

We have so far in this section noted that the emergence of African Christian identity is practically testified to by the African Indigenous Churches on the one hand, and the moratorium drive on the other. On a more theoretical level the issue of African Christian identity is at the centre of the quest of various African theologies.

In analysing these theologians, the spotlight is on the quest for identity which they all manifest to one extent or another. This search for identity in African theology focuses on issues of culture, race, gender and class – all of which being areas in which the marginalization of Africans has been strongly felt both before and during the advent of the New World Order (Mugambi 1995).

African theologies cannot be neatly divided into watertight categories. Those which focus on race such as Black Theology have also shown an interest in class analysis, which happens to be the main focus of Liberation Theology. Those that deal with inculturation have shown an openness to liberation issues and vice versa, for a wider understanding of liberation must be concerned about cultural, economic and racial marginalization. In the same way reconstruction theologians are still

building their thinking on the liberation paradigm (Maitiweke 2000). Nevertheless it is not useful, if only for analytical purposes, to divide the quest for identity in African theology into categories. Petersen (1995) divides African theologies into the categories of Black, Liberation, and African theologies. I find the category 'African theology' to be an inappropriate subdivision, for it must indeed be a rubric to cover all other African theologies. I therefore prefer to talk about Translation Theology, Black Theology, Liberation Theology, African Women's Theology and Reconstruction Theology. Even though the singular has been used for each of the theologies, there are various nuances contained in each type of theology, so that some might prefer to talk about 'theologies' with relationship to each category.

The quest for identity in Translation Theology will be the subject of chapter four. This is the theology that seeks to relate Christianity to African religions and cultures. Black Theology and African Women Theology, being African exemplars of Liberation Theology, will be the subject of chapter five. Their quest for identity is mainly based on an analysis of race, class and gender. Reconstruction Theology as typified by Mugambi (1995) and Villa-Vicencio (1992) recognizes that Africa is a shattered continent; a shattering that has affected the very identity of the African Christians. For Mugambi, for example, the end of the Cold War and the consequent ushering in of the New World Order has left Africa in what he calls an 'ideological wilderness' (Mugambi 1995:207). His proposed solution is to move away from the old reactive theologies of liberation and inculturation and engage the proactive metaphor of 'reconstruction' as clearly suggested by the very title of his book. The hope is that by reconstructing the continent, Africans can recover a positive identity and that the usual Afropessimism would be dispelled. Thus although Reconstruction Theology is not specifically addressed in the rest of this thesis for reasons of space management, it must also be recognized as a quest for identity in different mode.

2.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The above exploration has revealed that for all its material poverty, the African context remains a rich context for the quest for identity. This quest is rooted in Africa's contact with the West from the time of the slave trade up to the present New World Order. It is a history of domination, oppression and marginalization. It is also a history of the West's systematic attempt to reshape Africa in its own image. These external factors have combined with Africa's self-inflicted wounds

to create the problem of Afropessimism. These are the problems that have created an identity crisis and elevated the issue of identity into a position of prominence in Africa.

The responses to this situation have been varied, but they amount to a quest for identity in Africa. Outside the church we noted the rise of nationalism and pan-Africanism during the time leading to the independence of one African country after another. But independence still left the question of identity as an unfinished agenda. The African media mirrors the continuous wrestling on the part of Africans with the issue of how to define themselves in a Westocentric globalized world which continues to marginalize the continent politically and economically. African leaders have now adopted the ideology of African renaissance in an attempt to reshape Africa's tattered image. Their attempts, like other attempts to define the African identity, are fraught with ambiguities.

Christianity, we have seen, is an active participant in Africa's quest for identity. This has had to be the case not only because Christianity is an *African* religion (as much as it also seeks to be at home in other parts of the world) but also because the missionaries of the Third Opportunity who brought the Christian faith to Africa did more than their colonizing compatriots to de-Africanise the Africans. Christianity in Africa has therefore had to go through soul searching examination – to reassert the indigenizing and liberating nature of the Christian faith or face the possibility of the demise of Christianity itself on the continent as happened in its first two epochs. While the fuller quest for identity in various African theologies will be the subject of future chapters, we have already seen its outworking in the AICs and the moratorium debate.

All this leads us to conclude with two preliminary observations which will be demonstrated again and again in the forthcoming chapters. The first is that the quest for identity in Africa presents us with evidence that domination will always provoke resistance which may occur in overt or covert forms depending on the degree of safety of the space of those who must respond to domination. The second observation is that both domination and resistance are fraught with ambiguities. Domination often ends up empowering the very resistance it seeks to thwart. Resistance is often effected using the tools of those from whom the oppressed seek to be liberated. At times the oppressed may even become unwitting tools for their own oppression, or to suffer from self-inflicted wounds..

The concept of identity has so far appeared many times in this thesis without explication. It is to that complex task that we now turn in this next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF IDENTITY

Attainment of that full stature and maximum identity demands that reference be made to an external, absolute and timeless denominator. ... [O]nly Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to that ultimate Identity, Foundation and Source of security (Mbiti 1969:277).

3.1 ORIENTATION

An African philosopher, Appiah (1992:289), points out that identities in general are ‘complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities’. This chapter will seek to explore the complexity of the matter of identity, and its importance to Africans in particular. A multi-faceted theoretical framework to explore the meaning of identity will be followed by a discussion of four non-Christian manifestations of the quest for African identity. These are the Black Consciousness Movement, Négritude and African personality, African traditional religions and philosophy and finally postcolonial criticism.

Section five will then seek to integrate the foregoing discussion on African identity in general with the Christian faith in particular. After facing objections that have been raised against the role of the Christian faith in the shaping of an African identity the ground will have been laid for a full discussion of the emergence of an African Christian identity. The concluding section will then suggest five contributions of African theology to the shaping of African Christian identity.

This chapter is therefore essential preparation for the next two chapters which will focus on the quest for identity in African theology from the perspective of inculturation and liberation respectively.

3.2 THE BASIC MEANING OF IDENTITY

Grenholm and Patte (2000:35) give us an indication of the complexity of human identity when they talk of ‘three modes of existence’, these being:

autonomy, relationality, and heteronomy – that is, respectively, each believer-reader's sense of personal identity; her or his place in the web of social relations, including power/authority relations; and her or his religious experience, including encounter or lack of encounter with the holy and a sense of the presence or absence of the divine.

Many books have been written on each of the three modes identified above. The mode of 'autonomy' covers the whole field of psychology; that of 'relationality' covers fields like sociology, and 'heteronomy' delves into the field of religion. Moreover these three modes interface with each other in complex ways in a continuous quest for identity. Obviously, then, it would not be practical in a thesis like this to explore the entire field of human identity and some conscious choices have to be made in the light of the context and the aims of the thesis. The 'autonomy' mode is largely excluded, not only because it belongs to the different field of psychology but also because in Africa it is not the autonomous, individualistic personal existence that matters most but the communal one, as will be highlighted later on in this chapter. It will also become clear in this thesis that religion, including the Christian faith, matters a lot in the part of Africa that this thesis is focussing on. Heteronomy and relationality as human modes of existence will therefore take centre stage in this thesis. But that, of course, is still only the beginning in the exploration of a complex theme. How do group dynamics, interfaced with religion, define identity in Africa?

A renowned Christian anthropologist, Paul Hiebert (1983:178-183) explained group identity by distinguishing between 'statistical groups' and 'societal groups'. Statistical groups share one or more common features which may be useful for statistical analysis, such as being born on a particular day, having a certain kind of weight or even living in a certain geographical area. Statistical groups, however, lack a 'consciousness of the uniqueness of their kind' (:179). It is this 'consciousness of kind' which creates the sort of identity which forms a vital attribute of 'societal groups'. It is the identity arising from 'consciousness of the uniqueness of their kind' which is of concern in this thesis. As Hiebert (:183) goes on to explain

[Societal] groups include some people as participants or members, and by the same token, they exclude others. This leads to a distinction between in-groups, or the 'we-group', and out-groups, or the 'they-group'. 'We' may mean members of a family, town, or tribe. The rest of the people are 'they'.

This thesis concerns the contribution of African Theology to the quest for identity by black Africans South of the Sahara. What is it that gives, or should give, these Africans the 'we' consciousness, an

‘awareness of who they are and how they fit into the world’ (Hiebert 1983:181). There is a need to paint the broad spectrum of this quest for identity as a backdrop for appreciating the particular contribution to this quest by the Christian theologians of English-speaking parts of Africa. Before doing that, however, we need to expand Hiebert’s model in order to better appreciate factors that create a sense of identity. Figure 1 below gives a diagrammatic representation of factors that make up a consciousness of identity.

From the diagram it should be noted that consciousness of identity does not automatically arise in an abstract fashion. This consciousness arises as people relate to realities that surround them, that they have become aware of and that shape who they see themselves to be. While the ‘self’ in the centre can be an individual, for our purposes it will be taken to be a collective self, the ‘we’ of a social group. This collective self may have a conviction of the existence of God and other supernatural realities – a conviction which may have a great impact on their view of who they are.

The people’s relationship with the supernatural may be reflected in the various myths of origin and of their destiny and purpose. That conviction of the supernatural may tell them how valuable and significant they are. Because this apprehension of the supernatural will in some ways be different from that of another social group the ‘we’ versus ‘they’ consciousness arises and identity is thereby defined. We will be applying the concept of how African religiosity is, or can legitimately be, used in the quest for African identity. In particular, we will problematize the question of whether by becoming Christians, Africans are sacrificing who they are and surrendering to European religious and cultural hegemony.

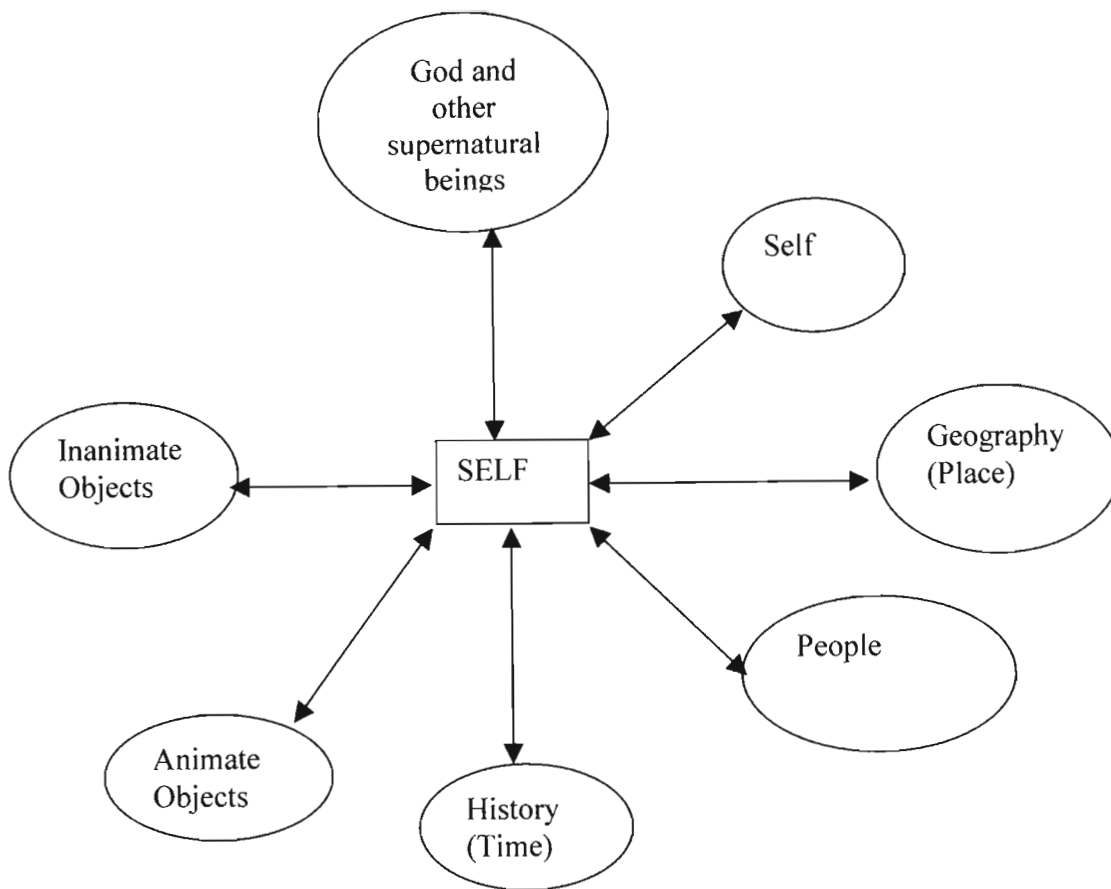


Figure 1: Factors that make up a consciousness of identity

The sense of place (geography) is another reality that may create a group consciousness. Africans feel a certain degree of affinity to one another by reason of the fact that they belong to one continent. This led to the formation of the OAU (now AU) and other regional/continental groupings such as the ECOWAS and SADC. In a lecture delivered to African and Black American theologians Tutu (1997:37) captures the sense of identity created by virtue of belonging to, or originating from, the continent of Africa²⁵:

All of us are bound to mother Africa by invisible but tenacious bonds. She has nurtured the deepest things in us as blacks. All of us have roots that go deep in the warm soil of Africa; so that no matter how long and traumatic our separation from our ancestral home has been, there are things we are often unable to articulate, but which we feel in our very bones, things which make us, who we are, different from others who have not suckled the breasts of our mother, Africa.

²⁵ This was at a conference in Ghana in the mid 1970s, i.e. at the height of apartheid oppression in South Africa. Tutu's address was first published in the *Journal of Religious Thought* in 1975 (Parratt:1997:36).

Yet some within Africa feel a greater sense of affinity to one another than others who are also from Africa because they are of 'African' descent as opposed to those who may, for example, be of European descent. This is why this thesis is especially focussed on the identity of Africans of *African* descent, rather than 'Africans' who are also Arabs, or 'Africans' who may feel a greater sense of affinity with European countries from which they are descendants. For reasons of manageability, this thesis also excludes people of African descent who are now part of the African diaspora, for example African-Americans.

History is another essential dimension in the definition of identity. We have seen in the previous chapter that Black Africans South of the Sahara have a shared historical experience of exploitation from people originating from other continents by virtue of slavery and/or colonialism and neo-colonialism. They share a history of 'struggle' against these realities. At the same time there is differentiation even within this history. Some countries in Africa such as Mozambique and Angola were colonised by Portugal and thereby inherited Portuguese as their official language of communication. Others like Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon became French colonies and inherited the French language. A sizeable number of countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe were British colonies and their official language (like the very language of this thesis) became English. So now sub-Saharan Africa is commonly divided into Lusophone, Francophone and Anglophone regions. These divisions coloured the theologising (and certainly the language of such theologising) that was practiced in each region. It is for that reason that the next two chapters will limit the theological quest for identity to so-called Anglophone Africa. A shared history is therefore able to create a boundary of identity between 'us' and 'them'.

Identity boundaries also arise in the way the collective self defines its relation to the individual self. There is a sense in which the 'self' can be objectified so that people are able to analyse the essence of who they are. A good example is the way the 'Bantu' people of Africa look at themselves. The *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia* (1999) defines Bantu as

a linguistically related group of about 60 million people living in equatorial and southern Africa. The Bantu probably originated in what is now Cameroon, migrating downward into southern Africa. ... Tribal groups descended from the Bantu include the Shona, the Xhosa, the Kikuyu, and the Zulu, of the Eastern Bantu language branch; and the Herero and Tonga peoples, of the western Bantu language branch.

An illustration of how the Bantu have analysed their sense of who they are is the concept of 'Hunhu' in Shona or 'Ubuntu' in Zulu which can roughly be translated as 'personhood'. A Zimbabwean writer Samkange (1980) wrote a book on this important concept which will be given further treatment below. For now what is important is to register the notion that the way people define their sense of self (their personhood) in itself sets an identity boundary from people who may define their sense of personhood differently.

Closely related to the issue of self-definition (the way a societal group relates to their own sense of self) is a people's understanding of what it means to relate to other people. Some groups put a high premium on relationships, such as the African's well acknowledged extended family system. The Shona language to which I belong, for example, has a lot more words to describe relationships than English. In Shona 'mai' means mother. Mother's sisters are also acknowledged as mothers, with 'maiguru' literally meaning the big mother (i.e. mother who is older than your biological mother) and 'mainini' meaning the small mother (i.e. the mother who is younger than your biological mother). Whereas English has one word 'brother', in Shona the word 'mukoma' meaning older brother and 'munin'ina' meaning younger brother. The same goes for all other relationships which are carefully distinguished by the use of different words. The reality behind these words is the legitimization or delegitimization of particular ways of relating to other people. The relationship with others is what makes a person a person in many black African, and particularly Bantu cultures. The Zulu saying '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*'²⁶ has equivalents in other Bantu languages, and indicates the high premium that the speakers of these languages put on relationships as against westerners who may put a higher premium on the 'individual'. Again this sets identity boundaries between 'us' who relate to others in this way and 'them' who relate in a different way which may even be shocking to 'us'. In Shona, for example, for a daughter-in-law to address the father-in-law or the mother-in-law by the first name as many westerners do is shockingly rude – or 'hunhules'.

Other boundaries arise from how the collective self relates to the world of things – animate or inanimate objects. Some groups may value things and use people. They would then differ from those who value people and use things. The Shona value that is put on relationship is such that a chicken, goat or cow would be slaughtered as an expression of hospitality – the size of the animal slaughtered depending on both availability and the closeness of the relationship. The Masai of

²⁶ Literally: one becomes a person by virtue of one's relationships with others.

Kenya are distinguished by their love of cattle or the 'cattle imperative' whereas the Kikuyu are distinguished by their love of land or the 'territorial imperative' (Mazrui 1986:64f). We see from these examples that even animate and inanimate objects play a role in the drawing of identity boundaries.

Taken together this model communicates the message that you are the way you define your relationship with the realities that surround you. But because these realities are constantly changing the quest for identity is an ongoing experience. This then makes sense of Appiah's statement quoted earlier that identities are 'complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities'. Also, the endless permutations in terms of how people define their relationships with these realities means that there will inevitably be degrees of identity, with boundaries constantly changing on what relational factors are uppermost in the societal groups (Hiebert 1983:183).

Even though we have separately described those realities that help to define identity for purposes of analysis, in reality they operate in an intertwined way. In the quest for African Christian identity we will have occasion to repeatedly emphasise in this thesis that there is a traditional African worldview which gives a spiritual dimension to all the realities and which gives a stamp of authenticity to the concept of Africanness. The erosion of this authenticity in Africa's interaction with the hegemonic forces of colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism in the New World Order has given rise to the quest for African (Christian) identity.

From the explanation of what identity is in general, we now turn to the quest for African identity in particular to find out why it is so important and how it is arrived at and manifested. This will set the scene for our consideration of how Christian theology has sought to contribute to such a quest for identity.

3.3 THE QUEST FOR AFRICAN IDENTITY

According to Appiah (1992:286-293), being African is an identity that we choose to construct (hence its not a natural phenomenon) 'within broad limits set by ecological, political and economic realities' (:286). We are already Africans by virtue of creating institutions such as the Organisation of African Unity. Being African is 'an identity ... we must continue to reshape'. It is

one among other salient models of being, all of which have to be constantly fought for and refought...; it is a model that draws on other identities central to contemporary life in the sub-continent, namely the constantly shifting redefinition of 'tribal' identities to meet the economic and political exigencies of the modern world.

(Appiah 1992:287)

The task of constructing an identity is particularly complex for the Africans. The 'double consciousness' that DuBois (1965) identified in African Americans is also applicable to Africans on the African continent. DuBois (:214f) articulates the agony of trying to reconcile this double consciousness:

One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body ... The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.

Following the long history of contact with the western world, the Africans on the continent experience strivings similar to what DuBois experienced as an African American. The contacts with the western world have made many Africans bicultural, and sometimes multicultural and biracial (Paris 2001:26). Africans often have to communicate with fellow Africans in the languages of the former colonial masters. They have engaged in western education and some have even excelled in it. Modernity has put a lot of pressure on them to conform to western cultural standards of, inter-alia, governance, dress, language, commerce and industry. At the same time Africans are striving for an *African* identity so that they are not a pale shadow of westernism. In the light of all this what does it mean to be an African? What identity factors are important to consider as Africans constantly fight and refight for their identity? These are among the questions that constitute the central theme of this section.

3.3.1 African identity and the power of being

Tillich's (1954) ontological analysis of love, power and justice as categories of being gives us a good theoretical framework for appreciating the importance of the quest for African identity. He argues that love, power and justice form a 'trinity of structures in being itself' and that therefore they have 'ontological dignity' (:21). Tillich's view is that the three are so much intrinsically part of being that none of them can be subtracted without destroying being itself. However, they

function differently, albeit in unison. It is my intention now to discuss the gist of Tillich's view of each of these and relate them to our subject of the quest for African identity.

For our purposes, the most important of the triad of structures of being is power and how it relates to being. According to Tillich (1954:35) power is the 'fundamental description of being as being'. Tillich links this concept to 'Nietzsche's philosophy of life as will to power' (:36) which he describes as 'self-affirmation of life in its self-transcending dynamics, overcoming internal and external resistance'. He clarifies this further by saying (:40):

Power is the possibility of self-affirmation in spite of internal and external negation. It is the possibility of overcoming non-being. Human power is the possibility of man to overcome non-being infinitely.

The importance of this description of power as the power of being itself lies in the fact that such power is

real only in its actualization, in the encounter with other bearers of power and in the ever-changing balance which is the result of these encounters. ... Every encounter of somebody who represents a power of being with somebody else who represents another power of being leads to a decision about the amount of power embodied in each of them. ... Everybody and everything has chances and must take risks, because his and its power of being remains hidden if actual encounters do not reveal it.

(Tillich (1954: 41)

Tillich links this concept with Toynbee's 'phenomenology of power-relations' which is seen as the most important determinant of 'all important historical movements' (:43). This comes out clearly in the following explication of the concept in interpersonal relationships:

In any encounter of man with man, power is active, the power of the personal radiation, expressed in language and gestures, in the glance of the eye and the sound of the voice, in face and figure and movement, expressed in what one is personally and what one represents socially. *Every encounter, whether friendly or hostile, whether benevolent or indifferent, is in some way, unconsciously or consciously, a struggle of power with power.* In this struggle decisions are made continuously about the relative power of being, actualized in all those who are involved in the struggle. Creative justice does not deny these encounters and the conflicts implicit in them. For this is the price which must be paid for the creativity of life (italics added).

(Tillich 1954:87)

In these power relations the power of being usually manifests itself through the application of 'force' which 'points both to the strength a thing has in itself and to the way in which it has effects on other things. It forces them into a movement or behaviour without using their own active support' (:46). If the force or compulsion is applied against the essential nature of the other bearer of power, there is a real danger of the later being actually destroyed. In that case that which is forced must preserve its identity by using counter force or else it is destroyed by the stronger power (:46).

It is important to register the fact that the issue of power of being and the phenomenon of power relations is applicable equally to group relations as it is to interpersonal ones. For Tillich (:98f) a social organism also qualifies to be called a power of being, and he gives as example members of a family and citizens of a nation. The resulting 'communal self-affirmation, on the human level, is called the spirit of the group', and that spirit is expressed in various ways including utterances, laws, institutions, symbols, myths and cultural forms (:98).

This raises the problem of whether we can legitimately talk of a collective 'African' identity. Is there enough commonality among Africans to create what Hiebert called a 'societal group'(1983:183) and what Tillich now calls 'spirit of the group?' If Africa as a whole was under consideration the answer would clearly be in the negative. The diversity of Africa is a well acknowledged fact. Even an Africanist like Mazrui (1986:99) acknowledges this diversity by saying that 'climatically the range in Africa is from arid deserts to tropical forests; ethnically from the Khoisan to the Semites: linguistically from Yoruba to Kidigo'. It is this geographical, cultural, linguistic and historical diversity which made some thinkers like Melville Herskovits argue that Africa was a 'geographical fiction', regarded as an entity only 'to the degree that the map is invested with an authority imposed on it by the mapmakers' (Mazrui 1986:99).

On the other hand, Mazrui (:100-101) correctly acknowledges that the course of world history is being affected by people who speak of themselves collectively as 'Africans' – who exhibit the sentiment of African identity because of a shared historical consciousness to be analysed later in this chapter. It is therefore possible to combine what Mazrui and Tillich have written and thereby identify black people originating and living in sub-Saharan Africa as a unit whose sense of identity

is analysable. In the language of Tillich (:98f) they form a 'structure of power' whose 'communal self-affirmation' is enough to constitute a 'spirit of the group'.

Tillich goes on to say that a power group 'experiences growth and disintegration' through encounter with other power groups (:100). For the group to strengthen its power of being it must, for example, provide space for itself which is the 'reason for the tremendous importance of geographical space and the fight for its possession by all power groups' (:100). An example given is how Israel has strengthened its power of being when it regained its lost territory. Apart from geographical space there is also the space of influence radiated into other groups through examples such as economic expansion, technical expansion and the spread of civilization (Tillich: 101). A power group can strengthen itself through encounter with other groups. This creates power of being which is not just physical but includes the 'power of symbols and ideas in which the life of a social group expresses itself' (:101f). The growth of such power of being can even lead to what Tillich calls 'vocational consciousness' which led, for example, to the creation of the Roman empire, the spread of Greek civilization under Alexander the Great, and more recently the world conquering imperialism of the European nations (:102). All this illustrates the fact that 'the power of being of each political power group is measured by its encounter with the power of being of other power groups' (:100). Talking about empires Tillich (:104) says that

vocational consciousness expresses itself in laws. In these laws both justice and love are actual. The justice of the empires is not only ideology or rationalization. The empires not only subject, they also unite. And in so far as they are able to do this, they are not without love. Therefore those who are subjected acknowledge silently that they have become participants of a superior power of being and meaning. If this acknowledgement vanishes because the uniting power of the empire, its strength, and its vocational idea vanish, the empire comes to an end. Its power of being disintegrates and external attacks only execute what is already decided.

Tillich hints at, but does not go far enough in describing, the ambivalence of the imperialism. That imperialism has created the positive reality that we call 'African identity' has already been acknowledged. That other benefits like western technological advancement also came to Africa also goes without saying. But these were largely the unintended results of imperialism. The real goal of imperialism was to strengthen the power of being of the hegemonic imperial powers economically and politically. But because this could only be achieved through subjugation of conquered peoples (i.e. by reducing their powers of being), the quest for African identity has come as a positive force to preserve and enhance the power of being of the African peoples.

So far we have explicated the close connection between 'consciousness of identity' with Tillich's concept of the 'power of being'. What about love which Tillich makes part of the triad in the ontology of being itself? Love is ontologically part of being itself because it is 'the drive towards the unity of the separated', meaning 'the reunion of the estranged', bearing in mind that 'the greatest separation is the separation of self from self' (:25). According to Tillich this separation of self from self, what might be called self-alienation, is the demise of being itself. He is therefore hesitant to talk about self-love, for once the unity of self has been divided, being becomes non-being. But Tillich talks about 'self-affirmation' and 'self-acceptance' in the sense of 'affirmation of oneself in the way in which one is affirmed by God' (:33f). Tillich is possibly splitting hairs too much by his attempt to distinguish between self-love and self-affirmation. There is a sense in which one can objectify the self, separating self as subject from self as object, for the purpose of self-analysis and as a result be either estranged from that self (self-hate) or be drawn towards that self (self-love). In this way, self-love is as conceivable as self-estrangement. What is important for the purpose of this thesis, however, is that the quest for African identity is legitimised by Tillich's concept of love as 'reunion of the estranged'. Our discussion of black consciousness (below) will be seen to link up with this concept.

For now we need to note Tillich's exposition of the 'ontological unity of love and power' (:48-50). The compulsory manifestation of power conflicts with love 'when it prevents the aim of love, namely the reunion of the separated'. In that case 'love, through compulsory power, must destroy what is against love' (:49), for according to Luther, 'it is the strange work of love to destroy what is against love' (:49).

What does this tell us about the quest for African identity? We have already noted negative forces of destruction in colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism and Apartheid. These forces have applied the compulsory element of power to separate African peoples in order to rule over and exploit them. In the quest for African identity the strange work of love has had to be applied – that work of destroying what is against love. In extreme cases that strange work of love has had to include armed struggle for the sake of self-determination.

Lastly, we examine Tillich's description of the ontological connection between justice and being itself in order to complete his ontological triad. Ontologically speaking justice is 'the form in which

the power of being actualises itself' in the 'encounters of being with being' (:54). For our purposes justice is in effect the power relations that result when one person or sociological group encounters another. At the centre of normative power relations must be the principle of love. As Tillich (1954:57) explains:

'On the basis of an ontology of love it is obvious that love is the principle of justice. If life as the actuality of being is essentially the drive towards the reunion of the separated, it follows that the justice of being is the form which is adequate to this movement. The further principles to be derived from the basic principle mediate between it and the concrete situation in which the risk of justice is demanded.

Of the 'four principles which perform this mediation' the two that best serve our purposes here are the principles of *equality* and of *freedom*. Equality means treating each power of being, whether an individual or a sociological group, according to its 'intrinsic claim for justice' (:58). Tillich (1954:60) explicates this further by saying:

The content of this principle is the demand to treat every person as a person. Justice is always violated if men are dealt with as if they were things. This has been called 'reification' ... or 'objectivation' ... In any case it contradicts the justice of being, the intrinsic claim of every person to be considered a person.

In this respect we will have occasion to repeatedly note in this thesis that at the centre of the quest for African identity is this demand for justice 'the intrinsic claim of every person to be considered a person'.

Closely associated with justice is the principle of *freedom* which is also related to justice. According to Tillich this freedom is both internal and external. Internal freedom is the 'inner superiority of the person over enslaving conditions in the external world' and can be enjoyed even by the slave whose social conditions contradict 'external freedom' (:61). We will note below, for example, that the Black Consciousness Movement was based on the need to first decolonise the minds of the Africans (Ngugi wa Thiongo 1986) as a prelude to the gaining of external freedom. Without such internal freedom, external freedom pays little dividends. The justification for the black consciousness approach can be seen in the fact that a number of Africans still suffer from a chronic and debilitating inferiority complex years after the attaining of 'majority rule' in South Africa and Zimbabwe. But this is already an anticipation of a fuller discussion to follow in which we will engage the concept of black consciousness.

For now we need to note that according to Tillich the ideal of the 'non-political spiritual freedom' is complemented by liberalism's externalised idea of freedom, the need to 'remove the enslaving conditions' (Tillich 1954:61). Just as lack of spiritual freedom can prevent the true enjoyment of social freedom, 'there are social conditions which prevent spiritual freedom either generally or for the great majority of people' (:61). Moreover:

'Liberty' is considered to be an essential principle of justice because the freedom of political and cultural self-determination is seen as an essential element of personal existence. Slavery in all forms contradicts justice even if both the master and the slave can participate in transcendent freedom.

(Tillich 1954:61)

This becomes especially true when we realise that 'injustice' occurs if in this struggle the superior power uses its power for the reduction or destruction of the inferior power. This can happen in all forms of personal encounters (:88).

The link between Tillich's concept of justice as an ontological part of being itself and the quest for African identity is very clear. The historical and socio-political background factors discussed in the previous chapter make it clear that this quest for identity arises from the various ways in which Africans have suffered the injustice of dehumanization and its debilitating effects on their wellbeing.

3.3.2 African identity and self-worth

From our discussions so far, it has become clear that the question of identity is far deeper than the need for a label to identify who we are. When we talk about the quest for African identity we are also implying African answers to the question of the extent of their self-worth. It has become obvious also, especially from our consideration of Tillich's exposition of ontology that the question of African self-worth should be put in the context of Africa's contact with the outside world, particularly with the colonising European powers. We have already seen how negative evaluations of Africa and the subsequent mistreatment of Africans through slavery, colonial subjugation and continuing exploitation in the New World Order have caused self-doubt in Africans which has sometimes been described as 'Afro-pessimism'. This is the background against which the quest for African identity should be understood.

Firstly, the drive towards African self-worth is an ontological imperative. The desire for self-betterment, for an increase in power of being, forms part of the ontological make-up of being itself.

Tillich (1954:54) expressed this concept in this way:

Everything wants to grow. It wants to increase its power of being in forms which include and conquer more non-being. Metaphorically speaking, one could say that the molecule wants to become a crystal, the crystal a cell, the cell a centre of cells, the plant animal, the animal man, the man god, the weak strong, the isolated participating, the imperfect perfect, and so on.

This ontological reality legitimizes the African slaves wanting to be free from slavery, colonised Africans fighting to overthrow colonialism and imperialism, oppressed Africans wanting to overthrow settler regimes and African despots, poor Africans wanting a fair share of this world's resources etc. It is part of being increasing its power of being against forces of non-being.

Secondly, the drive towards African self-worth is a Christian theological imperative on at least two grounds – that of creation and that of incarnation. In terms of creation a strong conviction in Christian theology is the creation of human beings in the image of God – a conviction which has implications on the need for all human beings to be treated equally and with the dignity befitting the *imago Dei*. A sample of how this principle has been variously articulated may be in order at this point.

Burnaby (1959:43-59) explores the question of 'man – as he should be' by linking this concept with that of humankind being made in the image of God. He surveys the various views that have been advocated as an explanation for this concept, such as the fact of humankind being endowed with a mind (an ability to reason), the idea of original righteousness and the fact of human beings being able to exist only in the context of relationship. However, he asserts that although all these views have some merit, the heart of what it means to be created in the image of God is that human beings share some characteristics of personality that are found in God himself such as freedom and creative love.

It may be inferred from what Burnaby says that human beings therefore have intrinsic value derived from *imago Dei*. TEE²⁷ (1994) draws out this implication most clearly. Explaining the identity that belongs to all human beings by reason of this image of God TEE (:88) writes:

To be made in the image of God endows human beings with a particular *identity*, and with this a *dignity* that belongs to no other creature. Our true value lies in what we *are* not in what we can achieve. This, of course, means that *all people are equal*. No human being is any more or any less important than anyone else.

TEE (:94f) then correctly identifies the upholding of human rights as an implication naturally flowing from the conviction of human beings being created in the image of God. This view of human rights differs from the 'western liberal concept of human rights' which is 'grounded in the assumption that the individual is sovereign, and that humans have certain inalienable rights just because they are humans. These rights are not conferred, they simply exist'. This liberal concept of human rights articulates a concept which has no foundation or point of reference in anything outside humanity. It does not provide a solid basis for counteracting views also based on humanity, such as the belief that one's culture can be discriminating against women or those who are from the low classes etc. That is why the Christian theistic concept of human rights as articulated by TEE (:94f) stands on firmer grounds for it states that

the basis for human rights lies quite simply in the fact that human beings - all human beings - are made in the image of God. If we believe that we, and every other person as well, are made in God's image, then we have a particular identity, and with it a dignity, that is inalienable. Each human being has a right to be treated in a way that befits a creature made in the likeness of God. In acknowledging the basis of human rights to lie here, we are avoiding the anthropocentricity of the western liberal view, by making our worth dependent, not on ourselves, but on God's grace. We also avoid the notion ... that human rights are a product of human merit, and can therefore be earned or - worse still - that we can be left without rights at all. To ground human rights in the image of God also prevents the inequality inherent in the hierarchical approach (emphasis in the original).

On the basis of the above view the doctrine of *imago Dei* rules out the legitimacy of discrimination on the basis of physical or cultural distinctions:

²⁷ TEE stands for 'Theological Education by Extension'. This publication does not identify a particular author, suggesting the possibility of team authorship. See bibliography for details.

This, of course, has implications when it comes to discrimination between people - on whatever grounds. Whether it be on grounds of race, gender, class, religion, language, physical ability, or whatever else, *discrimination is invalid: it is wrong*.

(TEE 1994:88)

Driving home the same concept and making it particularly pertinent to situation of Africans, Tutu (1997:40) insists on the full 'personhood and humanity of the African':

[A]nything less than this is blasphemy against God who created us as we are in His own image, not to be carbon copies of others of His creatures, no matter how advanced or prosperous they might conceive themselves to be.

It is for this reason that for Tutu doing what was illegal to overthrow the evil Apartheid system and in defence of the dignity of human beings created in God's image could in fact be the morally correct thing to do. He explains this further by saying (1999:179):

White South Africans under Apartheid made the big mistake of confusing 'legal' with 'morally right', and thus would get very hot under the collar when I and others said unjust laws did not oblige obedience. They were very upset with the Churches and Mass Democratic Movement, and their campaign to disobey unjust laws. Many white South Africans thought that *illegal* was identical with *immoral*.

And just as discriminating against other people is wrong, being made in God's image also means that 'we have *no reason to feel inferior by virtue of our humanity*' (TEE 1994:89). That must also include inferiority complexes by virtue of skin colour, culture, level of development etc. Human beings have intrinsic value by virtue of being human beings created in the image of God.

The second ground for the theological imperative for human worth comes from the doctrine of *incarnation*. The conviction that in Jesus Christ God became flesh and identified with us so completely confers dignity and worth to all humanity. A Catholic author, Elizabeth Johnson (1997:13-22), presents arguments for the reality of both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ. She opposes the many ways in which the humanity of Jesus has been devalued in the history of Christian doctrine and explains incarnation by saying:

At the moment of the incarnation, God who is love eternally self-expressing within the divine being as the eternal Word, self-expresses outwardly into the history of this earth. God's own inner Word is spoken into the medium of human flesh, bringing Jesus into existence. God who is always self-expressing within the divine nature now self-expresses outside the divine nature, in time, in human nature, in another medium (you might say), and the one who comes

into existence is Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh. ... Jesus Christ comes into existence as God's own self-expression in time, himself genuinely human, with the divine glory (you might say) having been emptied out.

(Johnson 1997:18)

God fully adopted human nature. Therefore he does not wish that we deny our own humanity but rather 'the more human we become, the more God is pleased (Johnson 1997:19). The divine and the human nature 'come together in the incarnation in a personal unity which enables the human nature of Jesus to flourish' (:20).

Johnson (1997:21) then draws out important implications of the humanity of Jesus – the worth and dignity of human beings conferred by the incarnation as much as by creation in the image of God:

If God has become one of us and Jesus Christ as a fully human being is confessed as God, then the humanity of every single human being in some implicit way (because we are all one race) is also united with God and has its own very special dignity. The logic is clear: if God has become one of us, then that means something for the whole human race. Human nature itself is gifted with God's identification with us in our own nature. ... This leads to a very strong sense in the church of the dignity of every human being precisely as human, and to a very strong social teaching with regard to human rights. The church's social teaching is not based only on simple humanism, but on a deep christological motif: God has so identified with our humanity that each of us as human beings had been lifted to a dignity beyond compare. Thus, whatever disfigures or damages a human being is an insult to God's own self.

We should note here the striking convergence of the idea of human dignity and worth arising from creation in the image of God, and from the incarnation whereby God has conferred incomparable worth to human nature by himself becoming human. Again human rights become legitimised by an act of God's grace and not just as 'simple humanism'.

In this double theological imperative, the quest for African identity and worth becomes grounded. We will note that some of this quest is pursued by those who do not operate from the lofty theological height suggested by our double imperative. Some of these 'fighters' for African identity and worth may even be operating from non-Christian presuppositions. That does not invalidate their quest, for the Bible witnesses to people like the harlot Rahab (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31) and Cyrus (Ezra 1) who God used in his liberative intention for his people, but who did not belong to the covenant community. After all, *all truth is God's truth* as the title of Holme's book (1977) testifies. Yet it remains true, from what we have articulated above, that the quest for African identity is better

grounded in theological than in merely anthropological imperatives. That is why from the next chapter we concentrate on the quest for identity in African theology.

3.3.3 African identity and the protection of self-interest

We have seen that the quest for African identity is vitally related to the issue of the power of being in general, and that of self-worth in particular. We now consider other self-interests that are related to identity and that legitimize the quest for it in black Africa, South of the Sahara.

Mazrui (1986) provides us with a suitable theoretical framework for appreciating this connection between identity and especially economic self-interest. He sees the genesis of 'collective identity in ancient times' in economic activities

especially as they matured into competitive activities. An early version of the territorial imperative in human behaviour probably inaugurated the distinction between insiders and outsiders, between 'we' and 'they'. Who had a right to hunt in this particular area? Who had a right to gather fruit or roots in that area? These were questions involving the territorial imperative, and probably initiating the foundations of human differentiation and therefore human identity.

(Mazrui 1986:64)

From this basis Mazrui is able to trace the genesis of wars for protecting self interest by different group identities. These wars amounted essentially to a 'conflict of identities' as Mazrui (:64) explains in the following quotation:

If hunting was the mother of technology and helped to initiate the influence of the territorial imperative in human differentiation, technology and the territorial imperative together were in turn the parents of war. The rise of disputes as to who can hunt where, or gather fruit in what area, when combined with the emergence of the instruments of hunting resulted in the earliest examples of military confrontations between human beings. Identity and differentiation were becoming a matter of mutual injury and armed struggle. Again these ancient examples are still contemporary in Africa. Quarrels between groups over hunting ground or over animals are still part and parcel of social relations and conflict of identities.

From this exposition, which as we will see is historically well-grounded, we note how survival needs and economic well-being generate a 'territorial imperative' and how this leads to a 'conflict of identities'. In the Old Testament we read of Hebrews crossing the Jordan and fighting against various tribes settled in Canaan for territorial control. To energize this war effort Joshua and the various Israelite tribes needed a legitimising ideology which they found in the conviction of the

'Promised Land'. Without a sense of identity as the Chosen Race, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this territorial imperative would not have been there and there might have been no country called Israel today.

The African nationalist and Pan-Africanist cry of 'Africa for the Africans' is built around the same need for the preservation of self-interest against imperialist forces of dispossession. The 'territorial imperative' arising out of this feeling of Africanness led to nationalist uprisings and wars of liberation in various African countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania and other countries.

How might this connection between identity and the 'territorial imperative' be interpreted theologically? It is a well-acknowledged fact that human beings are needy creatures. Maslow, for example, built his system of thought around the idea of the hierarchy of needs, with physiological needs being the most basic, followed by safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization needs following in that order (Kraft 1979:86). On the basis of Maslow's analysis human beings have greater needs than animals whose needs do not rise above the first two or three of the needs in that hierarchical system of needs. The question that arises is how these needs are to be met. Who, for example, is responsible for looking after the needs of a newly born child? If the answer is that 'everybody' is responsible, there would be a real danger that in fact nobody might end up being responsible, with everybody assuming that somebody else would do it. God therefore created basic societal units, beginning with the family as the most basic unit, proceeding to extended families (people who regard each other as relatives), tribes, inter-tribal units (which we might call nationalities) and so on up the whole of humanity. These levels of differentiation (identities) were necessary for the fulfilment of human needs. The meeting of these needs then requires that each unit have resources for the fulfilment of this task. Self-interest means the protection of such resources which might otherwise be consumed by other groups.

From the above exposition, self-interest is a legitimate God-given capacity of different identities for acquiring and protecting resources. However, self-interest can easily degenerate into 'selfish' interest when one identity acquires resources at the expense of the legitimate interests of other identities. This then requires that different identities not only have what Mazrui has called the 'territorial imperative' but also that there be 'power' for such protection. When one identity

exercises its power against another identity for acquisition of resources the result is war, or what Mazrui called the 'conflict of identities'.

The danger in the above scenario which human history has experienced from time to time is that 'conflict of identities degenerates into a 'law of the jungle' which has been called the 'survival of the fittest'. Christian theology has a solution to this problem which we have already noted above. That solution lies in the need to recognise the God-given worth of every individual and group identity. We have already noted that this is a theological imperative arising out of the doctrines of both creation and the incarnation. A failure to recognise this worth of other identities results in condemnation by God and calls for resistance to such exploitation.

This exposition has an important bearing on the quest for African identity that forms the major concern of this thesis. We have noted again and again, especially in the previous chapter, that Africa has been a subject of exploitation in different forms, beginning with slavery, proceeding to colonialism and the neo-colonial New World Order. Africa has been plundered in a selfish way by other powers. The close connection between identity and the protection of self-interest that we have noted in this section makes the quest for African identity a legitimate imperative.

3.3.4 African identity and vocational consciousness

Another characteristic of identity that is of concern to us is what Tillich (1954:102-104) has called 'vocational consciousness'. Tillich links power of being in the sense that we have already discussed with this vocational consciousness. The greater the power of being in a social group (which we have in turn associated with identity) the greater the vocational consciousness. It was a strong sense of identity and self-worth which made the Romans subject 'the Mediterranean world to the Roman law and the order of the Roman empire'. The same power of identity enabled Alexander to bring 'Greek culture to nations which were subjected in terms of both arms and language'. After the end of the Middle Ages

the European nations combined power drives with vocational consciousness of different character. Spain's world-conquering imperialism was united with the fanatical belief in being the divine tool of the Counter-Reformation. England's vocational consciousness was rooted partly in the Calvinistic idea of world politics for the preservation of pure Christianity, partly in a Christian-humanistic feeling of responsibility for the colonial countries and for a solid balance of power between the civilized nations. This was inseparably united with an economic and political power drive and produced the largest Empire of all times and almost

eighty years of European peace ... America's vocational consciousness has been called 'the American dream', namely to establish the earthly form of the kingdom of God by a new beginning ... This was originally meant for America alone. Now it is meant explicitly for one-half of the world and implicitly for the whole world. ...[I]t is already justified to speak of half-conscious American imperialism.

(Tillich 1954:102-104)

The vocational consciousness of America, which Tillich wrote about in 1954, is now abundantly evident in the way America is dominating world politics. This has been particularly evident from the American foreign policy since it emerged victorious from the Cold War. The American response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001²⁸ is a case in point. The death of thousands of people in this attack was tragic. Yet the American response to this event showed signs of wounded pride and a desire to dominate world politics even by the use of double standards. An analyst, Phillip Cryan, writing in the Zimbabwe *Daily News*²⁹ of 17th January 2002 brings out this fact clearly. According to him the bombing of Afghanistan and the threat of spreading the war to other parts of the world resulted in

political leaders from many countries ... at once declaring support for the new US war and seeking to rename their own enemies as 'terrorists'. Furthermore, the US 'War on Terrorism' extends beyond those suspected of masterminding the bombings of 11th September and 'includes as enemies', as President George W Bush has made clear since his first public address on the afternoon of 11 September 2001, 'all those who harbour terrorists'.

Unfortunately, says Cryan in the article referred to above, the United States itself has on several occasions in world politics been guilty of promoting terrorism and harbouring terrorists. He quotes the definition of terrorism given by US Federal Bureau of Investigation:

Terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

Cryan rightly insists that by this very definition the US government has itself repeatedly been guilty of terrorism. It has unlawfully used force or violence to 'intimidate or coerce' governments in

²⁸ Terrorists, suspected to be masterminded by the Saudi born anti-American activist called Osama bin Ladin living in Afghanistan, hijacked four passenger aircraft and used them to ram into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York as well as the Pentagon. In response to this attack American president, George Bush Jr, led a 'crusade' against terrorism which included an extensive bombing of Afghan cities and suspected hide-outs of the Taliban and al Qaeda soldiers.

²⁹ This is currently Zimbabwe's only independent daily newspaper.

countries like Nicaragua and Libya to achieve 'political or social objectives', such as fighting against Communism. In the case of Nicaragua, argues Cryan, the US government even 'established training schools for right-wing militia, dismantled two liberal governments, and helped to orchestrate fake elections'. Furthermore, in 1984 Nicaragua took the US government to the World Court for mining three Nicaraguan harbours, with the result that 'a US\$18 billion ... judgment was brought against the US'. Yet the US response 'was to simply refuse to acknowledge the Court's jurisdiction.' Yet in spite of these actions of committing terrorism, and of harbouring terrorists, it becomes ironic, in Cryan's analysis, that president George Bush should, in his address to Congress in response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, insist that every nation is either on the side of the United States or of the terrorists. Cryan's conclusion from this evidence is that

(t)he double standards at play, the hypocrisy and bad faith involved, in calling for the world to decide whether it is 'with us' or 'with the terrorists' should by now be fairly evident.

Applying Cryan's argument to our theme, we can say that the USA feels the 'vocational consciousness' to define the shape of the world and make all nations conform to its supreme will. It would appear that might is being equated with right, considering what Cryan has identified as the American hypocrisy, 'unlawful violence, double standards, and outright engagement in acts of terrorism'.

Mazrui (1986:64) similarly argues that consciousness of identity has behavioural consequences.

What people believe they are influences what they actually do:

the Masai believe that they are the custodians of all the cattle of the world, wherever they might be. The Masai are thus God's chosen people in a special sense – not in charge of the soul of Man but in charge of Man's most important companion on earth, the cattle species. Because of this belief, the Masai regard themselves as fully justified to seek cattle wherever they might be. The cattle complex among them is part of their identity. Their style of life as herdsmen and pastoralists intermingles with the ancient possessiveness of the hunter. But in this case the Masai are not animated by a territorial imperative: they are animated by a cattle imperative, regardless of territorial boundaries.

In a different context West (1999:36) confirms the observations of Tillich and Mazrui by confessing that white South Africans, particularly males, are groomed for leadership (over blacks) from their infancy creating a superiority complex among them which fuelled Apartheid:

For biblical scholars who do not come from poor and marginalized communities becoming socially engaged requires some form of conversion. The forms our conversions take are as different as our identities and contexts. My own process of conversion is rooted in my white, middle class, male and Christian identity and the South African context. White, middle-class males are groomed for greatness, particularly in the Apartheid past of South Africa. We grow up expecting to be major players in the scheme of things. And even if we partially betray our race, class and gender by struggling against Apartheid and its legacy we still expect to play a pivotal role in that struggle.

The examples quoted above make at least three things very clear. Firstly, identity and vocational consciousness are intricately linked. Secondly, the vocational consciousness can be driven by selfish interest leading to the domination of others against their will (such as was the case with Apartheid and colonialism) and the dispossessing of other groups of their assets (as is the case with the Masai). The third reality is therefore that a sense of identity needs an external theocentric reference point (Mbiti 1969:277) if it is to lead to justice and peace. This is where Christianity provides such a theocentric reference point with the conviction of God creating humankind in his own image. That gives equal value to all people, and carries with it the imperative of respecting each other's human dignity.

Chapter 7 will take up this important issue further, examining how the quest for African Christian identity can lead to a missionary vocational consciousness.

3.3.4 African identity and the consciousness of uniqueness

The last characteristic of identity that we consider, with particular reference to African identity, is a consciousness of uniqueness. Identity is always found in contradistinction to other identities (Appiah 1992:289), which implies a consciousness of uniqueness on the part of a social group. This raises the question of what unique features should make the Africans who are the subject of our inquiry conscious of their unique identity. The answer to this question will not lie in any one feature but in a combination of the following: race, culture, shared history, and the geographical factor. None of these features, standing by itself, would make black Africans South of the Sahara be conscious of a unique identity as the following exposition will make clear.

Appiah (1992:282), a professor of African-American studies and philosophy at Harvard University, defines identity as 'a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought, and patterns of evaluation; in short a coherent kind of human social

psychology'. On the basis of this definition he denies the existence of any African *traditional* identity – i.e. any African identity before colonialism and insists that it was only especially after the First World War (:281) that the process of constructing an African identity (:282) has been in progress. His argument (:282) is that there was nothing that gave the disparate peoples scattered on the continent any sense of mutual belonging to one another:

But if we could have travelled through Africa's many cultures in those years – from the small groups of Bushman hunter-gathers, with their stone-age material, to the Hausa kingdoms, rich in worked metal – we should have felt in every place profoundly different impulses, ideas and forms of life.

However, Appiah proceeds to say that 'there is no doubt that now, a century later, an African identity is coming into being' (:280) and that it takes external exigencies to create an awareness of an identity (:287). He quotes the example of the Igbo of Nigeria who, until the Nigerian Civil War, never saw themselves as the Igbo (:288). Although all along they had spoken the same language called 'Igbo' they had only seen themselves as people from this or that village rather than the Igbo. But during the two year civil war being an Igbo 'became a very powerful consciousness'. In fact 'the Nigerian Civil War defined an Igbo identity'. External exigencies therefore make tribe, religion or race to be 'invested with new uses and meanings' (:288). What does all this add up to?

What Appiah says concerning the pressure of external exigencies in creating a consciousness of unique identity at tribal level is also true of the role colonialism played in creating an African identity by black Africans South of the Sahara. This point is forcefully brought out by Mazrui (1986:99) who says that

one of the great ironies of modern African history is that it took European colonialism to inform Africans that they were Africans ... Europe ... helped to invent Africa as we know it through the ruthless distortions of colonial rule.

In other words 'Europe Africanise[d] Africa' (:100) by, inter-alia, 'the process of racism in history' (:101). 'The humiliation and degradation of black Africans across the centuries contributed to their mutual recognition of each other as 'fellow Africans' (:101). It was this racism that 'influenced slavery and the slave trade to a great extent, and converted Africans into commodities to be acquired and sold on the world market' (:103). Furthermore

European racism helped to convince at least sub-Saharan Africans that one of the most relevant criteria of their Africanity was their skin colour. Until the coming of Europeans south of the Sahara, blackness was taken relatively for granted. It is true that fairer-skinned Arabs sometimes penetrated into the interior of black Africa, but they were few in number. And they were ready to intermarry with local populations and not emphasise too greatly the colour differentiation.

(Mazrui 1986:104)

Therefore, according to Mazrui (:106)

Nothing reminded sub-Saharan Africans especially that they were black people more convincingly than European attitudes towards skin colour. To use the words of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. 'Africans, all over the continent, without a word being spoken either from one individual to another or from one African country to another, looked at the European, looked at one another, and knew that in relation to the European they were one.' This was a central aspect of black consciousness in Africa, which in turn is an aspect of African identity, at least south of the Sahara.

Europe also Africanised Africa through 'imperialism and colonisation. This generated a sufficient sense of shared African identity for the movement of Pan-Africanism to be born' (:101). Another process which Mazrui (:101) describes as 'truly dialectical' was the

fragmentation of Africa in terms of artificial state boundaries, in terms of reinforced ethnic nationalisms and in terms of new elite formations. By a curious destiny, these criss-crossing boundaries of sectional identity have sometimes increased the value of a regional or continental African identity.

In the light of Mazrui's convincing arguments about how a consciousness of race was created by European racism, it may come as something of a surprise that Appiah (1992) rejects the reality of race as a genuine characteristic of identity. He calls the concept of race 'the ennobling lie' for the sake of political expediency (:283). His standpoint is 'that a biologically-rooted conception of race is both dangerous in practice and misleading in theory: African unity, African identity, need surer foundations than race' (:285). He describes labels based on race and tribe as

disabling labels; which is in essence, my complaint against Africa as a racial mythology – the Africa of Crummell and Du Bois (from the New World) and of the *bolekaja* critics (from the Old); against Africa as a shared metaphysics – the Africa of Soyinka; against Africa as a fancied past of shared glories – the Africa of Diop and the 'Egyptianists'.

(Appiah 1992:285)

Appiah explains why all these bases for African identity are disabling. For example he attacks Soyinka's metaphysics for trying to found African unity 'in gods who have not served us well in our dealings with the world' (:285). The Egyptianists 'like all who have chosen to root Africa's modern identity in an imaginary past ...divert us ... from the problems of the present and the hopes of the future' (:286).

As for the 'biologically rooted conception of race' (:284) Appiah dismisses it as an 'illusion', to the explication of which he devotes a whole chapter (1992:43-73). In this chapter he enters into a debate with W. E. B. Du Bois who he acknowledges as having laid 'both the intellectual and the practical foundations of the Pan-Africanist ideology' and whose many writings constitute 'the archaeology of Pan-Africanism's idea of race' (Appiah 1992:43). Having summarised Du Bois's thinking Appiah then proceeds to discredit the whole concept of race. In fact this whole chapter two of the book is entitled 'Illusions of race'. He systematically undermines all the elements on which Du Bois built his concept of race including 'common blood', 'common language', 'common history and traditions' 'common impulses and strivings'. Appiah's main point here is that such commonalities do not exist, and on that basis he comes up with a strong and startling assertion: 'The truth is that there are no races ...' (1992:72).

Appiah's conclusion should not be accepted at face value. Are there really no races? Daily people complete immigration and other forms in different parts of the world in which they are asked to identify their races. South Africa was governed by 'race' laws until 1994. Movements such as the 'Black Consciousness Movement' and theologies such as 'Black Theology' all presuppose the reality of race. Conferences against 'racism' are still being organized – again presupposing the reality of race and its possible abuse. Appiah himself co-edited a book with Gates (1995) in which the two declared in the introduction that the eighties might well be characterized by a literary historian as 'the period when race, class and gender became the holy trinity of literary criticism' (:1) and that these same realities had become 'regnant clichés of our critical discourse' (:1). So they are admitting that race is a factor in the definition of some identities. This factor becomes even more pronounced in an essay by Michaels (1985) in the same book edited by Appiah and Gates. The gist of Michaels argument (1985:61f), whose context is the multiculturalism of America, is that

culture has turned out to be a way of continuing rather than repudiating racial thought. It is only the appeal to race that makes culture an object of affect and that gives notions like losing

our culture, preserving it, stealing someone else's culture, restoring people's culture to them, and so on, their pathos. Our race identifies the culture to which we have a right, a right that may be violated or defended, repudiated or recovered.

Michaels (1995:59f) explicates this thought by saying that without race consciousness cultural identity would become the dynamic reality that it actually is. Cultural identity would remain no more than what people currently do and believe:

The fact, in other words, that something belongs to our culture, cannot count as a motive for our doing it since, if it *does* belong to our culture we *already* do it and if we don't do it (if we've stopped or haven't yet started doing it) it doesn't belong to our culture. (It makes no sense, for example, to claim that we shouldn't teach Shakespeare because he isn't part of our culture since to teach him will immediately *make* him part of our culture, but it also makes no sense to claim that we should teach him because he is part of our culture since, if we stop teaching him, he won't be any longer). It is only if we think that our culture is not whatever beliefs and practices we actually happen to have but is instead the beliefs and practices that should properly go with the sort of people we happen to be that the fact of something belonging to our culture can count as a reason for doing it. But to think this is to appeal to something that must be beyond culture and that cannot be derived from culture precisely because our sense of which culture is properly ours must be derived from it. This has been the function of race.

We can therefore say that Appiah in his critique of Du Bois has overstated the lack of commonalities on the criteria that Du Bois stated in his definition. There is something of substance in Du Bois's view of the socio-historical criteria for race and that is 'common history, traditions and impulses'. Mazrui illustrates that it is precisely because of a common history of colonialism and oppression that created a common consciousness of mutual racial belongingness to those who were previously scattered and isolated tribal groups in what is now Africa. Appiah's half-hearted admission is significant: 'Of course, the common impulses of a biologically defined group may be historically caused by common experiences, common history' (1992:52). What Appiah tries to lightly dismiss is in fact at the very heart of what it means to belong.

More positively Appiah helpfully recognises the existence of culture and says that talk of race 'works as a sort of metaphor for culture' (1992:72). Cultures, he says, are the 'communities of meaning, shading variously into each other in the rich structure of the social world' (:72f). So even if we admit that a racial African identity would have remained non-existent without the historical processes we have identified, we can still build an African cultural identity. We would do so with the needed qualification that culture itself is dynamic and that the advent of the global village has

speeded up the reality of cultures 'shading variously into each other'. The task that requires to be carried out on the criterion of culture – a task that is by no means easy – is that of identifying what cultural traits make up the notion of 'Africanness'. Various attempts have been made to do this, with varying levels of success. One of the most credible, to be more fully explicated in the next chapter, is Bediako's stipulation of qualities, first identified by H.W Turner, that belong to the 'primal' worldview (Bediako 1995:93-96). These are: kinship with nature, a sense of dependence on the supernatural, an ontology made up of spiritual beings more powerful than humankind, the belief that humankind can enter into a relationship with the 'benevolent spirit-world and share in its powers and blessings', the importance given to 'ancestors or the "living dead"' and finally a conviction that human beings live 'in a sacramental universe where there is no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual'.

The fact that other groups in the world, at various times in history, have also exhibited the primal apprehension of reality does not detract from the fact that this, together with other features of Africanness, add up to the uniqueness of what it means to be an African.

Another attempt at stipulating the cultural qualities of Africanness has been made by people like Samkange (1980) and Tutu (1999) in a concept of *ubuntuism* or *hunhuism* and by Tempels (1959) in his *Bantu philosophy*. These will be fully discussed below.

What is important for now is the recognition from our discussion so far that race, culture, shared history and the geographical factor are all legitimate criteria by which black Africans in sub-Saharan Africa can claim a uniqueness of identity. None of these features, by itself, should be considered an adequate basis for claiming an African identity. For example, modernity has eroded the primal apprehension of reality in some Africans. Yet that does not *ipso facto* mean that the Africans concerned have lost their identity, for there are other bases for claiming African identity other than the primal worldview. At the same time it should not be assumed that modernity will necessarily overwhelm the African primal worldview. There is in academic circles a rising tide of recognition of the value of the indigenous knowledge systems which, for Africa, would include the primal worldview. Therefore, far from indigenous knowledge systems being consigned to extinction, there is a resurgence of such systems, with the world of academia adding value to them through teaching and research. This is already reinforcing Afrocentric thinking on this continent.

3.4 MANIFESTATIONS OF THE QUEST FOR AFRICAN IDENTITY

Having discussed the characteristics of identity itself in the above section, we turn now to the various manifestations of the quest for identity in Africa. These manifestations cannot be analysed into watertight categories. For example what may be categorised as 'political' approaches may be undergirded by 'religious' and/or 'philosophical' considerations. So it is only for the sake of clarity of thinking that we divide these manifestations into categories, bearing in mind that in discussing each category we will inevitably refer to issues drawn from other categories. The categories that seem to best illustrate the quest for African identity are the Black Consciousness Movement, Négritude and the African Personality, Postcolonial criticism, African philosophy and Religion.

3.4.1 Black Consciousness³⁰

During the period of the 1960s and 1970s in South Africa, the Apartheid system, with its 'politics of fragmentation' (Gwala 1975:24), was at its most vicious. With the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress black students rose to become the voice of the voiceless Africans (Mekoa 1995:3-7). In 1969 the black South African Students Organization (SASO) was inaugurated and in 1972 it broke away from the multi-racial but white dominated National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Black students had concluded that 'the time had come for blacks to do things for themselves, no longer relying on the altruism of a minority of white liberals' who, while presuming to speak on behalf of the blacks, continued to enjoy the exclusive privileges accorded to them by the Apartheid system (South African Institute of Race Relations 1977:22). Steve Biko, who was elected the first president of SASO, became the leading figure of the black conscious philosophy which guided the activities of SASO. Other black consciousness groups, notably the Black People's Convention (BPC) and the Black Community Programmes (BCP), also came into existence, with Biko being involved in their founding and their leadership. As Biko (1978:15) said, 'the blacks are tired of standing at the touchlines to witness a game that they should be playing. They want to do things for themselves and all by themselves'. Our interest is to investigate what the black conscious philosophy is, its contribution to the identity of the black people of South Africa and its relationship to African theology.

³⁰ Maluleke (1995:11 note 11) correctly points out that there is a 'difference between black consciousness as such as the Black Consciousness Movement as contained in political formations such as AZAPO and the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania'. However they have to be seen as being closely related, for it is the black conscious philosophy that gave rise to the BCM.

The meaning of the black consciousness philosophy

The Black Consciousness Movement of South Africa drew part of its inspiration from the Black Power movement of the United States of America (Mekoa 1995:4). This is borne out by the closely related definitions of black consciousness as given by Cone, the most articulate spokesman for Black Theology in America, and Steve Biko, the man at the centre of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during the late 1960s and the 1970s. Cone (1975:66) defined black consciousness, which he equates with Black Power as follows:

Perhaps the most appropriate description of this new black mood is the concept of black consciousness, which is to say that black people are aware of the meaning of their blackness in the context of whiteness. They know that their colour must be the defining characteristic of their movement in the world because it is the controlling symbol of white limitations placed on black existence. Black consciousness is recognising that the social, economic, and political status of black people in America is determined by white people's inability to deal with the presence of colour.

He proceeds to explain that 'black consciousness is the black man's self-awareness ... To be conscious of his colour means that the black person knows that his blackness is the reason for his oppression. For there is no other way to account for the white racist brutality against the black community, except by focusing it on the colour of the victim' (:66). Cone (:67) brings his explanation of black consciousness to a climax when he links it with Black Power:

Black consciousness is Black Power, the power of the oppressed black man to liberate himself from white enslavement by making blackness the primary datum of his humanity. It is the power to be black in spite of whiteness, the courage to affirm being in the midst of non-being.

Biko's explanation of the black consciousness philosophy closely parallels that of Cone as given above. To him black people are not 'black' merely by virtue of their skin colour. In *I write what I like* (1978:48) he defines blacks as

those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations.

This is a socio-political rather than a biological definition of blackness which then leads him to the definition of black consciousness itself as the

realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid

themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the 'normal' which is white. ... It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.

(Biko 1978:49)

We accept this definition of black consciousness which is in general agreement with other such definitions, and which comes from the most authoritative figure at the centre of the Black Consciousness Movement.

Contribution of black consciousness to African identity

From the above definitions three concepts emerge in the explanation of black consciousness and its contribution to African identity. Firstly black consciousness is the acceptance of the very colour that the oppressors used as a justification for oppression. Writing in the context of black Americans Cone (1975:68) rightly insists that 'it is not possible to enslave a people because of their blackness and expect them not to be conscious of colour'. This statement can be applied to the context of racial discrimination in the old days of Rhodesia and South Africa. It is not possible to oppress a people because of their blackness and not expect them to be conscious of their colour. But such a consciousness of colour by the oppressed people can easily be in the direction of inferiority complex. Black consciousness is a deliberate psychological intervention to ensure that such a consciousness of their colour is in the direction of self-affirmation rather than self-negation. The solidarity must involve both a deliberate solidarity of the oppressed and a deliberate reversal of the negative connotations in the very language that the oppressors had used as a justification for their oppression. So if for the oppressor black equals inferiority, black consciousness rightly takes the very skin colour that justifies oppression and uses it to justify self-pride.

In the context of Apartheid in which the black consciousness of South Africa arose, the usual distinction drawn by the hegemonic powers was between whites and 'non-whites'. This clearly made whiteness a normative criterion of definition. It is for this reason that the term 'non-white' was rejected by black consciousness activists.

The term non-white was discarded. In SASO's view it diminished blacks by defining them in terms of whites. Self-definition, self-reliance, black pride, these were the answers to what was seen as the immediate problem, a psychological one of overcoming black attitudes of inferiority and subservience.

(Mekoa 1995:4)

On surface reading, black solidarity and black self-affirmation may seem to be an undesirable reverse racialism. Would it not be more desirable to counteract white racism with the concept of non-racial integration? Biko has a convincing rebuttal of that thinking. The greatest ally of white racism, according to Biko (1978:50), was

the refusal by us to club together as blacks because we are told to do so would be racialist. So while we progressively lose ourselves in a world of colourlessness and amorphous common humanity, whites are deriving pleasure and security in entrenching white racism and further exploiting the minds and bodies of the unsuspecting black masses.

Utilising the Hegelian theory of dialectic materialism, Biko (1978:51) takes the thesis to be white racism. The antithesis must then be solid black unity. The interplay between these two then produces a 'synthesis of ideas and a *modus vivendi*' in which the two races can work together as equals. This synthesis produces 'real black people who do not regard themselves as appendages to white society' (:51). To achieve that it is necessary that blacks must 'rally around the cause of their suffering – their black skin' (:62). Without this initial solidarity and self-affirmation integration would simply mean that 'both black and white walk into a hastily organised integrated circle carrying with them the seeds of destruction of that circle – their inferiority and superiority complexes' (:64)

Such integration is a 'one-way course, with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks the listening' (Biko 1978:20). True integration, according to Biko (:21) instead means that

once the various groups within a given community have asserted themselves to the point that mutual respect has to be shown then you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration. At the heart of true integration is the provision for each man, each group to rise and attain the envisioned self. Each group must be able to attain its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another. Out of this mutual respect for each other and complete freedom of self-determination there will obviously arise a genuine fusion of the lifestyles of the various groups. This is true integration.

Biko (1978:24) was insistent on the fact that integration should not be a matter of blacks fitting into norms and values pre-established and maintained by the whites. It must be integration on the basis of norms and values determined by the will of the majority of the people, 'for one cannot escape the fact that the culture shared by the majority group in any given society must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society'.

Secondly, black consciousness is a realization that psychological liberation must precede economic and political liberation. As Biko (1978:68) so ably expressed it:

At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realisation by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Once the latter has been so effectively manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do that will really scare the powerful masters.

Zimbabwe presents a clear illustration of the truth of Biko's stand on the need for psychological liberation. Black consciousness did not precede political liberation. The result is that in spite of twenty years of political freedom blacks in that country still suffer from an inferiority complex as the previous chapter illustrated. It is also possible to say that even in South Africa black consciousness faded off prematurely before the majority of Africans in the country had become convinced of the fullness of their humanity in their own right as blacks. For that reason inferiority complex amongst the blacks, and superiority complex among the whites is still an ongoing problem seven years into independence. For example, many middle class African parents only converse to their children in English, and seem proud when they 'confess' to visitors that their children are not able to communicate in the vernacular.

Whites on the other hand, still want their values to dominate. For example, when visiting formally all-white congregations which are now supposedly 'integrated', it is very clear that nothing fundamental has changed in those congregations. The only way for blacks to fit into those congregations is if they are as white in their value system as possible. Indeed many of those blacks who are now part of those churches have learnt to adopt the white value system by which they feel 'promoted' to a higher level of being. What Biko (1978:23) wrote in February 1970 in a letter to SRC presidents about the effect of prolonged oppression on black people is still true in South Africa today:

They [i.e. blacks] have been made to feel inferior for so long that for them it is comforting to drink tea, wine or beer with whites who seem to treat them as equals. This services to boost up their own ego to the extent of making them feel slightly superior to those blacks who do not get similar treatment from whites.

Thirdly, black consciousness must actively pursue an emancipatory programme. According to Biko (1978:49) such a programme cannot be one of reforming the oppressive system because 'so doing implies acceptance of the major points around which the system revolves'. Therefore blacks had to be out to 'completely transform the system and to make of it what they wished' (:49). The initiation of Black Community Programmes was meant to give expression to the need for such emancipatory programmes.

Black consciousness and Christian theology

It now needs to be asked whether black consciousness is compatible with African Christian theology. The answer must be a qualified yes. It is compatible with African Christian theology in so far as it seeks to recover the full humanity of the oppressed people who are created in the image of God. Black consciousness can be an aid to the conviction of Liberation Theology about God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed – a subject to be covered more fully in chapter five. We noted in chapter one, for example, the declaration of self-affirmation that Israelites were commanded to make each time they brought their offering of firstfruits to the priests a declaration that includes the affirmation that those who were once of no consequence have become the Chosen people, great and mighty. Even though the basis of this affirmation is not colour, it still provides a powerful example of how a previously disadvantaged people can successfully affirm their full humanity and thereby experience power of being. This self-affirmation is desperately needed by the black person who, because of prolonged oppression 'has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity' (Biko 1978:29).

Black consciousness is also compatible with African Christian theology in as far as it seeks to make Africans agents in the project of their own liberation, rather than perpetually carrying a victims mentality or expecting that liberation must come from the agency of white liberals or other outside forces. The SASO watchword was 'black man, you are on your own' (Mekoa 1995:4). As Biko

correctly asserted (1978:29), 'the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality'.

Yet the compatibility must remain qualified in three respects. Firstly black consciousness can easily be corrupted into white hatred. Whites are as much created in the image of God as blacks are. Their humanity must therefore also be affirmed. Biko makes provision for this affirmation of their humanity when he talks about a genuine integration among equals. But Biko is wrong when he denies that blacks could be guilty of reverse racism. His denial was based on the assumption that 'one cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate' (1978:25). Therefore any violence by blacks against whites was treated as a mere response to white racism. Biko is viewing 'power' in a very limited way as meaning political and military power. But if power of being in the Tillichian sense can be seen as being capable of being negatively applied against another being then anyone can be a racist. Hatred towards whites, for no other reason than that they are white, is racism in a broader sense than Biko's exposition suggests.

Secondly black consciousness can easily become too exclusive. For example, it can easily exclude whites who have undergone a genuine 'conversion' from a superiority complex to a genuine willingness to become catalysts for the liberation of the black oppressed (West 1999:36). In both Zimbabwe and South Africa there were examples of whites who sacrificed even their own lives in the cause of black liberation. Thirdly, and most importantly, black consciousness by itself provides an inadequate basis for the affirmation of the humanity of those who are oppressed. To say 'black' means beauty, or power, or worth etc merely because of being black and oppressed does not stop someone affirming the same about their whiteness, or their shortness or any other identifiable quality. It becomes an affirmation on the basis of an arbitrary opinion which does not compel acceptance by others. That is why black consciousness needs a theological affirmation that blacks, as much as other people, are created in the image of God and *therefore* they command worth and respect.

3.4.2 Négritude and the African Personality

While the context for the development of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa was Apartheid racism, the context for the more nebulous concepts of Négritude and African Personality

in the rest of black Africa is colonialism and its perceived negative effects. What, then, do the concepts Négritude and African Personality mean?

Exposition of Négritude and African Personality

The New Oxford Dictionary defines Négritude, which comes from the French word of 'blackness', as 'the quality or fact of being of black African origin; the affirmation or consciousness of the value of black or African culture, heritage and identity'. Mudimbe (1985:175) gives a general context in which the concept arose as follows:

The alienation of colonialism entails both the objective fact of total dependence (economic, political, cultural and religious) and the subjective process of the self-victimization of the dominated. The colonized internalizes the racial stereotypes imposed upon him, particularly in his attitudes towards technology, culture, and language. *Black Personality* and Négritude appear as the only means of negating this thesis and Fanon expounds the antithesis in terms of anti-racist symbols. Négritude becomes the intellectual and emotional sign of opposition to the ideology of white superiority and, at the same time, asserts an authenticity which eventually expresses itself as a radical negation: rejection of racial humiliation, rebellion against the rationality of domination, and revolt against the whole colonialist system.

It is immediately possible to see that Négritude is a more diffused version of the black consciousness that we have already analysed. It works on the same dialectic analysis of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The thesis is all that is involved in what Mudimbe has called 'the alienation of colonialism' including 'the self-victimization of the dominated'. The antithesis can be viewed negatively as 'opposition' to racism and other colonial forms of alienation. But the antithesis can also be positively defined, in the words of Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the architects of Négritude, as 'the awareness, defence and development of African cultural values' or simply 'the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world' (Mbiti 1969:267).

For Senghor Négritude is part of Africanity, or what we are calling the African Personality (Mbiti 1969:267). To Mbiti (:268) African Personality fits into the mould of the 'search for new values, foundations and identity' in Africa. Yet a precise definition of it remains elusive as 'almost every champion of African Personality has his own image and definition of it'. For our purposes here such a precise definition as Mbiti is looking for is not necessary. We can accept even the lack of a precise definition as part of the process of searching for and affirming African cultural values in the face of their decimation by colonialism and westernisation. For all practical purposes, then, we can equate Négritude and African Personality.

Négritude and African identity

Like black consciousness, Négritude is a commendable attempt to assert the value of Africanness, including African culture, in the light of western ethnocentrism. It is an attempt to restore pride in that which was undervalued or even dismissed as worthless.

In saying this we must not overvalue Négritude's power to foster African identity. Its shortcomings must be admitted and highlighted. Firstly, Négritude does not have a general appeal to Africans because of its limited interlocutors. Mudimbe (1985:171) highlights this fact by pointing out that Négritude's

most distinguished promoters are among those first and most completely assimilated to western culture and thought, and that everything happens as if – from the point of view of the integration experienced and accepted – those westernized Africans felt, at one time, the need to return to their own sources and to state the right to be different.

That Négritude is a pursuit of 'African intellectuals and politicians', rather than of the generality of Africans, has also been highlighted by Mbiti (1969:268) who writes:

The concept of Négritude with its many forms and definitions is an ideological point of reference for the few élite particularly from the French-speaking countries of West Africa. Nobody in the villages understands or subscribes to its philosophical expression. ... Négritude is, then, a comfortable exercise for the élite who wants, seeks and finds it when he looks at the African Zamani and hopes for an African future. It has neither dogmas nor taboos, neither feast days nor ceremonies. You only need to imagine it and you will be able to identify it; be lucid about it and you will be able to see it. Négritude is because it is said to be. It is identified with Negro Africans; but do Africans identify themselves with Négritude? That is the dilemma of Négritude as an ideology.

It is this lack of dogmas, taboos, feast days and ceremonies that makes Négritude inaccessible to the common people. Because Négritude has tended to remain as an ivory tower pursuit of dis-Africanised African intellectuals, and has not made any attempt to permeate to those on the grassroots, its impact must remain limited indeed.

Secondly, Négritude has also been justly criticised for not offering anything uniquely African. Mudimbe (1985:170) rightly criticizes Négritude for being essentially French in outlook and for 'responding more to European sources than to the immediately visible African themes'. He then points out the paradox of the fact that 'Négritude writers speak to a white audience'. Négritude is a protest movement, but one that is out of touch with the reality of Africanness.

While these criticisms are valid, it does not mean that Négritude is thereby rendered valueless. For one thing Négritude, like black consciousness, seeks to make black Africans accept the way they were created (Mudimbe 1985:168). Secondly Négritude offers at least those African intellectuals it reaches an ideological basis for negating colonialism and racism while maintaining solidarity with the oppressed of all colours (:168).

Négritude and Christian values

Is Négritude compatible with Christian values? Most of the comments we have made in evaluating black consciousness will be applicable in the case of Négritude as well. Suffice it to add here that Jesus' preferential choice of the despised Galilee as his operational base can be seen as affirming Négritude's preferential option for what is African. From the comments we have made, however, we can immediately point out a big difference. While Jesus existentially identified with Galileans, walking with them and eating with them, Négritude is more of an intellectual identification with what is African, mainly as manifested in literature and art. That is where Négritude, for all its usefulness, falls far short of the Christian ideals.

3.4.3 Postcolonial criticism

Our task in this section is to give a general exposition of postcolonial criticism as a quest for African identity, to discuss Mazrui as a particular example of a postcolonial writer grappling with these issues and finally to offer a critique of postcolonial criticism as a whole. Although postcolonial resistance literature is a worldwide phenomenon, especially in the Two-thirds world, we limit our analysis to Africa by reason of its being the subject of this thesis.

General exposition of postcolonial criticism

Though increasingly popular and widespread, the field of postcolonial studies, being so new, is still plagued by 'ambiguities and dissonances' (Bahri 1995:76) with a 'sufficiently thoughtful definitional and conceptual framework' continuing to elude us (:51). While the lack of agreement on the precise meaning of the term may be seen as a handicap on the one hand, it has the advantage, on the other hand, of allowing practitioners to specify their own agendas according to their own contexts within the broad framework of the postcolonial. According to Bahri (:52), following Gauri Viswanathan, the broad framework of postcolonial studies is the 'cultural interaction between colonizing powers and the societies they colonized, and the traces that this interaction left on the

literature, arts, and human sciences of both societies'. While postcoloniality refers to the historical situation, postcolonialism refers more specifically to the political and cultural response to that historical situation of colonialism³¹. The particular approach to be taken here is that of postcolonial criticism as a literary counter-discursive, deimperializing process – 'identifying the kinds of anti-colonialist resistance that can take place in literary writing' (Slemon 1990:32). This involves looking at 'how literature is used by imperial powers to impose and justify their institutions, and how the colonized also employ literature to reject the empire and to assert their liberation' (Dube 2000:49).

In looking at postcolonial criticism we are in fundamental agreement with Slemon (1990:33) who writes:

It has been, and always will be, the case that the most important forms of resistance to any form of social power will be produced from within the communities that are most immediately and visibly subordinated by that power structure.

This statement acknowledges the agency of those who are oppressed and articulates their ability to be their own liberators rather than helpless victims of oppressive forces. In our case the form of resistance to be analysed is literary resistance which Slemon (:36) correctly identifies as 'an integral part [of] an organized struggle or resistance for national liberation'.

While political and economic liberation have been the generally understood goals of resistance, our perspective in this thesis is that of the quest for an African identity in the light of western ethnocentricism as already discussed above. Postcolonial literary resistance in Africa represents such a quest. It is a Pan-African nationalist quest for identity in the light of the devastating effects of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism which were fully discussed in the previous chapter. This quest can best be seen through an analysis of one such piece of postcolonial literature, Ali Mazrui's *The Africans: A triple heritage* (1986)³².

³¹ In postcolonial criticism 'the empire writes back' as suggested by the title of the book by Ashcroft et al , 1989. *The empire writes back: The theory and practice of postcolonial literature*.

³² Postcolonial literary resistance in Africa has grown considerably since mid-20th century. An outstanding example of such literature is Wa Thiong'o's book whose very title, *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*, speaks of the need to resist colonialism at the symbolic level.

Ali Mazrui: An example of the quest for African identity in a postcolonial mode

Ali Mazrui (1986) sets the framework of his postcolonialist quest for identity in the context of Africa's triple heritage of indigenous traditions, Islamic culture and western influence. He looks at how the identity of Africans emerges out of the conflicts and the synthesis arising from that triple heritage. Since our main concern in this thesis is with sub-Saharan Africa, our analysis of Mazrui will focus mainly on the interaction between the indigenous traditions and the western culture.

Mazrui (1986) has no doubt that rapid westernization in Africa has negatively impacted on African identity, and that this has led to the ancestors of Africa cursing the continent because of their anger (:11):

But what is the proof of the curse of the ancestors? Things are not working in Africa. From Dakar to Dar es Salaam, from Marrakesh to Maputo, institutions are decaying, structures are rusting away. It is as if the ancestors had pronounced the curse of cultural sabotage. ... If this is the curse of the ancestors, what is the sin? It is the compact between Africa and the twentieth century and its terms are all wrong. They involve turning Africa's back on previous centuries – an attempt to 'modernise' without consulting cultural continuities, and an attempt to start the process of 'dis-Africanising' Africa. One consequence takes on the appearance of social turbulence, of rapid social change let loose upon a continent.

Mazrui's appeal to 'fellow Africans' is that 'the main thing we need to change is our own changeability' and slow down the 'remarkable pace of cultural dis-Africanisation and westernisation' for the sake of preserving African identity (:11). To him the rapidity of westernising change amounts to no less than 'unnatural dis-Africanisation' (:12). By contrast Mazrui (:11) is inspired by the Jewish ability to maintain their identity in the middle of worse pressures to be like other nationalities:

If the Jews in the Diaspora had scrambled to change their culture as fast as Africans in their own homelands seemed to be doing until recently, the miracle of Jewish identity would not have lasted these two or three additional millennia in the wilderness. Many Africans even today seem to be undergoing faster cultural change in a single generation than the Jews underwent in the first 1000 years of dispersal.

Yet in the midst of the decay in Africa Mazrui (:12) senses hope for the recovery of authentically African values:

Africa is at war. It is a war of cultures. It is a war between indigenous Africa and the forces of western civilisation. It takes the form of inefficiency, mismanagement, corruption and decay

of the infrastructures. The crisis of efficiency in the continent is symptomatic of the failure of transplanted organs of the state and the economy. Indigenous African culture is putting up a fight. It is as if the indigenous ancestors have been aroused from the dead, disapproving of what seems like an informal pact between the rulers of independent Africa (the inheritors of the colonial order) and the West – a pact which allows the West to continue to dominate Africa. It is as if the ancestors are angry at the failure of the Africans to consult them and to pay attention to Africa's past and usage. It is as if the apparent breakdown and decay in Africa today is a result of the curse of the ancestors. Or is it not a curse but a warning, a sign from the ancestors calling on Africans to rethink their recent past, their present and their future and calling on them to turn again to their traditions and reshape their society anew, to create a modern and a future Africa that incorporates the best of its own culture?

The question, however, is whether the westernization of Africa is reversible and whether the impact of such westernization was deep or shallow (:12). One school of thought sees the irreversibility of the process of westernization in Africa (:12-14). Through a series of decisive turning points, Africa has been irrevocably incorporated into a world economy. It began with the dragging of African slaves to fuel the capitalist economy (:12). Next, there was colonialism itself whereby Africa's lands were taken over for the benefit of western economies (:12). This was followed by a development of the western state system at or after independence (:12f). The process continued with Africa's incorporation into a 'primarily Eurocentric' world culture (:13) with European values and norms. One sign of this was the adoption of European languages as official mediums of communication. Another indication is 'Africa's incorporation into the world of international law, which is again heavily Eurocentric in origin' (:13). Apart from all the above there is Africa's incorporation into 'the modern technological age' and the global system of dissemination of information' (:13f). Even the moral order of Africans was penetrated with western and Christian systems (:14). So according to this school of thought all the above factors add up to a 'totally transformative force' (:14).

Mazrui, however, leans more towards the alternative school of thought that sees colonialism as 'an episode in millennia of African history' (:14). On the one hand there is an insistence that 'Africa could have entered the world economy and the international state system without being colonised by Europe', the example being that of Japan (:14). On the other hand, and more importantly for Mazrui (:14) the European impact on Africa has been shallow rather than deep, transitional rather than long-lasting. This, according to Mazrui (:15f) has resulted in several unsustainable anomalies. One of these is the 'anomaly of urbanisation without industrialisation' creating shallow and lopsided capitalism (:15). Then there is the decay of the postcolonial state itself, resulting from the

competing forces of privatisation and militarisation. He (Mazrui 1986:15) graphically describes these competing forces:

The pull towards privatisation is partly a legacy of greed in the tradition of Shylock, Shakespeare's creation in *the merchant of Venice*. The push towards militarism, on the other hand, is a legacy of naked power in the tradition of Shaka, the founder of the Zulu kingdom and empire. Africa is caught between Shylock and Shaka, between greed and naked power – and the decay of the postcolonial state is one consequence of that dialectic.

Mazrui describes situations, such as that of Idi Amini of Uganda and Mobutu Sese Seko of the former Zaire, where the two forces worked in combination, with the resources of the state, and even the state itself, being privatized into the hands of those who controlled 'the means of destruction' (:16f). Even Mobutu's principle of 'authenticity' was most effectively realized 'not in his explicit cultural policies, or in his rhetoric and eloquence on behalf of African culture, but in his mismanagement of Zaire's economy and his form of privatisation of the Zairean state' so that 'as the roads decayed, and factories came to a standstill, Africans turned increasingly to older and more traditional ways of earning a living' (:18).

Mazrui's conclusion from the above facts is that 'European colonial rule in Africa was more effective in destroying indigenous African structures than in destroying African culture' which he describes as 'resilient' (:20). The 'transferred institutions simply did not take root' because of the 'culture gap between new structures and ancient values, between alien institutions and ancestral traditions' (:20). The result is that while 'Africa can never go back completely to its pre-colonial starting point' there is 'a case for at least a partial retreat, a case for re-establishing contacts with familiar landmarks of yesteryear and then re-starting the journey of modernisation under indigenous impetus'. Japan was able to modernise without losing the Japanese culture, showing that this too may be possible for Africa. So 'if instability in the continent is a symptom of cultures at war, perhaps Africa's identity may survive the ravages of westernisation after all. ... It is almost as if the indigenous ancestors have been aroused from the dead, and are fighting back to avert the demise of Africinity' (:21). Hence decay and instability 'in their longer-term repercussions ... may be a matter for celebration (:21).

How then can the 'compact with the twentieth century be amended' in order that the ancestors may be appeased? Mazrui (:21) has the concluding answer:

Two broad principles should influence and inform social reform in Africa in the coming decades. *One* is the imperative of looking inwards towards ancestry: the other is the imperative of looking outward towards the wider humanity. The inward imperative requires a more systematic investigation into the cultural preconditions of the success of each project, of each piece of legislation, of each system of government. Feasibility studies should be much more sensitive to the issue of 'cultural feasibility' than has been the case in the past. Africa's ancestors need to be consulted through the intermediary of consulting African usage, custom and tradition.

But since the world is becoming a village, Africa cannot just look inward to its own past. The compact with the twentieth century has to include sensitivity to the wider world of the human race as a whole.

Mazrui (:73f) juxtaposes two responses to 'Europe's cultural haughtiness'. *Romantic gloriana* 'looks to the pyramids as a validation of Africa's dignity, takes pride in the great Zimbabwe ruins and adopts the name for a newly independent country... Idealised primitivism ... seeks solace in stateless societies, finds dignity in village life and discerns cultural validation in the traditions and beliefs of rural folk' (:73). '*Romantic gloriana* is inspired by a faith in rationality and science, trust in technology and technical achievements' while idealized primitivism takes part in 'indigenous capacities for intuition' (:73). *Romantic gloriana* values the written word while idealized primitivism values oral traditions, drum and dance (:74f). *Romantic gloriana* respects 'hierarchy and stratification ... Idealised primitivism ... is predicated on village egalitarianism.'

Julius Nyerere combined this egalitarianism with the fellowship of village life to provide what he regarded as the ancestry of his own brand of socialism. Nyerere used the Swahili word *ujamaa* (familyhood) for the fellowship of modern Africa rooted in the ancient virtues of equality and co-operation. As Julius Nyerere once wrote: 'We in Africa have no more need of being taught socialism than we have of being taught democracy. Both are rooted in our past, in the traditional society which produced us'.

(Mazrui 1986:75)

Mazrui, however, does not say which of these two responses he finds most valid. But it may be inferred from his use of 'romantic' and 'idealized' that neither of these responses is realistic. Neither does Mazrui provide an alternative response, perhaps because he does not know that the Christian faith is able to integrate the best that is in so-called primitive societies with the best that is in so-called 'developed' societies'. The values of 'godliness' and 'love' coalesce with those of 'subduing the earth' as God's stewards (positive technological development) thus making it unnecessary to choose between gloriana and primitivism.

Mazrui does not see only the dark side of westernism. He asserts (:113) that westernism gave Africa the precious gift of an identity, even though this was done unintentionally:

Europe especially awakened Africans to the fact that they were Africans. This Africanisation of Africans was accomplished first through cartography: then through European racism and racial classifications; third, through the impact of colonisation and imperialism; and fourth, through the fragmentation of Africa and the resulting quest for a transcending continental or racial identification.

When we say that Europe Africanised the identity of the inhabitants of the continent, we mean that this was in spite of the wishes of Europe. Europe's greatest service to the people of Africa was not western civilisation, which is under siege, or even Christianity, which is on the defensive. Europe's supreme gift was the gift of African identity, bequeathed without grace and without design, but a reality all the same.

According to Mazrui Christianity is classified as part of the western influence. To him Christianity therefore shares in the faults of westernism towards Africa, including slavery and colonialism. But Christianity is also given the credit of awakening African to the fact that they are Africans:

Christianity has quite often communicated with Africans in the language of their own societies. The Bible was often translated into indigenous African languages decades before the Quran. Services in African churches are often conducted in indigenous African languages. Many hymns, though originating in Europe, have been translated and are often sung in indigenous African tongues. At least at the level of language, Christianity has made more concessions to Africa than has Islam.

(Mazrui 1986:141)

Coming from a severe critic of the western influences upon Africa, Mazrui's remarks about the manner in which Christianity has contributed to African identity should be seen as a remarkable compliment to the Christian faith. It is even more remarkable that Mazrui (:143f) should so correctly see translation as being intrinsic to the Christian faith:

The Bible from very early times has been primarily a work of translation. After all, Christianity did not triumph among the people to whom it was first revealed – the ancient Hebrews. Christianity had its greater successes away from its own cradle. It became pre-eminently the religion of the foreigner, the religion of the gentiles. By becoming the religion of the stranger, Christianity entered into the realm of translation almost from the beginning.

It remains true, however, that Mazrui is not out to valorise the western influence in general or Christianity in particular. The overall thrust of his message is that in spite of awakening Africa to

her identity, westernism itself is incompatible with African values. He dramatises this conviction by likening westernism to the heart of a baboon that was transplanted into Baby Fae in 1984:

The baby survived for twenty days, breathing with the aid of an alien heart. It turned out that the transplant of a baboon's heart to a human being was ahead of its time. Baby Fae finally rejected the alien heart. There is a sense in which Africa, too, has received the heart of a baboon since colonisation. Here, too, Africa's body politic is rejecting the transplanted organ – be the organ an alien university in Kenya or an American constitution in Nigeria, a premature technology or a foreign ideology without adequate roots. Africa is rebelling against westernisation masquerading as modernity.

(Mazrui 1986:210-211)

This rejection of westernism, however, leaves Africa in a dilemma. In the modern global village Africa cannot survive by a retreat to its pre-colonial traditions. Therefore Mazrui (:295) is forced to look at 'two routes towards Africa's redemption'. One route is 'looking inwards towards Africa's ancestors' through a revisiting of the indigenous culture for the sake of African authenticity. 'The other is the imperative of looking outwards towards the wider world' through development in the true sense of 'modernisation minus dependency, the promotion of innovative change and the broadening of social horizons without excessive reliance on others (:201).

A critique of postcolonial criticism

Having looked at what postcolonial criticism deals with in general, and having analysed Mazrui as an example of postcolonial literary resistance, we must now ask whether it establishes a solid basis for African identity.

Postcolonial criticism, to its credit, has helped to heighten awareness of the various kinds of oppression arising from Africa's contact with the West over previous centuries, and the negative effect of such oppressions on Africa's identity. Postcolonial criticism is a protest against the overpowering effect of westernism on Africa's identity. Positively it is a call to Africa to re-assert her identity.

With the aid of postmodernism, the success of some forms of postcolonial criticism in Africa lies in its ability to question certain grand narratives of colonialism, especially the grand narrative of civilisation in the modernist mode of science and technology. Thus Mazrui (1970:128) pays tribute to Négritude for not only negating colonialism and racism but also for negating the grand narratives

that go with colonialism and affirming the value of African local cultures and cultural expressions. As he says Négritude 'has sought to make respectable that which was African'.

But this postcolonial venture is fraught with many complications. The first complication is the lack of resolution of the tension between the dynamism of culture, especially in the light of cultural contact with others on the one hand, and the need to reassert African traditional values on the other. Mazrui correctly analyses what he calls 'stages of cultural integration' (:239), these being culture *contact*, culture *conflict*, culture *conquest*, culture *confusion* and finally culture *coalescence* or integration. In the light of this correct analysis one would have expected Mazrui to suggest practical ways of achieving the sort of cultural integration that would do justice to African identity while enabling Africa to remain part of the global village. His suggestion (:305) is that we must on the one hand 'reduce the power that the western world has upon Africa' and on the other hand 'attempt to increase the power of Africa upon the western world'. Among the strategies Mazrui proposes for achieving a new balance of power more favourable to Africa are the 'power of numbers' (:310), utilising African's 'mineral wealth' (:310), power of debt (:313) and even 'nuclearisation of Africa' (:315). This is tantamount to a greater westernisation of Africa in an effort to reduce the western influence on Africa – a real contradiction in terms. Other forms of postcolonial literary resistance bemoan the loss of traditional cultures in the light of westernisation. A well known example is Chinua Achebe's novels, *Things fall apart* (1958) and *No longer at ease* (1960). The titles themselves loudly communicate the frustration of the de-Africanisation taking place on this continent as a result of rapid westernisation. But there is no clear solution of how to retrieve healthy values of African traditions and still participate in modernisation.

The second complication, already suggested above, is postcolonial criticism's inability to escape from a western frame of reference even in a war waged against westernism. For example much of postcolonial literary resistance is written in English, the very language of the culture whose predominance is being fought against. Mazrui (1970:126) points to the irony of 'the tendency to westernise what is indigenous' i.e. to 'look at traditional African institutions and ideas, and describe them in language borrowed from western ideologies'. He quotes the example of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere who argued that socialism and democracy were native to Africa. To Mazrui (:127) this is an example of 'looking at the African phenomena with the spectacles borrowed from a different experience'. It is as if because socialism and democracy are already acceptable ideologies in the

West, Nyerere was keen to show that Africa is also acceptable, by western standards. Elsewhere this is what Mazrui (1986:75f) describes as accepting European *values* while rejecting European *facts* about Africa:

But in its purer form *romantic gloriana* is a branch of idealised African history. It tends to accept European values while rejecting European 'facts' about Africa. The gloriana tendency betrays a readiness to agree with the proposition that respectable societies are those with relatively centralised political systems, with kings or imperial structures, preferably with monuments in bricks and mortar, and ultimately based on the organisational principle of statehood. What the gloriana school disputes is the European assertion that such societies did not exist in pre-colonial Africa.

Most of postcolonial literary resistance is of the gloriana type, which is trapped in the western value system against which it is waging a war.

The third complication that postcolonial criticism shares with Négritude is its inability to inspire the following of the generality of the African people. This is literature of the educated, by the educated. It is as if its real audience consists of the western metropolitan powers against which the literature is protesting, as well as the educated African élite. The possibility that such literature impacts the general African population to whom it is not linguistically and conceptually accessible is therefore minimal.

The fourth complication that postcolonial criticism must confront is the claim made that the colonialism it fights against was necessary for the creation of an African identity, and will continue to be necessary for African unity. That westernism created the African identity has already been established above. The question now is what would happen if the war against colonialism and neo-colonialism were completely won? Mazrui (1986:108f) expressed his fears clearly:

It is certainly clear that the mere departure of alien forces from the African scene would not be enough for the task of 'putting Africa back together again'. Indeed, the evidence so far points in the reverse direction. When Africans decide to unite against colonialism and racism, they stand a better chance of sustaining that unity and sometimes achieving really substantive results. Pan-Africanism of liberation, concerned with gaining independence for Africa and ending white minority rule, has basically been a success story. On the other hand, when Africans decide to unite for the sake of economic development or shared regional facilities and utilities, unity is less likely to be sustained. Postcolonial African history is littered with the debris of economic communities and common markets and indeed sometimes political unions which did not last very long. This includes the most promising economic community of them all at the time it was launched, the East African Community

involving Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. At some levels it was even more integrated than the European Economic Community. But one by one the legs of solidarity were removed — and the table of solidarity finally collapsed in 1977. Pan-Africanism of integration, of uniting for Africa's development rather than Africa's liberation, has basically been a failure.

Mazrui goes on to argue that even Apartheid, for all its brutality, helped to 'sustain African solidarity all over the continent in a shared political cause'. It is as if Mazrui had foreseen that with the elimination of the Apartheid enemy African wars against each other would be intensified as the internationalisation of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has so clearly demonstrated.

The last problem of postcolonial criticism is its general misreading of the nature of the Christian faith. Mazrui (1986) presents a clear example of such misreading. As already pointed out he sees a triple heritage in Africa consisting of the African indigenous, the western and the Islamic forces. Christianity is buried under the western heritage, and is seen to share with the West all the evils perpetrated against Africa. It will be argued in section 3.5.1 that the abuse of Christianity for oppressive purposes by those who first brought the faith to Africa does not compromise the universal nature of the faith itself, or change its basic liberative nature.

These five complications make it clear that postcolonial criticism is fighting an uphill battle for African identity in the face of overwhelming odds. This does not render the postcolonial battle counter-productive. Its most important contribution in spite of all those complications is the registering of the battle for African identity which other approaches can also join in fighting from different perspectives.

3.4.4 African traditional religions and philosophy

By 'philosophy' here we are not talking about a study of the meaning of existence which is accessible only to learned professional philosophers, but the traditional Africans' religiously based outlook on life. It is their worldview, the sum total of their convictions of what reality is made up of, and how best to participate in that reality, even if that worldview or those convictions are not systematically articulated (Tempels 1959:14f). The fact that 'religion' and 'philosophy' are so closely bound together in the African traditional worldview gives the justification for considering them under the same heading. However, a full consideration of African traditional religions belongs

to the next chapter. Here it should suffice to understand the ontological basis of African religion and the resultant 'philosophy' of life.

African ontology and its relationship to vital force

A consideration of African traditional religions and philosophy must begin with an understanding of what reality is made up of in the traditional African world. Mbiti (1969:75) says that 'the spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living-dead'. He goes on to describe the various kinds of spiritual realities that constitute traditional African religiosity (:75-91). God constitutes the highest reality. Below God, in the belief of some African societies, there are various divinities, including deified heroes. 'The Yoruba have one thousand and seven hundred divinities (*orisa*), this being obviously the largest collection of divinities in a single African people' (:76). After the divinities follows the spirits, i.e. 'spiritual beings beneath the status of divinities, and above the status of men' (:78). These are the spirits of those who have passed out of the stage of *Sasa* and are wholly in the *Zamani*³³ stage of existence where they are no longer remembered by name. Then follows those who Mbiti classifies as the 'living-dead', who have 'died' and yet are still remembered by name, remain active and are in constant fellowship with the living (:83f). This is followed by human beings, animate and inanimate objects in that order.

A very similar, but more nuanced, description of the African ontology is given by Placide Tempels (1959) who describes each ontological category as a 'vital force'. To Tempels the African ontology is an 'interaction of forces' (:39) which are arranged as a hierarchy (:41-43). God the Creator is the highest of all forces. 'He gives existence, power of survival and of increase, to other forces' (:41). After God comes the 'first fathers of men, founders of the different clans' (:41) who 'constitute the most important chain binding men to God' and who participate 'to a certain degree in the divine Force (:42). They are the deified heroes of the tribes. These are followed by 'the dead of the tribe' who 'form a chain, through the links of which the forces of the elders exercise their vitalising influence on the living generation' (:42). This is followed by the living, who also form a hierarchy 'according to their vital power' (:42). Humans are followed by other forces 'animal, vegetable and

³³ The terms *sasa* and *zamani* will be further explicated in later paragraphs. Mbiti first articulated these concepts in his 1969 book where *sasa* is explained as the time period ranging from the immediate past through present to immediate future. This is the period of intense consciousness. By contrast the *zamani* period stretches backward from the immediate past into the infinite past which no living person has any memory of.

mineral', and within each of these categories 'is found a hierarchy based on vital power, rank and primogeniture' (:43).

Tempels (1959:34) makes it very clear that what is statically called 'being' in western hellenised ontology is what is dynamically called 'vital force' in Bantu tradition:

We can conceive the transcendental notion of 'being' by separating it from its attribute, 'Force', but the Bantu cannot. 'Force' in his thought is a necessary element in 'being', and the concept 'force' is inseparable from the definition of 'being'. There is no idea among Bantu of 'being' divorced from the idea of 'force'.

From this Tempels comes up with an understanding of Bantu principles pertaining to vital force. Firstly 'all force can be strengthened or enfeebled. That is to say, all being can become stronger or weaker' (:38). Secondly vital forces are constantly interacting, with 'one being influencing another' (:39). Human beings, living or dead, can 'directly reinforce or diminish the being of another man' (:45) and higher forces directly influence inferior forces (:46). Thirdly, the forces are in a hierarchy as already described above. Fourthly 'the created universe is centred on man: The present human generation living on earth is the centre of all humanity, including the world of the dead (:43).

The centrality of vital force, according to Tempels means that 'human behaviour is centred in a single value: vital force' (:30). For this reason (:32)

[s]upreme happiness, the only kind of blessing, is, to the Bantu, to possess the greatest vital force: the worst misfortune and, in very truth, the only misfortune, is, he thinks, the diminution of this power.

That pursuit of the vital force then becomes the basis of African religion and ethics. As Tempels (1959:31) says: 'Force, the potent life, vital energy are the object of prayers and invocations to God, to the spirits and to the dead, as well as of all that is usually called magic, sorcery or magical remedies'.

In three propositions Mudimbe (1985:193) summarizes the 'convergences which solidly mark the continuity from Tempels to Kagame and other ethnophilosophers'. These are:

- (1) A good application of classical philosophical grids demonstrates beyond doubt that there is an African philosophy which, as a deep system, underlies and sustains African cultures and civilization;
- (2) African philosophy is fundamentally an ontology and organizes itself as a deployment of interacting but hierarchically ordered forces;
- (3) Man, vital unity, appears

to be the centre of the endless dialectic of forces which collectively determine their being in relation to him.

From that statement by Mudimbe it is noteworthy that Tempels' analysis has generated a consensus among ethnophilosophers. Tempels' characterisation of African philosophy is also remarkably similar to the Tillichian concept of the 'power of being' that we have already considered above. This creates a fair amount of confidence that Tempels' analysis of 'vital force' as the heartbeat of African ontology is correct.

Indeed it is possible to concede the correctness of Tempels' analysis without necessarily agreeing with the whole of his motivation in coming up with the analysis. There is much that is questionable in Tempels' motivation and his view of Africans. Tempels in fact gives credence to the accusation that the missionary movement was the handmaid of colonialism. His book is addressed to 'colonials of good will' (:119) to assist them in 'our mission to civilize' the Bantu (:109). Mudimbe's analysis of Tempels' view of Africans is quite correct: 'In effect, throughout his book Tempels indistinctly uses the terms Africans, Bantus, primitives, natives, and savages' (1985:181f).

Yet Mudimbe (1985:193) commends Tempels for identifying elements in Bantu philosophy which have been used 'for the Africanization of Christianity' by people like Taylor, Mulago and Mbiti. But before analysing the full value of African ontology in the quest for African identity, we must analyse a related aspect of African philosophy, that of *hunhuism* /*ubuntuism*.

The African philosophy of *hunhuism/ubuntuism*

Samkange & Samkange (1980) wrote their *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism* to prepare Zimbabweans for majority rule. As suggested by the sub-title of the book their aim was to identify 'A Zimbabwean indigenous political philosophy' whose essence is captured by the Shona concept of *hunhu* or the Ndebele concept of *ubuntu*. These are the terms that the authors anglicise to *hunhuism* or *ubuntuism*.

The authors explain that *hunhuism* or *ubuntuism* is in fact an *African* rather than a peculiarly Zimbabwean phenomenon (:36). The concept originates from an analysis of about three hundred African languages of eastern, central and Southern Africa which linguists classify as *Bantu* languages. These languages all have the stem *ntu*, or its variation, for 'person' prefixed by *mu-* or its variation to indicate singular and *ba-* or its variations for plural. Thus Shona has *munhu* for person

and *vanhu* for people. Zulu, Xosa and Ndebele have *umuntu* for person and *abantu* for plural. Further linguistic analyses indicates that these languages in fact have more than two thousand roots in common indicating that the 'Bantu people originated from a single source, and have since achieved a wide geographical dispersion with only a small linguistic divergence' (:36).

The commonality between these people groups however, goes beyond language similarities. The authors see a common underlying philosophy of life which in Shona would be identified as *hunhu* and in Ndebele as *ubuntu*. The essence of this philosophy is the importance attached to human relationships. The authors (:39) describe this essence as follows:

The attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people; a code of behaviour, an attitude to other people and to life, is embodied in *hunhu* or *ubuntu*. *Hunhuism* is, therefore something more than just humanness deriving from the fact that one is a human being. We will, therefore, describe more accurately what we are talking about if we use the words *hunhu* and *ubuntu* or *hunhuism* and *ubuntuism*, instead of the word humanness.

The authors see the necessity of the philosophy of *hunhuism* from the fact that 'our problem, indeed most of the problems of the human race, stems from our inability to accept the brotherhood of man regardless of colour, creed or race' (:11). Based on the premise of the 'essential unity of men' (:12) they (:11) then assert that

unless we eradicate the myths that divide us, we condemn ourselves to eternal fratricide. Our aim must be to build a single nation of free men and women: black, white and brown enjoying a way of life enriched [sic] by the diversity of their backgrounds.

Tutu's book (1999), recounting the whole experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of which he was chairman, is driven by the same concept of '*ubuntu*' (:passim). In the case of Tutu the *ubuntu* philosophy is interpreted in the light of Christian convictions for indeed Christian ethics could rightly be described as *ubuntu* ethics. Tutu (:11) captures the heart of the Christian *ubuntu* ethics as follows:

The Bible... is quite categorical in saying what endows human beings, every single human being without exception, with infinite worth is not this or that biological or any other external attribute. No, it is the fact that each one of us has been created in the image of God. This is something intrinsic. It comes as it were with the package. It means that each one of us is a God carrier, God's viceroy, God's representative. This is why treating anybody as if they were less than this is veritably blasphemous. It is like spitting in the face of God. That is what filled some of us with such a passionate commitment to fight for justice and freedom. We were

inspired not by political motives but by our biblical faith. The Bible turned out to be the most subversive book imaginable in a situation of injustice and oppression.

The image of God motif gives potency to the *ubuntu* philosophy. It creates a sword with a number of cutting edges. Firstly it leads to the condemnation of those who oppress other human beings, for those human beings were created in the image of God. It enabled Tutu to tell the Apartheid architects and those who perpetuated the Apartheid system that they were being 'blasphemous' and in fact 'spitting in the face of God'. It is difficult to think of greater condemnation than that.

Secondly, the image of God motif means that disobeying unjust laws becomes part of *ubuntuism*. Many South African white Christians found the concept of civil disobedience difficult to reconcile with Christianity as Tutu (:179) explains:

White South Africans under Apartheid made the big mistake of confusing 'legal' with 'morally right', and thus would get very hot under the collar when I and others said unjust laws did not oblige obedience. They were very upset with the Churches and Mass Democratic Movement, and their campaign to disobey unjust laws. Many white South Africans thought that *illegal* was identical with *immoral* (italics in the original).

The idea of elevating human values above legal technicalities accords well with both *ubuntuism* and Christian values. Jesus, for example, did not feel obliged to obey Sabbath regulations when these were in conflict with the demands of love (e.g. Matthew 12:1-12). Tutu is making the point that when a law is unjust and oppressive, it is in fact a Christian duty to disobey that law.

The third implication of Christian motivated *ubuntuism* is the call to forgive even the unforgivable. Tutu tried to capture this in the very title of the book, *No future without forgiveness* (1999). It is this aspect that is likely to bring up serious questions in the minds of critics of *ubuntuism* as Tutu understood it. In this book Tutu is calling for forgiveness of those who carried out serious crimes against humanity in the name of Apartheid. These crimes included detention without trial, torture and murder. Is it just to forgive such people merely because they confessed what they had done even when they showed no remorse or repentance? Tutu devotes chapter four of his book to deal with this painful issue. His conclusion is a convincing one. Although such forgiveness may not be in line with the normal understanding of retributive justice, such forgiveness is necessary in the interest of the forgiving victim. Without forgiveness the victim remains embittered and enslaved to the past, with a diminished quality of life. Moreover, those who internalize their brutalization can easily end up brutalizing others. Referring to the brutality perpetrated by Winnie Madikizela-

Mandela, Tutu (:155) describes how ‘those who opposed Apartheid could end up ... becoming like what they most abhorred’:

Tragically, they themselves frequently became brutalised and descended to the same low levels as those they were opposing. The victims often ended up internalising the definition the top dogs had of them. They began to wonder whether they might not perhaps be somehow as their masters and mistresses defined them. Thus they would frequently accept that the values of the domineering class were worth striving after. And then through the awful demons of self-hate and self-contempt, a hugely negative self-image took its place in the centre of the victim’s being, corrosive of proper self-love and self-assurance, eating away at their core... Society has conspired to fill people with self-hate which they then project outwards. They hate themselves and destroy themselves by proxy when they destroy those who are like this self they have been conditioned to hate.

This adds poignancy to Tutu’s call to forgive even the unforgivable perpetrators of Apartheid. The alternative is that the unforgiving person gets consumed by that which s/he hates.

Is there value in this African philosophy of *hunhuism* or *ubuntuism* ? Samkange and Samkange (1980:34) capture the value of this philosophy on the basis of the premium it sets on human relations:

In a world increasingly dominated by machines and with personal relationships becoming ever more mechanical, Africa’s major contribution in the world today may well be in her sense of *hunhu* or *ubuntu* which her people have developed over the centuries.

Although the authors did not set out to write a Christian treatise around the concept of *hunhuism* , it is evident that the emphasis on human relationships that they have picked on is consonant with much that comes out of biblical texts. For example the commandments to honour or respect parents, to respect other people’s property, the need for hospitality and Jesus’ emphasis on loving one another are all embraced by the concept of *hunhuism* or *ubuntuism* .

If Africa had been modernised without being dis-Africanised in its people-centred philosophy of *hunhuism* we would not be in the mess that we are in now. In an appreciative review of the book by Samkange and Samkange (1980) the Zimbabwean communications consultant and political commentator, Pius Wakatama writes concerning *hunhuism*:

This philosophy or ideology is far superior to the foreign ideologies like Marxism-Leninism or materialistic capitalism which some of our people have espoused today.

Zimbabwe's homegrown philosophy posits that a man or woman is not judged by his or her position or possessions as to how he or she relates to other human beings. Its hallmark is working in togetherness or co-operatively, communal living and sharing of resources. According to *Hunhuism* or *Ubuntuism*, the good man is the person who is well integrated into society and his community and lives in harmony with others.

With all the national and cultural wealth that Zimbabwe endowed us with, we should now be soaring like proud eagles for all to see, especially those who believe in our inherent inferiority and propensity for corruption and dictatorship.

(Zimbabwe *Daily News* Leader Page Saturday, 3 March, 2001)

Furthermore, *hunhuism* as a philosophy permeates every aspect of life. That is why Samkange and Samkange (1980) are able to apply this philosophy to such fields as governance (:41-46), foreign policy (:47-50), land (:55-59), social policy (:71-76), education (:77-79) and work (:80-92). This indeed means that Zimbabwe and other African nations have something to contribute to the world if only they could believe in the worth of their own home-grown philosophies instead of unthinkingly imbibing foreign values out of a sense of inferiority complex.

The value of African religions and philosophy in the quest for African identity

The manifestations of the quest for African identity previously considered, whether it be the Black Consciousness Movement, Négritude and the African personality or postcolonial literary resistance all suffer in varying degrees from the problem of lack of accessibility to the common people in Africa. When we come to African traditional religions and philosophy, however, we are dealing with an expression of Africanness that is accessible to all Africans who have been nurtured on the systems. Thus, the quest for African identity, when built on African traditional religions and philosophy, gives hope of general applicability.

Secondly, the *enduring* value of African traditional religions and philosophy is well attested. There is evidence to suggest that many westernised Africans retain traditional values below the superficiality of westernism. Tempels, for example, says that this is true of the 'évolués', that is, Africans 'who have passed out of the traditional ways of life and thought of their own ethnic group and have taken over those of the West' (1959:13). Of these he writes (13):

In the same way among our Bantu we see the évolués, the – 'civilized', even the Christians, return to their former ways of behaviour whenever they are overtaken by moral lassitude, danger or suffering. They do so because their ancestors left them their practical solution of the

great problem of humanity, the problem of life and death, of salvation or destruction. The Bantu, only converted or civilized superficially, return at the instance of a determining force to the behaviour atavistically dictated to them.

Mazrui (1986) similarly indicates the superficiality of much westernization in Africa. Discussing the question of whether the westernization of Africa is reversible Mazrui admits that there is one school of thought which sees the irreversibility of the process of westernization in Africa – its incorporation into a Eurocentric world culture (:12-14) with its values and norms. One sign of this was the adoption of European languages as official mediums of communication. Another indication is ‘Africa’s incorporation into the world of international law, which is again heavily Eurocentric in origin’ (:13). Apart from all the above there is Africa’s incorporation into ‘the modern technological age’ and the global system of dissemination of information’ (:13f). Even the moral order of Africans was penetrated with western and Christian systems (:14). So according to this school of thought all the above factors add up to a ‘totally transformative force’ (:14).

Mazrui, however, leans more towards the alternative school of thought that sees colonialism as ‘an episode in millennia of African history’ (:14):

[T]he European impact on Africa has been shallow rather than deep, transitional rather than long-lasting. ... The kind of capitalism which was transferred to Africa was itself shallow. western consumption patterns were transferred more effectively than western production techniques. western tastes were acquired more quickly than western skills, the profit motive was adopted without the efficient calculus of entrepreneurship, and capitalist greed was internalised sooner than capitalist discipline.

It is the superficial adoption of westernism that for Mazrui explains the turbulence that Africa is experiencing. The hoped for result is that Africa can return to enduring traditional values while still modernising along the same lines as what Japan was able to achieve (:14).

These are not the only voices clamouring for the retention of enduring traditional values. As will be more fully elaborated in the next chapter, the inculturation models of African theology are built on this quest. They were building on the foundation laid by Temples of whom Mudimbe (1985:181) says:

As a priest, true to the ideals of his mission, he proposes a new program for the human and spiritual promotion of the indigenous people; namely, how to establish Christian values on a Bantu cultural basis and construct a civilization which will be in harmony with the modes of thinking and being Bantu.

On the basis of this we can therefore say that the third value of African traditional religions and philosophy lies in the fact that they provide a solid foundation for the Christian faith. This is what Mbiti (e.g. 1976) continually refers to as '*praeparatio evangelica*'. As Walls (1980:214) says, the compatibility makes it easier for Christian mission to effect one of the challenges of the Gospel which is

that of making Christianity at home in the life of a people rooting the gospel in its culture, its language, its habits of thought – 'indigenizing' it, in fact, making the church (in the words of the title of a well-known book about African independent churches) 'a place to feel at home.

3.5 AFRICAN IDENTITY AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Having examined the quest for identity and its manifestations in Africa, we now need to look at the appropriateness of applying this concept to the Christian faith. Before looking at the emergence of the African Christian identity, we face the question of whether there might be a fundamental incompatibility between the concepts *African* and *Christian*.

3.5.1. Does the Christian faith militate against the quest for African identity?

Before considering the quest for 'African Christian identity' in detail we have to confront the objections to the combination of 'African' and 'Christian' made by those who argue that the two concepts are incompatible. Okot p'Bitek (1970) and Ali Mazrui (1970) typify an incisive, yet also extreme form of this objection and their views need to be engaged in a more serious way than Bediako (1992:9-10) does. Bediako's stated aim was to introduce the Celsus-like 'anti-Christian polemic' 'only incidentally' (:9). The result is that he does not fully address the arguments raised by p'Bitek and Mazrui. He only offers two responses to the critics. Firstly he turns their criticism to the service of African Christian theologians by saying that the critics' 'perceptive observations of the Christianisation of African pre-Christian tradition may be taken as an indication of the success that African Theology has in fact achieved' (:10).

Secondly, he takes the criticisms of Mazrui and p'Bitek as a challenge to African theologians to 'answer their critics effectively' by coming up with 'a clear definition of African Christian identity and how it integrates into an adequate sense of African selfhood' (:10). It is indeed a surprise that in more than four hundred pages Bediako's book on *Theology and identity* does not come up with the

‘clear definition of African Christian identity’ that the title of the book and the above quotation would lead one to expect. This thesis is intended in part to fulfil this need.

But we first need to clear the hurdle of the alleged incompatibility between the concepts ‘African’ and ‘Christian’. Where are the incompatibilities according to Mazrui and p’Bitek? We could summarize their thinking by saying that Christianity conflicts with African identity in two respects. Firstly African religiosity and Christianity are seen as operating from two fundamentally different and even conflictual worldviews and presuppositions. Secondly they see the coming of Christianity to Africa as part of a western agenda to demean, subjugate and exploit Africans. Let us explore these two areas in greater depth.

Is there a worldview conflict?

Arguing for a basic worldview incompatibility between western and African civilisations p’Bitek (1970:119) wrote:

But the basic conflict is between fundamental assumptions of western civilization and the fundamental assumptions of African civilization. The assumptions of western man have their roots in Judaism, the Greek and Roman experiences, the Christian faith and industrialization. True *Uhuru*³⁴ means the abolition of western political and economic dominance from Africa, and the reconstruction of our societies on the basis of African thought systems. The study of African religions is one important way of understanding African ways of thought.

Elaborating on the religious side of this supposed worldview conflict p’Bitek (:110f) rejects the existence of monotheism in African religions. He insists that belief in one High God is not part of African traditional religiosity, and therefore throughout his book he continually refers to ‘African deities’ (:passim). To p’Bitek ‘the new God of Christianity was taken by many African peoples as just another deity, and added to the long list of the ones they believed in. So that many African Christians are also practitioners of their own religions’ (:113). Moreover, African religiosity operates on a very different ethical basis from Christianity according to p’Bitek. In particular, ‘Christian sex ethics, its *other-worldliness*, and its preoccupations with *sin* are three important areas which African intellectuals and leaders can explore, because, here, Christianity contrasts vividly with African religions (p’Bitek 1970:113). P’Bitek (:62f) captures the ‘this-worldliness’ of African religions in contrast to Christianity in this way:

³⁴ *Uhuru* is a Swahili word for liberation or freedom.

African religions are not so much concerned about the *beginning* and the *end* of the world, they are rather more concerned with the good life here and now, with health and prosperity, with success in life, happy and productive marriage, etc.; they deal with the causes of diseases, with failures and other obstacles in the path of self-realization and fulfilment.

It follows from this that for Africans sex life is there to be enjoyed rather than shunned as it is in Christianity with its Pauline anti-sex ethics (:115). For example according to p'Bitek (:117) in traditional African societies unmarried women are allowed to sexually 'enjoy both unmarried and married men'. In northern Uganda 'mothers encourage their daughters to sleep with their boy friends and test their manhood before marriage'. In contrast to this-worldly enjoyment of life p'Bitek sees Christianity as being too preoccupied with sin.

The question that p'Bitek then tries to answer is how African religiosity came to be interpreted in terms of Christianity when the two worldviews are in fact so different. He finds three answers to this question. Firstly this resulted from 'Christian apologists mounting a counter attack on the eighteenth and twentieth centuries' non-believers' (:40) and therefore using 'African deities to prove that the Christian God does exist' (:41). In the process these western apologists had to 'dress up African deities with Hellenic robes and parade them before the western world' (:41). The result is that 'African deities were used as mercenaries in foreign battles, not one of which was in the interest of African peoples' (:102). The second reason is that of 'African nationalists fighting a defensive battle against the vicious onslaught on African cultures by western scholarship' (:40). To demonstrate that they were not primitive such African nationalists, including African nationalist theologians, also helped to dress up their gods in the western Hellenistic dress to give them western respectability. He later explicates this idea (:91):

What did African scholars find so beautiful and useful in Greek metaphysics that they chose it to be the vehicle for expressing African religious concepts? It would appear that African scholars were attracted to this tool not because of its usefulness or efficiency. They were reacting against intellectual arrogance, and, as Mazrui has put it, 'In order to establish her intellectual equality with the West, Africa has to master western versions of intellectual skills. Africa has to be as Greek as the next person'. And, while the West is busy demolishing the hellenic moulds in which the Christian faith had become imprisoned, African scholars are busy collecting the same rusty, throw-away pieces and putting them on African deities.

This leads p'Bitek (:88) to assert: 'The African deities of the books, clothed with the attributes of the Christian God, are, in the main, creations of the students of African religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary Africans in the countryside'.

The third reason that p'Bitek (:41) finds for the Hellenisation of African gods lies in missionaries like Edwin Smith, John Taylor and Placide Tempels who

have for their audience the highly sensitive and easily provokable new African elites, whose hearts they wish to win for the Christian God. They attempt to assure the Africans that the earlier generation of anthropologists erred grievously when they reported that African peoples were 'pagan savages', and assert that Africans are, as they have always been, highly religious and moral peoples.

To p'Bitek (:50) all this adds up to the fact that 'the interpretation of African deities in terms of the Christian God does not help us to understand the nature of the African deities as African peoples conceive them'. Because p'Bitek accuses Mbiti of being guilty of exactly this 'interpretation of African deities in terms of the Christian God' 'what comes out of his works are more Christian than African' (:108). Therefore:

The first duty of an African scholar is to remove these rusty Greek metaphysical dressings as quickly as possible, before African deities suffocate and die inside them in the same manner as the Christian God had perished. Because, now, when Christian theologians try to break open the Hellenic coffin in which the Christian God was imprisoned, he is no longer to be seen. Fritz Mauthner has proclaimed, 'God is dead. The time has come to write his history'.

(p'Bitek 1970:105)

Mazrui, in his epilogue to p'Bitek's book (1970), fundamentally accepts the writer's stance. He too believes that the similarities that African academics noted between African religions and Christianity were just a way to appear respectable before their western cultural despisers. So (:124f):

Faced with these kinds of distinctions [between the western civilized and the African uncivilized people], the early wave of academic reformers in Africa tended to dress up African traditions and customs in western garments. In the study of religion, African deities were duly dressed in resplendent garments and robes reminiscent of religious services in the Vatican and Canterbury. In a fit of fury Okot p'Bitek enters the temple thus erected by the first wave of African religious scholars, and indignantly pulls off those resplendent robes, in an attempt to reveal the real essence of African deities.

What are we to make of this alleged incompatibility between Christianity and African religiosity? If the differences between Christianity and African religions were as great as p'Bitek and Mazrui make them out to be, it would make no sense to talk of *African Christian* identity. One would have to be 'dis-Africanised' (Mazrui) in order to be a Christian. By the same token an African must reject

Christianity in order to be or to remain authentically African. Indeed these are the ideas that p'Bitek is subtly implying in this book.

On one level p'Bitek is doing Christianity a great favour by pointing out differences, some of them irreconcilable, between Christianity and African religions. He perceptively points out that western ethnocentricism during the era of colonialism, with its denigration of all African cultural realities, caused a defensive reaction on the part of African nationalist theologian who became anxious to prove their 'civilisation' by how close it was to western civilisation. One consequence was an exaggeration of the similarities between African religions and Christianity. The closeness suggested, in its extreme form, would make the concept of Christian 'conversion' lose its potency. 'Conversion' would then be tantamount to Africans who become Christians merely coming to realise that all along they have been 'anonymous Christians', to borrow a well known saying by the Roman Catholic Theologian Karl Rahner (Bosch 1991:481). Part of chapter four will go into an in depth analysis of such exaggerated claims of similarity by such African theologians as Mbiti and Idowu.

On another level, p'Bitek himself counteracts these nationalist theologians by himself exaggerating the dis-similarity between Christianity and African religions. As Mazrui admits in an epilogue to p'Bitek's book (1970:123), 'the spirit of the book is basically argumentative, sometimes even polemical'. It is a style that lends itself to an exaggerated defence of African religiosity in its own right, uncontaminated by the Hellenistic thought patterns in which the Christianity which was brought to Africa was dressed. We should also note in passing here that whereas, for example, Mbiti's conclusions in support of the similarities of Christianity and concepts of God in Africa are based on extensive research covering 'over two hundred and seventy different peoples (tribes) (Mbiti 1970:xiii) p'Bitek's claims are based on isolated examples with no backing of field research. It will be argued in the next chapter in support of several African theologians like Mbiti, Bediako and Sanneh that the missionaries used existing African names for God, and there was a massive turn to Christianity in Africa precisely because of compatibility in several key points between Christianity and African religions.

Moreover, p'Bitek betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the culturally translatable nature of Christianity itself – a feature which will also be analysed in more detail in the next chapter. Suffice

it to say at this point that the Hellenization of Christianity which p'Bitek complains against so much was in itself a function of cultural translation as Christianity spread from its formally Jewish milieu to the Greco-Roman world. The fact of Christianity being brought to Africa in its western Hellenised form was a function of the shortcomings of the missionaries who brought the gospel to Africa, missionaries who were indeed contaminated by the existing overall western ethnocentrism. It was not the nature of Christianity itself. Indeed we can profitably agree with p'Bitek that the first phase of African theology sought to Christianise African culture, whereas now the bigger task facing African theology is to Africanise Christianity itself.

As African theology moves in this direction, it can utilize Mazrui's helpful insight about the danger of 'looking at the African phenomena with the spectacles borrowed from a different experience' or 'analysing African experience with a rhetoric borrowed from a different cultural universe' (1970:127).

Is Christianity part of the agenda of western exploitation of Africans?

We turn now to the accusation that Christianity was part of the western agenda of exploitation of Africans leading to the conclusion that freedom to be Africans must include a reject of Christianity itself. A thorough study of the history of Christianity in Africa would by and large sustain p'Bitek's conclusion (1970:54):

The Christian mission to Africa was double-edged. The missionaries came to preach the gospel as well as to 'civilize', and in their role of 'civilizers' they were at one with the colonising forces; indeed they were an important vehicle of western imperialism, which readily lent to the churches its wealth, power and influence. ... The missionaries came with the same arrogant assumptions that they represented a 'higher' civilization, indeed, perhaps that no civilization existed in Africa. western values and customs were, to them, identical with Christian morality.

A typical view, from a different postcolonial writer, of how Christianity is associated with evils of slavery, colonialism etc is held by Mudimbe (1985:151f):

The more carefully one studies the history of missions in Africa, the more difficult it becomes not to identify it with cultural propaganda, patriotic motivations, and commercial interests, since the program of mission is more complex than the simple transmission of the Faith. From the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, missionaries were, all through the 'new worlds', part of the political process of creating and extending the right of European sovereignty over newly discovered lands. In doing so, they obeyed and followed the 'sacred instructions' of

Pope Alexander IV, issued in his bull *Inter Caetera* (1493): to establish the Christian religion, overthrow and bring to the faith all barbarous nations. Besides, the bulls of Nicholas V – *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) – had already given to Christian Kings of Portugal the right to dispossess and enslave for eternity Mahometans, pagans, and all black people in general.

This shows how postcolonial resistance literature sees Christianity as having condoned, if it did not actually actively promote the slave trade. Christianity is also seen as part of colonialism and the whole process of dis-Africanising the continent.

We cannot deny the fact of Christianity being introduced to Africa by the West and that some of those who brought Christianity shared in some of the evils of their compatriots. Many missionaries who came to Africa during the time of colonialism were children of their time, sharing many of the weaknesses of their colonising compatriots. Even a committed Christian leader, Desmond Tutu (1977:39) acknowledges that '[m]ost western missionaries in the early days found it difficult if not virtually impossible to distinguish between the Christian faith and western civilization.'

Yet herein lies a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of p'Bitek, Mazrui and Mudimbe. The nature of Christianity should not be judged by the weakness of those who brought it, and who might have failed to live by its standards. The book of Acts records the story of Judaizers who were cultural imperialists of the time. They insisted that gentiles must first observe the customs of the Jews before they could be considered Christians. St Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, strongly resisted the Judaizers, and the resulting conflict needed the Council of Jerusalem to resolve it (Acts 15). In his own writings, which have been accepted as part of the Canon of Scripture, Paul goes even further than the provisions of the Council of Jerusalem in resisting cultural imperialism. According to Paul (e.g. Galatians 3:1-14; Colossians 2:6-23), such imperialism compromises the very nature of the gospel that he was preaching – the gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.

So just as gentiles could become Christians without having to first become Jews, Africans can similarly become Christians without having to become Europeanised. The acknowledged weaknesses of those early missionaries does not therefore become a decisive reason for concluding that the Christian faith is incompatible with being truly African. Christianity is not a western

religion³⁵, nor do the evil actions of some Christians constitute the *nature* of Christianity itself. As will be explicated in the next chapter Christianity, properly understood, is a non-western faith – or more positively a universal faith whose nature is to be at home in any cultural setting. It will also be argued in chapter five that Christianity is consistent with the theme of political and economic liberation.

3.5.2. The emergence of African Christian identity

From all that we have said above, we can now justify talk of ‘African Christian identity’. The massive acceptance of the Christian gospel in Africa has made Christianity as much an African religion as it is a western one. Furthermore, there is historical evidence in Africa that Christianity can be a potent weapon in the quest for an African identity. Outstanding examples, discussed in the previous chapter, include the emergence and growth of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) and the moratorium debate among the mainline churches.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Looking at the ground we have covered so far, it becomes clear that Africa’s contact with the West has had an ambiguous effect on her identity. It is a curious fact of history that the exploitative system of slavery and colonialism had the effect of creating an African identity - awakening Africans to the fact that they were Africans. However, the identity was no sooner born than it was devastated by the same contact with the West. The turbulence, uncertainty, and loss of self-worth and security has been reinforced rather than alleviated by the neocolonialism which characterises the New World Order.

This disequilibrium has given rise to a quest for African identity – a quest which, as we have seen, has come from multiple fronts. It is the argument of this thesis that African theology has an enhancing and integrative effect on this multi-pronged quest for African identity. Mbiti (1969:277) gives an exalted place to the role of Christianity in the quest for African identity when he says:

Christianity which is also ‘indigenous’, ‘traditional’ and ‘African’ like the other major religious systems considered here, holds the greatest and the only potentialities of meeting the dilemmas and challenges of modern Africa, and of reaching the full integration and manhood of individuals and communities. It is highly doubtful that, even at their very best, these other

³⁵ Bediako’s book (1999 *Christianity in Africa* is appropriately subtitled ‘*The renewal of non-western religion*’

religious systems and ideologies current in Africa are saying anything radically new to, and different from, what is already embedded in Christianity. And yet, the strength and uniqueness of Christianity do not lie in the fact that its teaching, practice and history have all the major elements of the other religious traditions. The uniqueness of Christianity is in Jesus Christ. ... His own Person is greater than can be contained in a religion or ideology. ... Attainment of that full stature and maximum identity demands that reference be made to an external, absolute and timeless denominator. And this is precisely what Christianity should offer beyond, and in spite of, its own anachronisms and divisions in Africa. I consider traditional religions, Islam and the other religious systems to be preparatory and even essential ground in the search for the Ultimate. But only Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to that ultimate Identity, Foundation and Source of security.

What we have said so far lends weight to this bold claim by Mbiti. What will be said in the rest of the thesis will be built on this fundamental presupposition. In preparation for what is to come, it is therefore appropriate that we summarize what African theology can potentially offer to the quest for African Christian identity.

3.6.1 A God-given identity

Firstly, we begin with a theological conviction that identity comes from the Creator. Whoever makes/creates something has a right to give it an identity and a purpose. African theology, if it takes its biblical sources seriously, must assure African believers that they have a God-given identity. It is God who took the initiative in creating Africans just as they are. Moreover, the conviction of *imago Dei* applies as much to Africans as to the rest of humanity. It is also God who took the initiative in salvation, so that those Africans who are Christians have the right to be called children of God (John 1:12). They assume an identity of being Christian *Africans* and African *Christians*. The Christian aspect of this identity makes African Christians members of a new worldwide (universal) family (Walls 1980:217f). The *African* part of this identity gives given the Christians in African their distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* other identities. All other realities concerning African Christian identity will flow from this fundamental theological conviction.

3.6.2 Sense of cultural distinctiveness

While African theology often takes the universality suggested by our God-given identity for granted, it goes into great length in exploring the distinctiveness of African Christians. For example, African theology can claim that Christianity is an *African* religion by virtue of its compatibility with African culture which can therefore be seen as *praeparatio evangelica* (Mbiti 1969, 1971). The

primal worldview, in particular, which is most pronounced in Africa, gives African Christianity its distinctive stamp (Bediako 1995). This claim to distinctiveness is not an aberration on the part of African theology. It accords well with the very nature of Christianity, for as Walls (1980:216) rightly says:

[T]here is not and has never been, and we cannot reasonably expect there ever to be, a church which is not a culture church. All churches are culture churches, including our own.

Without a sense of distinctiveness African Christians could rightly be accused of being 'Europeanised' or of being 'dis-Africanised'. True identity searches for distinctiveness. Tutu (1997:37, 44) finds such African distinctiveness in areas such as 'our shares sense of the corporateness of life, of our rejection of Hellenistic dichotomies in our insistence that life, material and spiritual, secular and sacred, is all of a piece', distinctive African music and 'the reality of the spiritual when others are made desolate with the poverty of the material'. Such distinctiveness must be valued without being absolutised.

3.6.3 Positive evaluation of self

Being different would only provide a sense of identity in a negative sense. In fact those who dislike the way they are will often try to hide their distinctiveness and try as much as possible to be like the ones they admire. We have already noted the seriousness of this problem in Africa with many Africans having been brainwashed into believing that what is western has to be highly valued over what is African. We have noted how secular movements like Négritude and the Black Consciousness Movement have tried hard to overturn the negative evaluations of Africanness. African theology supplies a powerful theological motif for a positive evaluation of Africanness. That is true of Black Theology with its use of blackness as a measure of African humanity created in the image of God. That is also true of Inculturation theology with its valorisation of African culture as a worthy vehicle for God's revelation to Africans. In these ways African theology helps to negate the European ethnocentrism which bedevilled the nineteenth and twentieth century era of missions.

3.6.4 A sense of ownership

Identity also has to do with ownership. What people accept as uniquely belonging to them helps to define who they see themselves to be. African theology is playing a crucial role in fostering this

sense of ownership. It takes the Christian faith which was brought to Africa by European missionaries and shapes it to become an *African* religion. Inculturation Theology helps in the acceptance of *our* culture and its positive contribution to the nature of Christianity in Africa. Black Theology takes the basis on which Africans were exploited and makes it the basis for accepting African humanity. Thus instead of being ashamed of blackness it makes it possible for Africans to accept the blackness as being theirs, and something on which to build a positive self-estimation. Liberation Theology helps African Christians to join in the ownership of the God-given resources. To define what is ours in all these senses is to fight for an African Christian identity.

3.6.5 Self-determination

At the heart of the quest for African Christian identity is the claim for self-determination. This is not an absolute claim, for the very first point we have considered above is that Christianity itself is about a God-given identity. Nevertheless African Christians claim the right to interpret the meaning of God's revelation for their context. Where economic, political or cultural oppression is experienced African Theology equips African Christians to be their own liberators. They are no longer to see themselves as passive victims, nor are they to expect that they should be passive recipients of the liberation effort coming from those who cannot truly identify with their contextual realities. African Theology valorises the agentic role of the African themselves in the process of their own liberation.

These various contributions of African theology in the quest for African Christian identity will be explored in depth in the following two chapters. For now it needs to be noted that African Christian identity presupposes that being *African* must not compromise the value of being *Christian*, and vice versa. If being African is emphasised at the expense of being Christian the Church in Africa becomes 'secularised and abandons her identity' so that she has 'little to offer the world' (Bosch 1980:224).

By the same token African theology rejects a Christian distinctiveness which has lost its rooting in the contextual realities of those who are its interlocutors. The quest is for an African Christian, as well as a Christian African identity. Chapter four, to which we now turn, will help to explicate this point.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN AFRICAN THEOLOGY: INCULTURATION THEOLOGY

'It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitators of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God, and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith' (Tutu, 1978:366).

4.1 ORIENTATION

How is the quest for identity manifested in African theological literature? This chapter will answer this question with reference to Inculturation Theology whose main focus is on the African cultural identity. The word 'inculturation' contains within it the concept of 'culture'. Here we shall agree with Sanneh's definition of culture as 'customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group' (Sanneh 1993:26). In agreement with Newbiggin, Sanneh (:26) specifically includes religion as an aspect of culture. What about the term 'inculturation' itself?

Bate (1995:230) rightly points out that the rapid dissemination and use of the term 'inculturation' since its introduction during the 1970s has meant that it has become 'multivocal', used with different nuances by different theologians. However, he explains that the usage of the term involves an interaction of two poles, one of them being culture (the 'worldly' pole), and the other being variously understood as the faith, gospel, the Church or even Jesus Christ (the 'religious' pole). In this thesis we shall use the term 'inculturation' to indicate an emerging consensus that the 'Christian faith never exists except as "translated" into a culture' (Bosch 1991:447). It is also this sense that underlies the quest for African Christian identity by the theologians we are to consider in this chapter.

Inculturation Theology can in turn be divided into two categories. On the one hand there is the early 'indigenization' theology typified by Idowu. On the other there is the 'translation' theology represented by Sanneh and Bediako, with Mbiti as a kind of bridge between the two. Our focus will be on their quest for identity as the common denominator that links them all.

4.2 EARLY INDIGENIZERS: THE THEOLOGY OF BOLAJI IDOWU

Idowu typifies the early generation of African theologians whose main quest for identity focussed on two thrusts. The first thrust is the religious one, consisting of rehabilitating the African religious traditions by attempting to demonstrate their compatibility with the Christian faith. As Maluleke (2000b:2) says, 'For this generation of theologians nothing was more important than the quest for a coherent African religious identity which would account for the African past as well as the African present.' They wrestle with questions such as whether Africa's religious past should be seen as irrelevant to the Christian faith and the gospel. Indeed did Christianity begin on a *tabula rasa* in Africa? If that were the case it would mean that even God had no use for, or interest in, African history and culture. Africans would then need to embrace a 'foreign' religion. Since the whole of the traditional Africans' life was an expression of their religion, a discarding of the religion would be tantamount to the discarding of the essential self and therefore the loss of identity. This identity crisis was the natural result of the negative evaluation of African religious traditions by the early European missionaries and their colonising compatriots. The second thrust is the cultural one, and consisted of the call to indigenize the church – including her structures and the whole Christian way of life. We now consider these two thrusts in turn.

4.2.1 Radical continuity between Africa's pre-Christian religious traditions and Christianity – the religious factor

To resolve this identity crisis African theologians argued for the continuity between Christianity and the African religious traditions. Idowu, at least in his last major publication (1973), represents a radical expression of this indigenization position (Bediako 1996b:5). Idowu gives a sustained treatment of this religious factor in two major publications: *Olódùmarè – God in Yoruba belief* (1962) and *African Traditional Religion – A definition* (1973). In these books Idowu builds an argument for the continuity between Christianity and Africa's religious past on the basis of the oneness of God.

In *Olódùmarè* Idowu (1962) confronts the problem of the many 'divinities' among the Yoruba which would create the impression that their religion is polytheistic and therefore discontinuous with Christianity. He counteracts this by saying that contrary to appearance of polytheism the reality is in fact what he describes as 'diffused monotheism' whereby the one God 'delegates certain portions of His authority to certain divine functionaries who work as they are commissioned by

Him' (:62). The Yoruba therefore worship the one God who Christians also worship through Jesus Christ. Idowu believes that in the final analysis 'Christianity, by its unique and universal message, stands the best chance of fulfilling that which is implied in the Yoruba concept of God ...' (:215). As that happens it becomes possible for the Yoruba to outgrow the other divinities (:63). What Idowu is doing here is to build bridges to the pre-Christian and pre-missionary religious traditions and thus lay a foundation for the Christian gospel message.

Ten years later Idowu (1973) had radicalised his emphasis on what he identified as 'African Traditional Religion' (:passim). He rejects the concept of 'polytheism' as an inappropriate description for this religion. 'Its appropriate description is monotheistic, however modified this may be. The modification is, however, inevitable because of the presence of other divine beings within the structure of the religion' (:168). As in the earlier book Idowu sees other divinities as derived from the one God and says that 'they have no absolute existence' (:168). However, unlike his previous book (1962), Idowu now claims for African Traditional Religion a normative status for Africans instead of seeing in Christianity a fulfilment of the aspirations contained in African religiosity. As Bediako (1991:285) rightly states:

The vindication and affirmation of African selfhood which elsewhere is laid upon the African Christian community, is here more confidently entrusted to the revitalisation of Africa's 'old' religions, with their 'God-given heritage' of 'indigenous spiritual and cultural treasures'.

This raises the question which inculturation theologies have had to face again and again, a question which will recur in different forms as this chapter progresses. To what extent can one be a Christian and an African at the same time? Rephrasing the question: How much of the old in African culture and religiosity must be retained for Africans to remain authentically African even when they have become Christians? In a quest for African identity there can be no straightforward answer to this question. By its very nature a quest must involve questioning, searching, testing different ideas and perhaps modifying earlier ones. It is clear that by the time Idowu (1973) wrote his *African Traditional Religion: A definition*, he had become uncomfortable with his earlier view which, he must have concluded, had given too much room to the new and too little to the old. He therefore undertakes the task of demonstrating that Africa has always worshipped one God who does not have to be discarded. Bediako (1991:288) has strongly come out in support of Idowu's theme of

monotheism in African traditional religiosity, calling it ‘one of Idowu’s most valuable theological insights into African religious tradition’.

Idowu’s search, however, is not just for an *African* identity, but for an African *Christian* identity. The ‘Christian’ part of the identity is provided for by demonstrating that the God who has always been worshipped by the Africans is indeed the same God of Christianity. Unfortunately, as we will explore more fully later, Idowu’s 1973 book suggests that since the two belief systems have such a similar view of God, Christianity is really unnecessary for the Africans. In that case what we end up with is a pronounced African identity, but hardly also a Christian one. This conclusion can still be sustained in spite of Bediako’s attempt (1991:285) to positively interpret Idowu’s stance:

But if Idowu appears to preclude any serious concern with the Christian faith in its own right for African Theology, this is because he sees the *initial* task of African Theology as one of providing the appropriate interpretation of that revelation contained in the ‘heritage from the past’, so that the old and the new may find their unity in the one and the same God who has acted in both.

Bediako is taking an apologetic stance that does not correctly reflect what Idowu himself is actually saying in his *African Traditional Religion*. What cannot be disputed, however, is that ‘the unmistakable effect of his [Idowu’s] general thesis is to challenge the early European assessment that African societies possessed little knowledge, let alone awareness, of a single, ruling Deity’ (Bediako 1991:291).

4.2.2 Call for the indigenization of the church – the cultural factor

The second thrust of Idowu’s quest for African Christian identity is that of indigenizing the Church. In the context of Nigeria, and by implication of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, Idowu (1965:11) uses the concept of ‘indigenization’ in the sense

that the church should bear the unmistakable stamp of the fact that she is *the church of God in Nigeria*. It should be no longer an outreach or a colony of Rome, Canterbury, or Westminster Central Hall in London, or the vested interest of some European or American Missionary Board. No longer should it be an institution acknowledging a human overlord elsewhere outside Nigeria; no longer a marionette with its strings in the hands of some foreign manipulators. By indigenization in this context, we mean that the Church in Nigeria should be the Church which affords Nigerians the means of worshipping God as Nigerians; that is, in a way which is compatible with their own spiritual temperament, of singing to the glory of God in their own way, of praying to God and hearing His Holy Word in an idiom which is clearly intelligible to them. She should be a corporate personality, personally discerning what is the

will of God for herself and responsible for all requisite steps taken in fulfilling it. In short, she should be the Church which is the spiritual home of Christian Nigerians, a home in which they breathe an atmosphere of spiritual freedom (emphasis in the original).

Idowu's emphasis is on home-grown Christianity as opposed to a foreign imposition of the faith. To him (1965:1) 'the church in Nigeria is on trial', to defend herself against the charge that she is 'an effective tool of imperialism' to soften up Nigerians 'for the purpose of convenient exploitation by Europeans':

Further still, there is the question as to whether what we have in Nigeria today is in fact Christianity, and not in fact only transplantations from a European culture the various manifestations of which are designated Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventists, and so forth.

It would appear that to Idowu the verdict of the trial is that the church is found guilty of destroying African selfhood. Christianity came to Nigeria 'heavily tinged with western culture' (1965:4). Nigerian Christians were effectively Europeanised in dress, language and other cultural expressions. The minds of the African Christians were enslaved as evidenced by their belief that 'the only way to human dignity and full-grown personality was to be in everything like Europeans' leading them to 'despise their own culture' (:5). This attitude originated 'when in the first encounter of Nigerians with Europeans they had seen themselves as grasshoppers in their own eyes; that grasshopper mentality has been burnt deep into them and it is going to take a near-miracle to cure them of it' (:6). He laments the fact that even after the attainment of political independence 'the way things are done in Europe and America still forms the norm and standard by which the life of the Church is ordered' (:6). Even the Nigerian preacher 'has developed a morbid kind of exaggerated admiration for everything European and a disdain born of a deep-seated inferiority complex for the things of his own race' (:20). Nigerian Christians sadly resist 'any attempt towards a radical indigenization of the Church' (:6).

Idowu therefore advocates for indigenization, as explained above, as the means of restoring to the African Christians the selfhood that colonialism robbed from them. He insists that Christianity must 'bear the distinctive stamp of the country, although in essence she must preserve full allegiance to the Eternal, Cosmic, Unchanging Christ, who is her only Lord' (1965:7). He continually insists that the universality of the Christian faith must be demonstrated by its localization. For example he

insists that the church in Nigeria must ‘respect, preserve and dedicate to the glory of God anything that is of value in the culture and institutions of the country’ (:7).

The talk of things that are ‘of value in the culture and institutions of the country’ gives us the key to understand and appreciate Idowu’s indigenization effort. In chapter two we described the historical context against which Idowu’s stance can be appreciated. The European missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries came to Africa with expectation of finding people who were culturally primitive, full of heathenism and with nothing that the missionaries could associate with civilization. This European value-setting had the effect of destroying the past of the Africans, and therefore their identity. People are what they are because of what they have been in the past and what they are being in the present. For Idowu and other indigenizing theologians, therefore, a quest for identity had to involve a rehabilitation of the past and a valorization of all its positive elements.

Idowu then explicates the principle of indigenization with reference to five key areas in which the localization (indigenization) of the Christian faith must be demonstrated in Africa: translation, evangelistic language, theology, liturgy and dress/vestments. Translations into local languages must be done directly from the original languages and be faithful to native idioms (1965:17). In preaching (evangelizing) only the language understandable to the people must be used (:17-22). Theologising must bear ‘the distinct stamp of indigenous originality’ (:23). Such theologising must include the ‘big question’

whether in the past pre-Christian history of Nigerians, God has ever in any way revealed Himself to them and they have apprehended His revelation in however imperfect a way; whether what happens in the coming of Christianity and as a result of evangelism is that Nigerians have been introduced to a *completely* new God who is absolutely unrelated to their past history?

(Idowu 1965:24f)

This fundamental question, according to Idowu (:25) must lead to a recognition of the oneness and universality of God who has not left himself without witness (Acts 14:16ff). Hence God ‘has in fact revealed Himself to Nigerians and ... they have had some knowledge of Him in various ways according to their inborn capabilities’ (:25). It is this kind of theologising which ‘bears the distinctive stamp of Nigerian thinking or meditation’ (:22) and leads the Nigerians, and Africans generally, to discover Jesus Christ for themselves (:23) as the Samaritans did in John 4:39-42 (:24).

Similarly liturgy must not be conducted in a foreign and unnatural way, but must conform to its definition of being 'a people's way of approaching God in worship ... a means by which human soul finds a link with the Living Spirit who is God' (:26). Idowu asks rhetorically, 'Surely, the Nigerians too are endowed with the capacity to worship in the beauty of holiness with their own indigenous gifts and materials?' Similarly Idowu laments foreign imposition in the area of dress and vestments. He complains (:39):

Why should a Nigerian turn European in his dress just because he believes in Jesus Christ and is found qualified to be a steward in the Church? Surely, this is nothing else but another manifestation of that inferiority complex and inexcusable bondage to unnecessary convention which have been making it so difficult for the Church in Nigeria to develop her own character? There can be no sensible reason at all why the Church in Nigeria should continue to sentence those who serve during worship to European dress just because they are called to be useful in the service of God.

These quotations reflect the way Idowu's heart pulsates with three distinct concerns. Firstly, Idowu is concerned about the survival of the Church itself. He is convinced that the foreign expression of the Christian faith has had a 'detrimental effect upon the life and mission of the Church' (1965:6). He gives the example of the church in North Africa, once famous for its towering fathers of the Church - Augustine, Tertullian, Cyril and Athanasius. He explains that the church in North Africa is no longer in existence 'because she remained a foreigner and never belonged in the environment in which she lived' (:7)³⁶. Secondly, Idowu is concerned about the pre-eminence and Lordship of Jesus Christ:

This point about the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ and total, undivided allegiance to Him, cost it what it may, needs to be emphasized. And this for two important reasons. First, once this element is maintained, there is sure to be a truly living virile Church, whatever local adaptation is made to her structure. Secondly, the full acknowledgement of the Lordship of Jesus Christ will make Him real to Nigerians. At the moment, there are signs that He is hardly real to them. And this is largely because authority for the Church in Nigeria appears too much to reside with the European or American overlords who supply European or American staff, prefabricated traditions for the guidance of her life, and money for her maintenance. The result is the detrimental fact that it is these overlords and not the Lord of the Church who is 'pre-eminent' over the Church in Nigeria. The authority which must be obeyed is largely that of some 'Oracle' enshrined in the Vatican, in Canterbury, in Scotland or elsewhere in the United Kingdom or Europe, or of some 'Providence' who dispenses dollars from America.

(Idowu 1965:7)

³⁶ Waruta (2000) emphasizes the same point as will become evident later in this chapter, and also in chapter six.

Idowu here is not saying that affirming the lordship of Christ leads to freedom from European domination. He is asserting that freedom from Europeans domination creates an environment which is conducive to affirming the lordship of Christ. While European domination remains such a strong reality the Nigerian Christians are conditioned by the reality of that domination more than the reality of the lordship of Christ. It is the Europeans and the Americans who supply not only the money, but the power that goes with the money, including the dominance of foreign staff and 'prefabricated traditions'. It is this missionary authority in all its forms that displaces the authority of Christ. The Nigerian Christians find themselves obligated to do what foreign mission boards will support, rather than what they sense to be Christ's will. Indeed what Idowu is saying here has been the experience of many churches and para-church organizations in Africa. The research that Paris (2001:25) has done, for example, indicates that 'whenever the governance of black churches has been under the jurisdiction of white denominational judicatories, or whenever black churches have been dependent on white denominations for financial support, such conditions greatly hindered them from exercising their independent judgement on social justice issues'. This in no small measure, as we saw in chapter two, helps to explain the rise of AICs who wanted to give expression to their religious convictions in their own terms, not in terms dictated by foreign mission boards.

Thirdly, and for our purposes most importantly, Idowu is concerned about the restoration of African Christian identity - of what he calls the 'true selfhood' of the African Christians (:8). Radical indigenization is his expression of the quest for such African Christian identity. Such indigenization, he insisted (1965:49), can only be effected by Africans themselves and not by foreigners:

The burden of giving the Church in Nigeria an indigenous complexion must rest heavily upon Christian Nigerians. No foreigner can do the work for them. And they can only be properly equipped for this when they cease to see Jesus Christ as an imported divinity from a European pantheon, when they come to see Him as God's Messiah to Nigerians, their own personal Saviour and Lord.

It is clear from what Idowu is saying here that an *African* Christian identity cannot come as a gift from outside. It must be cultivated from within by the Africans themselves. This is in line with our findings in chapter three, that we construct our identities when we respond to changing economic, political and cultural forces and in opposition to other identities. But this now takes to an assessment of Idowu's contribution to the quest for identity.

4.2.3 Idowu's contribution to the quest for identity

Looking at Idowu's contribution as summarized above, there can be no doubt that the quest for identity in African Theology found an articulate advocate in his theology of indigenization. The negative side of his contribution is his refusal to accept that Africans should live on borrowed (foreign) religion, and therefore also on borrowed culture. If the Christian God is not the God Africans have always worshipped, and if church life is an imposition from Europe or America, then it means that Africans must cease being Africans in order to be Christians. The only way for Africans to be Christians would be for them to be Europeanised or Americanised – in short for them to lose their identity. Idowu's theology of indigenization finds this intolerable.

Idowu, however, goes beyond a negative rejection of foreignness. His positive contribution lies in his building bridges of continuity between Africa's pre-Christian religious and cultural traditions and the Christian faith. By demonstrating that the Christian God is the same God of the African ancestors, he thereby enables Africans to worship the one universal God without betraying their Africanness. Since religion is the core of Africanness, governing their entire life so that everything has a religious dimension with no dichotomies, throwing away African religion would be tantamount to throwing away the African's self. This accounts for Idowu's insistence on the need to preserve African religion. Furthermore, by insisting that the worship of this one God should be African in style while also being faithful to the Bible, he takes the quest for African Christian identity to the highest possible level. He thereby ensures that the Christian faith is made indigenous to Africa - a faith that Africans can call 'ours'. Africans would then not have to live on borrowed faith – or culture.

The search for an identity which is both Christian and African, however, seems to have left Idowu with an unresolved tension. The book *African Traditional Religion: A definition* (1973) does not resolve the question of why, if African Traditional Religion is as adequate as he makes it out to be, it would still be desirable for Africans to become Christians. Idowu comes close to making Christianity in Africa a dispensable religion. If that is a correct reading of this book the implication is that we remain with an identity that is African, but not Christian at the same time.

With this we turn to a consideration of the views of John Mbiti whose thinking came closer to finding the balance that Idowu struggled to find.

4.3 TOWARDS A TRANSLATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN MBITI

With Mbiti we come to a theologian whose conviction is that Christianity is already an African religion because of its 'deep roots in the history of our continent' (Kinney 1979:66; cf Bediako 1992:304) and therefore does not need to be indigenized as if it were a foreign religion in the first place. In other words according to Mbiti Christianity is not 'a ready made commodity which has to be transplanted to a local area' (1979:66). The same applies to theology. These are realities born out of an interaction of the gospel with the local context. Therefore there can be no sense in calling for their indigenization since by definition they must always be indigenous. In the case of Africa what this means is that Christianity in general, and theology in particular, must be 'authentically African while at the same time being ecclesiastically universal' (Bediako 1992:306).

However, while this represents the ideal situation for Mbiti, he wrestles with a situation that he realizes is far from what it should be. In order to appreciate Mbiti's view on African Christian identity it is necessary to briefly look at his analysis of African tradition before the coming of Christianity, the encounter between that tradition and Christianity and then finally analyse his proposals for the proper synthesis between African tradition and Christianity.

4.3.1 African Tradition before the coming of Christianity

If indigenization should automatically happen when the eternal gospel encounters local tradition as Mbiti contends, it becomes important to study the local tradition in its own right prior to its encounter with the Christian gospel. This is what Mbiti has laboured to do in several of his writings. Only the salient points which bring out African identity before the coming of the Christian gospel will be highlighted here.

Mbiti is a systematic expositor of African tradition. Contrary to European conceptions (or rather misconceptions) of African societies as being uncivilized, primitive and without moral systems, Mbiti (1969) demonstrates the existence, prior to the coming of Christianity, of complex African traditional religions and philosophy. The traditional religions in their varied and unwritten forms are manifested by 'beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and religious officiants' (:1). The traditional philosophy of the Africans is discernible through their 'religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics, and morals of the society concerned' (:2). Mbiti defines African philosophy as 'the understanding, attitude of

mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life' (:2). From a combination of the African traditional religions and philosophy (the two being inseparable) we can summarize Mbiti's portrayal of African identity before the coming of the Christian Gospel under the following subheadings:

Religion as the centre of existence

Firstly, Mbiti rightly sees religion as defining the entire existence of the African people in its traditional form. There is no aspect of African life that lies outside religion. Religion, Mbiti (1969:1) says,

permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life.

Further explicating this point Mbiti (1969:2) says:

Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.

Mbiti portrays the African traditional religions as being largely compatible with Christianity (Kinney 1979). The God of African traditional religions is the God of Christianity. His eternal intrinsic attributes (Mbiti 1969:30-35; 1970:3-30) are given in terms familiar to Christian theology including eternity, infinity, invisibility, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, transcendence and immanence. The same goes for his moral attributes including his mercy, love, faithfulness, justice and holiness (1970:31-44). Mbiti portrays God's works (his active attributes) in African traditional religions in a way that is also compatible with those articulated in Christian theology, including God as creator, his governance, his providence and sustenance (1970:45-90). God is active in human history, as ruler and judge on the one hand, and as provider of rain, harvest, cattle and good health on the other.

This is the kind of God whom Africans, in their intense religiosity, have related to from time immemorial. The key aspect of the way Africans have always related to him is prayer. This is well

captured in Mbiti's later book, *The prayers of African religion* (1975). In this book Mbiti is at pains to emphasize that Africans do not come to Christ empty-handed. They already have a rich spirituality, much of it compatible with the Christian faith. According to Mbiti's analysis ninety percent of African traditional prayers are addressed to God, with only ten percent addressed to the spirits and the living-dead (:14). He sums up (:7) the way African have always related to God through prayer in the following words:

Such then, briefly, is the picture of God as it emerges from these prayers. It shows him to be personal, approachable, loving, kind, giver and preserver of life, and the Father who creates all things. In praying to God, people's attitudes are summed up in the words of one prayer: 'Oh God of our forefathers, all our lives depend on you and without you we are nothing'.

In portraying a religion so close to Christianity, Mbiti is anxious to preserve African traditional religions in the face of those who want to destroy them, dismiss them or demean them as no more than 'primitive', 'ancestor worship', 'superstition', 'animism', 'magic' etc (1969:6-14; 1991:17-19). Given Mbiti's stance that religion defines the very existence of the Africans, the preserving of those aspects of African traditional religions which are compatible with Christianity is tantamount to the preserving of the very identity of Africans. In a later section we shall have occasion to question some areas in which Mbiti has overdrawn similarities between the old and the new.

Yet while we can take issue with Mbiti on some individual points of his analysis, there can be no quarrel with the major thrust of his argument that African traditional existence is religious existence with no desire or possibility for dichotomising between the sacred and the secular. For Africans in traditional society religion is an 'ontological phenomenon', by which Mbiti means that it pertains to the question of their very existence or being (Mbiti 1969:15). He correctly asserts that

within traditional life, the individual is immersed in a religious participation which starts before birth and continues after his death. For him therefore, and for the larger community of which he is part, to live is to be caught up in a religious drama. This is fundamental, for it means that man lives in a religious universe.

(Mbiti 1969:15)

This is a very significant point which, if it had been properly grasped and applied by the missionaries who brought the gospel to Africa, could have resulted in Africans becoming Christians without losing their essential African identity. Elsewhere Mbiti (1978:155) draws out the implications of this truth for African *Christian* identity by saying:

Akamba life is so deeply rooted in the spirit world that, until Christianity can penetrate that far, it will for a long time remain on the surface, incapable of providing a radical and all-embracing meaning to the total *Weltanschauung* of the people. This applies as well to many African societies, since evidence shows great similarities between their concepts of the spirit world and those of the Akamba.

What Mbiti is saying here carries a lot of significance, not only for the preserving of an African identity but also for preserving the integrity of Christianity itself on the African continent. It is by Christianity penetrating to the level of the African pre-Christian spirituality that it can give the necessary meaning to, and create the necessary impact for, its adherents. Anything less than this means that Christianity remains on the surface of African spirituality, and by that token vulnerable to possible extinction as will be made clearer later on in this section and in chapter six.

Belief in the after-life

The second aspect of traditional religiosity that Mbiti articulates has to do with how traditional Africans strongly believed that even when people had died physically, they continued their existence in the spiritual world while remaining in contact with the living. 'Without exception, African people believe that death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter' (Mbiti 1970:264).

To arrive at this stance Mbiti had gathered information 'from over two hundred and seventy different peoples (tribes)' (Mbiti 1970:xiii). That is why Mbiti in many of his writings has coined the phrase 'living-dead' to refer to those who have 'died' and yet continue in active fellowship with the living. About these living-dead Mbiti says that they are 'bilingual: they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until "recently"; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically' (Mbiti 1969:83).

Belief in life after death is therefore part of the essence of traditional religiosity, and therefore of the very identity of Africans prior to the coming of Christianity. The affinity of this belief with Christianity is very significant for Mbiti in enabling the emergence of what we are calling in this thesis 'African Christian identity'. But this is to anticipate of what is still to come.

Quest for spiritual power

The third characteristic of African traditional religiosity in Mbiti's theology is a quest for spiritual power. Mbiti discusses what he calls the 'anthropocentric ontology' of traditional African societies (1969:16). In this ontology God is the highest reality, followed by spirits which are 'superhuman beings and the spirits of men who died a long time ago' (:16). Next in the chain are human beings. Below human beings are animals and plants followed by phenomena and objects without biological life. This ontology is anthropocentric in the sense that 'man is the centre' (:16), with both the higher and the lower realities existing for the benefit of humans. One of the benefits of the higher realities is the spiritual power or life-force made available to human beings:

In addition to the five categories, there seems to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is the Source and ultimate controller of this force; but the spirits have access to some of it. A few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, such as the medicine-men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for the good and others for the ill of their communities.

(Mbiti 1969:16)

It should be noted here how closely Mbiti is reflecting the ideas of Tempels (1959) on Bantu philosophy as already considered in chapter three. Mbiti's extensive research on African religions and philosophy has made him an acknowledged authority on this subject. Therefore his endorsement of Tempels' basic finding creates a firm ground for identifying the quest for spiritual power as being at the heart of African religiosity.

This fact has implications for the way the Christian faith should take root in Africa. The New Testament shows how Jesus manifested the reign of God with power. The Acts of the Apostles shows a continuation of the manifestation of that power through the Holy Spirit. Mbiti devotes a whole article (1973) to the explication of the concept of 'Our Saviour' in African experience. He explains how deliverance from the power of evil forces like sickness, witchcraft, evil spirits etc is what makes Jesus attractive to members of the African Initiated Churches (:408). This contrasts sharply with the cerebral faith of much of the mainline churches where the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit is not exercised. The result has been a decline in many of these mainline churches as many Africans flock to the African Initiated Churches where the power of the Holy Spirit is exercised.

Sense of community and kinship

A fourth characteristic of African traditional spirituality is no less significant in the development of African Christian identity according to Mbiti. That is the African sense of community and kinship:

Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is part. Chapters of African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community, and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.

(Mbiti 1969:2)

It is clear to Mbiti that the African sense of community and kinship is not just a social phenomenon, but more fundamentally a religious one. Mbiti (1971:6) brings this out more clearly when he says that the family

like in early Hebrew society, is not simply a horizontal extension of tribal solidarity, it is also a vertical link between departed members of the tribe and those who are still alive. Kinship ties extend like a giant network uniting with one another those who are alive, and joining them to the kinsmen who have departed. The household is the smallest and most intimate nucleus of Akamba life, and each household is bound to others through kinship so that the families are also bound together into 'houses', 'houses' into 'gates', and 'gates' into clans which compose the entire people.

Thus kinship becomes one of the critical defining factors of African traditional identity. This feature of Africanness can readily be extended to African's Christian identity whereby the church is viewed as a family. The local church can be viewed as the immediate family, the denomination as the extended family and all the churches together as one big tribe. Perhaps this would be a good illustration of what Bediako (2001a:6-7) advocates when he says that in contextualization the circle that represents our 'natural story' comes to overlap with the circle that represents our 'adoptive story' 'until one day there will not be two but one' circle.

Ethics for safeguarding the community life

If kinship is as critical as indicated above, it can naturally be expected that the whole African traditional ethical system can be characterised as 'relationship-based ethics' as opposed to ethics for safeguarding individual rights. This becomes the fifth way of characterising African tradition from Mbiti's perspective. In *African traditional religions and philosophy* (1969), Mbiti devotes a whole chapter (:204-215) to the 'concepts of evil, ethics and justice'. In this chapter he makes a distinction between 'moral evil' and 'natural evil' (:213). He explains moral evil as follows:

Moral evil pertains to what man does against his fellow man. There are customs, laws, regulations and taboos that govern conduct in society. Any breach of the right conduct amounts to a moral evil. We find endless examples of that in African societies.

(Mbiti 1969:213)

A very high value is placed on relationships in African societies. Mbiti (1969:214) rightly points out that 'the individual is conscious of himself in terms of "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am"'. In order to protect relationships which are so highly valued 'the list of what should and should not be done is so long and detailed that a person is constantly confronted with moral demands throughout his life' (:214). It is in this light that Mbiti (:214) points out that

the essence of African morality is more 'societal' than 'spiritual'; it is a morality of 'conduct' rather than a morality of 'being'. This is what one might call 'dynamic ethics' rather than 'static ethics', for it defines what a person *does* rather than what he *is* (italics in the original).

It is what the person does for the good or bad of others in the community that defines that person's character (:212). Examples of good character therefore include 'chastity before marriage and faithfulness during marriage; hospitality; generosity, the opposite of selfishness; kindness; justice; truth and rectitude as essential virtues ...' (:212).

The second type of evil is what Mbiti describes as 'natural evil' which he defines as 'those experiences in human life which involve suffering, misfortunes, disease, calamity, accidents and various forms of pain' (1969:214). He goes on to explain, however, that even this natural evil is usually a form of punishment by God, spirits or the living-dead for moral evil committed by one or more people (:215). The corporate existence of Africans therefore means that others associated with him or her share the consequences of the person's guilt. 'The guilt of one person involves his entire household including his animals and property. The pollution of the individual is corporately the

pollution of those related to him whether they are human beings, animals or material goods' (Mbiti 1969:206).

Mbiti's analysis of the moral structure of the African traditional society is valid and useful. It becomes extremely problematical where he pushes to the extreme the idea that in African society no conduct can be considered morally evil unless it actually affects relationship. For example Mbiti (1969:213) writes:

To sleep with some else's wife is not considered 'evil' if these two are not found out by the society which forbids it ... It is not the act in itself which would be 'wrong' as such, but the relationship involved in the act: if relationships are not hurt or damaged, and if there is no discovery of breach of custom or regulations, then the act is not 'evil' or 'wicked' or 'bad'.

This unfortunately undermines the very picture of the moral world among traditional African societies that Mbiti has otherwise successfully painted. It encourages immoral behaviour by those who are clever enough to break moral laws without being discovered. It is also essentially a self-contradictory stance on the part of Mbiti. On the very same page that he writes the above (1969:213) he also says, 'Those who practice witchcraft, evil magic and sorcery are the very incarnation of moral evil'. This immediately begs the question, 'Can they be an incarnation of evil if they can do it without being discovered?' Furthermore, from a theological point of view, Mbiti's controversial statement would undermine the ontological realities above human beings that Mbiti himself has articulated – the realities of the living-dead, spirits and God who should be able to see and be offended by what is done in 'secret'.

Still, the overall portrayal by Mbiti of a system of highly developed morality in traditional African societies, dovetailing so much with the Christian Bible, is valid. It creates a further possibility of Africans converting to Christianity without losing their essential identity as Africans.

Particularity of African traditional religions

Mbiti is honest enough to admit that not all the features of traditional life are compatible with Christianity. A sixth aspect of such religiosity is the particularity of traditional religions, which sharply contrasts with the universality of Christianity:

Traditional religions are not universal: they are tribal or national. Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. One traditional religion cannot be

propagated in another tribal group. This does not rule out the fact that religious ideas may spread from [one group of people] to another. But such ideas spread spontaneously, especially through migrations, intermarriage, conquest, or expert knowledge being sought by individuals of one tribal group from another. Traditional religions have no missionaries to propagate them; and one individual does not preach his religion to another.

(Mbiti 1969:4)

This becomes an example of areas of traditional religiosity which are deficient, thus making it necessary, according to Mbiti, for the Christian gospel to come to Africa, as will be discussed below.

Past and present orientation

Another area of deficiency in African religiosity, which becomes the seventh characterisation of religiosity by Mbiti, is its present and past orientation. While Mbiti has been able to find many myths concerning the past, he found no myths in traditional societies concerning the future (1978:25). He concludes from this fact that ‘the future dimension of time has not been formulated and assimilated into the mythology of African thinking and conception of the universe’ (:26). Instead of looking forward to the future traditional society has a present and past orientation (:31), one result being a lack of forward thinking, planning and expectation of progress beyond the perpetual rhythm of nature.

According to Mbiti this traditional outlook contrasts sharply with the New Testament teaching which ‘incorporates ... a threefold linear concept of Time in relation to its Eschatology’ (1978:57). This is another area where African religiosity needs Christianity without the latter destroying the essence of what it means to be an African.

4.3.2 Encounter between the African Tradition and the Christian faith

It now becomes necessary to see how, in Mbiti’s theology, the traditional worldview as summarised above should be married with the Christian faith in the quest for African Christian identity.

African tradition as *praeparatio evangelica*

The first thing to note, arising from the many similarities Mbiti rightly sees between African traditional religions and Christianity, is how he views the former as *praeparatio evangelica*. From a

theological point of view Mbiti (Mbiti 1979:68) arrives at this stance on the basis of his valid observation that

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the same God who for thousands of years has been known and worshiped in various ways within the religious life of African peoples. He is known by various names, and there are innumerable attributes about him which are largely identical or close to biblical attributes about God.

African religiosity has therefore been a preparation for the gospel in many ways:

It has provided the religious groundwork, religious vocabulary, religious insights, religious aspirations and direction for the gospel to find a hearing and an acceptance among African peoples.

(Mbiti 1979:68 cf 1976:128)

This naturally arises from the nature of African religiosity and the many similarities it shares with the Christian faith. Therefore, according to Mbiti (1970b:21) the traditional religiosity has prepared the ground, so that Christianity has not come to people who are religiously illiterate. 'African peoples are disposed, almost by nature, to receive and accommodate Christianity' (:21).

An example of such preparation is the concept of God:

When the Christian gospel is preached, and when the scriptures are translated into a given African language, use is invariably made of the word for God in the African language concerned. Within the context of African Religion, that word or name for God, has already attracted certain concepts and these are automatically carried over into the Christian usage of the same name or word, at least linguistically and conceptually.

(Mbiti 1976:129)

Mbiti uses this fact to illustrate how 'many basic concepts of God in African Religion, are the same as or similar to those in Christianity' (:129). On the one hand this means that Christianity can more easily build on what is already there. On the other this challenges African Christians to sort out 'what is valuable preparation for the gospel, and what is not' (1970c:432) and thereafter to 'make full use of the acceptable background not only in the communication of the gospel but in the profession of the Christian Faith in Africa' (:434). It is therefore lamentable that for a long time 'western Christianity has condemned the African background, and in so doing has not only thrown out valuable aids to the presence of Christianity in Africa, but also invited unnecessary resistance

which, if not checked, could seriously undermine the future of Christianity in Africa' (Mbiti 1970c:433).

Christianity as fulfiller rather than destroyer of African tradition

If African traditional religions are a *praeparatio evangelica* it naturally follows that Christianity should be seen as a fulfiller rather than a destroyer of African religiosity. To talk about the African tradition as *praeparatio evangelica* presupposes both the value of the tradition and also its inadequacy by itself. In terms of the latter Christianity is the fulfiller of the African tradition – a religion that supplies what has been lacking in the African tradition, without in the process needing to destroy what is valuable in the tradition. Mbiti draws parallels between God speaking to the children of Israel before the coming of Christ and God speaking to Africans before the coming of Christ. '[W]hatever means God used to speak to Moses and the children of Israel, they pointed to the fulfilment which came finally in and through Jesus Christ. The Lord God may have spoken Hebrew to the children of Israel: now He speaks the Christ-language. This is the language of the gospel ; and the gospel comes to fulfil, not to destroy' (1970c:436).

However, Mbiti believes that *fulfilling* does not mean *agreeing* with everything that already exists in African traditional religions. It also involves judging whatever in African religiosity that is inconsistent with the Christian faith. 'The task of fulfilment does not mean saying only "yes": it also says, "no". In order to preserve it may be necessary to prune as well; and African traditional religions need a lot of pruning, if their best values are to be preserved and taken up in Christianity' (Mbiti 1970c:436). Mbiti proceeds to elevate Christianity to the level where it alone has the credentials to pass judgement on what is or is not good, what is dead or alive in any religiosity. 'We must give Christianity the opportunity and freedom to remove deadness and rottenness from our traditional religiosity. If there were nothing to be judged and nothing to be saved in African traditional life, then there would be no need for Christianity in our continent' (1970c:436).

Elevating Christianity to a place so high above other religions certainly presents a sharp contrast to Idowu's (1973) *African Traditional Religion*. We can certainly say that in terms of an African Christian identity, Idowu's emphasis was on *African* while that of Mbiti was on *Christian* identity. This difference merely serves to highlight the fact that the quest for identity is never like a mathematical problem with only one correct answer. What is noteworthy in Mbiti's view is that the

judging and pruning of African religiosity is a means of making that religiosity even more usable within Christianity. Therefore Mbiti is not undervaluing African religiosity as might appear on surface reading of the above quotations. In the final analysis his view is not very far removed from that of Idowu.

Mbiti sees the need for the fulfilment of African tradition in at least two crucial areas. The first is Christology: 'It is here too that we must seriously ask ourselves to what extent the Christian Message as embodied in Christ Himself could be seen as a fulfilment of African religiosity' (1978:189). That Christ should be seen as the fulfiller of African religiosity is based on the fact that

in traditional African concepts, there are no parallels with the title of 'the Saviour'. ... This portrait of Jesus fits into the yearning and longing of our peoples, fulfilling something for which there has been no other known means of fulfilment. It is as if they awaited in darkness, not knowing that a Saviour would come. For generations African peoples have handed down by word of mouth myths of how paradise was lost, how immortality was lost, how death came about, how God and men were separated, and so on, but nobody knew how this loss could be repaired, how the resurrection could be regained, how the gap between God and men could be bridged. But in Jesus all this falls into place; it makes sense, it becomes a revelation, a hope, and a destiny to which the Church and the *Heilsgeschichte* are moving.

(Mbiti 1972b: 60)

Mbiti therefore sees Jesus filling a gap in African religiosity – a longing which African religiosity itself had no means of meeting. He is of the view that no ancestor had the credentials that Jesus had to be able to play this role. Jesus 'fought victoriously against the forces of the devil, spirits, sickness, hatred, fear, and death itself. In each of these areas he won a victory and lives now above the assault of these forces' (1972b:55). Considering what was said above about the important role spiritual *power* plays in African religiosity Mbiti is convinced that Jesus' victory makes sense to African peoples. 'It gives to their myths an absolutely new dimension. The greatest need among African peoples, is to see, to know, and to experience Jesus Christ as the victor over the powers and forces from which Africa knows no means of deliverance' (:55).

In short, according to Mbiti (1979:68):

What the gospel brought was Jesus Christ. The gospel enabled people to utter the name of Jesus Christ; and for that reason many African Christians have suffered and others have died for the sake of Jesus Christ – that final and completing element that crowns their traditional religiosity and brings its flickering light to full brilliance.

Therefore Jesus is 'the final test for the validity and usefulness of any theological contribution' (1978:190). 'Theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ, at a given Time, Place and human situation' (1978:190).

Not all African theologians would agree with Mbiti's clearly Christocentric theology. Maluleke (1996a:45), for example, attacks the elevation of Jesus to the role of Supreme Ancestor by some African theologians who include Mbiti and Bediako:

[W]e have no right to view everything in African life as waiting for Christianity in order to be fulfilled. This point of view is in fact only a rehash of the views of liberal western missionaries ... We must do better. Therefore the possibility is not only for Jesus to become the Supreme Ancestor, but he could simply join the ranks of other ancestors who are at the service of the Supreme Being in Africa.

Maluleke is not rejecting Jesus in Africa. His view is more akin to what we have seen in the later writings of Idowu. Jesus should be regarded as just another of the many other African ancestors. This view, however, does not answer the question implied by Mbiti (1970c:436) when he says, 'If there were nothing to be judged and nothing to be saved in African traditional life, then there would be no need for Christianity in our continent'. Indeed why would Jesus be needed in Africa if he is just to be one of the many ancestors on the continent? Maluleke and others do not supply a satisfactory answer to this question.

But we return to Mbiti's concept of Christianity as a fulfiller of African religiosity. The second area of fulfilment is that of Christianity supplying African tradition with a future dimension previously lacking in it. In his *African traditional religions and philosophy* (1969) Mbiti analyses the African concept of time. The thrust of his argument is that for traditional Africans time is associated with concrete events which Mbiti (:19) calls phenomenal calendars as opposed to the western numerical calendars. Therefore to them *real time* can only be two-dimensional 'with a long past and a present and virtually no future' (:17). What lies in the future is only *potential time* and not actual time (:17). And that which lies in the potential time is only that which is certain to happen, such as that 'which falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena' (:17). He then utilizes two Swahili words, *Sasa* and *Zamani* (:18f). Events which lie in the realm of intense experience, stretching from the immediate past into the immediate future, enjoy the *sasa* dimension of time. Events which start from the immediate past going infinitely backwards in time are in the *Zamani* dimension of time:

Each African people has its own history. This history moves 'backward' from the Sasa period to the Zamani, from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing can go. In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving 'forward' towards a future climax, or towards an end of the world. Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in the Sasa and the Zamani. The notion of a messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world, has no place in traditional concept of history. So African peoples have no 'belief in progress', the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor 'build castles in the air'. The centre of gravity for human thought and activities is the Zamani period, towards which the Sasa moves. People set their eyes on the Zamani, since for them there is no 'World to Come', such as is found in Judaism and Christianity.

(Mbiti 1969:23)

Mbiti is overstating his case on this point. It is inconceivable, for example, that the Great Zimbabwe could have been built by people with no concept of progress or a long future. In South Africa's Kwazulu-Natal province there are stories of the daring exploits of king Shaka of the Zulus before colonialism or Christianity came. Those empire building exploits certainly presupposed a view of 'progress' based on the enlargement of an empire, whether or not one agrees with that view of progress at the expense of other peoples. Stories like this can be multiplied throughout Africa.

However, regardless of the merits and demerits of Mbiti's specific argument on the dimensions of time in traditional African societies, we have here yet another example of the fact that Mbiti's agenda is not that of preserving the African traditional worldview, merely for the sake of conservative preservation. He sees a deficiency in the African traditional worldview to which the Christian faith provides an adequate answer. Mbiti does not see this as the destruction of African identity, but its fulfilment in Christianity. At his point, however, we stand back from the specific points in Mbiti's theology to make an overall assessment of its overall impact on the quest for identity.

4.3.3 Mbiti's quest for African Christian identity – concluding comments

We conclude our discussion on Mbiti's theology by examining how it focuses on the quest for African Christian identity. Four key points sum up the way Mbiti's theology applies to this question.

True Christianity, by its very nature, must bear the stamp of its context

The first point is that Christianity, by its very nature, must bear the stamp of its context. As pointed out above, Mbiti believes that true Christianity is (or rather should be) always indigenous – a result of the combination of the Christian gospel and the local context. For Mbiti religion is part of the ontological reality for the traditional Africans. Christianity must reflect this reality. It must not be a Sunday religion which leaves the rest of the week religiously empty. ‘Unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most converts to these faiths will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis’ (1969:3). To prevent this from happening Christianity must be coloured by the nature of traditional religions which ‘occupy the whole person and the whole of his life’.

When the Christian faith bears the stamp of its African context, the result can be said to be the emergence of the African Christian identity.

Freedom to be truly African while also being truly Christian

Secondly, according to Mbiti, African Christian identity must mean the freedom to be truly African while also being truly Christian. This arises from what Mbiti (Mbiti 1972a:57) sees as the threefold task of Christianity in Africa. The first task is for Christianity to retain the ‘African religious and cultural heritage’. The conviction here is that if the African religious and cultural heritage are swept away, Africans would lose their past, and therefore also their identity. The second, related, task is ‘to give Christianity an African imprint and character’ so that it is seen to be an African religion. The third task is ‘to uphold the uniqueness and catholicity of Christianity’. Thus, while Christianity is an African religion, it is also the religion of other lands. So even in Africa the universality and the locality of the Christian faith must continue to be held in creative tension. This would not happen if African religiosity were to overwhelm Christianity so that it loses its uniqueness.

Like Idowu Mbiti (1969:232) criticizes mission founded churches in Africa for importing foreign cultural forms which are then imposed on African Christians:

Different Church structures and traditions have been imported from overseas, and African Christians have inherited them without even understanding their meaning or background. These denominations endeavour far more to produce ‘perfect’ Anglicans, Roman Catholics,

Lutherans, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Quakers and so on than to make their converts good followers of Jesus Christ.

In a later work based on the encounter between Christianity and the Akamba peoples of Kenya Mbiti (1978:111) writes even more scathingly about the tendency to westernise rather than Christianise Africans. For example, Mbiti contends that baptism 'has come to mean practically no more than simply a western rite of a "naming" ceremony' whereby the 'adherent' is 'enabled to take the white man's name or/and a biblical name'. This baptismal name then 'becomes a social badge, and the owner feels that he is no longer culturally "heathen", uncivilized, uneducated, in darkness' and therefore 'adopts whatever of western culture is accessible and palatable to him'.

This imposition of cultural forms has created a double problem for what Mbiti calls '*mission Christianity*' (1969:236). Firstly it has alienated African converts from their traditional roots and given them a form of Christianity that is 'deeply rooted in Euro-American culture' (:237). A typical example is that of the Akan Christians who were drawn 'away from traditional life towards what missionaries thought was the proper, civilized and Christian expression of the new Faith ... This form of Christianity called the Akan out of their traditional environment: it did not redeem them from within it' (:237). The second problem, arising from the first is superficial Christianity which does not reach the deeper levels of African spirituality (:233f, 238, 263). The impact of such Christianity has remained 'on a cultural level' (:238), by which Mbiti presumably means the outward cultural forms (like dress, forms of church governments etc) rather than the deeper spiritual meanings. For example Mbiti (:263) reveals that 'a careful scrutiny of the religious situation shows clearly that in their encounter with traditional religions, Christianity and Islam have made only an astonishingly shallow penetration in converting the whole man of Africa, with all his historical-cultural roots, social dimensions, self-consciousness and expectations'³⁷.

For Mbiti this is the greatest explanation for the rise and phenomenal growth of what he calls 'independent or separatist churches'. They arose, he says (1969:233), in order to 'indigenize' Christianity and to 'interpret and apply it in ways that, perhaps spontaneously, render Christianity both practical and meaningful to them'. This was all in reaction to the foreignness and superficiality of mission Christianity. For Mbiti (:233f) since 'African Christians often feel complete foreigners in

³⁷ Note here a convergence of what Mbiti is saying with Mazrui's assessment of the shallowness of the European impact on Africa as noted in chapter three.

mission churches' AICs have come in as 'an attempt to find "a place to feel at home", not only in worship but in the whole profession and expression of Christian Faith'.

By contrasting mission Christianity and the African Initiated Churches, Mbiti is in effect pleading for freedom to be truly African while also being truly Christian. He does not glamorise AICs. On the contrary he believes that just as mission churches fail when they try to achieve true Christianity without true Africanness, AICs are also in danger of failing by trying to be truly African without also being truly Christian. He charges some of them with incorporating 'traditional practices which are clearly not Christian and which drown and reduce their Christianity to a very low level' (1969:236).

By allowing Africans to be truly themselves, within the limits of what is compatible with the Christian gospel, Christianity can 'remove the sense of frustration and uprootedness' in Africa (1969:2f).

Christ as the integrating factor for African Christian identity

The third statement in the quest for African Christian identity according to Mbiti is that Christ must be the integrating factor for African Christianity. According to Mbiti (1969:267) Christianity 'makes nonsense of all other identities in that it claims the whole person and the whole cosmos as the property of Christ. Then, deriving from this Christocentric identity, the person is free to become whatever else he wishes, to be identified as an African, nationalist, neutralist, trade unionist or even beggar'.

This is another instance of Mbiti grossly overstating his case. Christianity cannot 'make nonsense of all other identities'. This stance puts Mbiti in a contradictory position. While on the one hand he has convincingly argued that the pre-Christian religious tradition has been the source of identity for Africans before the coming of Christianity, he is now undermining that very identity by saying that Christianity 'makes nonsense' of it. It makes better sense to say that Christ has infused the existing African identity with a new meaning and has become the integrating factor for African identity so that one can sensibly talk about being an African Christian and a Christian African.

Towards translatability of the Christian faith

The last statement that in some way sums up all that Mbiti has written is that the Christian faith is translatable, not only into different languages, but more fundamentally into different cultural forms. If Christianity is to bear the stamp of its context, according to Mbiti, a two way process of transformation must take place. The Christian faith must transform African tradition, for example by adding to it the Lordship of Jesus Christ and an eschatological dimension previously lacking in it. But by the same token African tradition must colour and in fact transform the way Christianity is practiced in Africa. Just as the African tradition must be Christianised, Christianity itself must also be Africanized. For Mbiti (1970c:430):

Christianity has made a real claim on Africa, as evidenced by the fact that we have today almost 100 million Christians in our continent; and much of the educational advance in the non-Muslim states of Africa is in fact through Christian presence. The question is: has Africa made a real claim on Christianity? That is the crux of the matter. Christianity has Christianized Africa, but Africa has not yet Africanized Christianity. ... Energy, effort, wisdom and grace should now be concentrated on Africanising Christianity in our continent; for until we do that, we may well have to face the risk of dechristianization if not a near extinction of Christianity in Africa in the next century.

Mbiti is clearly sounding an alarm bell for Christianity in Africa that is not at all unfounded. This is precisely the point that Waruta (200:125-127) is at pains to emphasise when he says that the first two waves of Christianity in Africa vanished because of its lack of rootedness in people's culture. It is not enough that Christianity should Christianize the African culture. The African culture must Africanize Christianity.

A valid argument that Mbiti (1970c:431) uses for such Africanization (or translation into African terms) of Christianity is the universalism of the Christian faith. 'It belongs to the very nature of Christianity to be subject to localization, otherwise its universality and cosmicity become meaningless'. Therefore Mbiti argues that just as Europe and America have Westernized the Christian faith and the Orthodox Churches have Easternized it, it also necessary that Africa we must Africanize it.

In practical terms how does this Africanization take place? Mbiti (1972a:57-58) tries to address this question by picturing Christianity as consisting of four layers in two sets. The innermost layer is Christ, followed by the gospel layer. To Mbiti this is the given, constant and unchangeable set of

layers. The next set of layers consists of culture and civilization respectively. This is the set of layers that gives expression to what Christ and the gospel mean. Those are the variables of Christianity – variable historically and geographically. Through these variables Christianity can be localized, while it continues to partake of the universality guaranteed by the inner set of layers. If the ‘outer layers do not change then they cripple Christianity and put it out of place and out of touch with mankind’. On the other hand the ‘inner layers of Christianity work towards mastering, dominating and saturating the outer layers’. A process of mutual enrichment between the sets of layers then takes place. ‘The gospel and the Christ will ... enrich African life by being injected into it; and simultaneously the African religious heritage will enrich Christianity, by articulating it with a new freshness which has not yet become rusty and outdated through institutionalism, apathy and decadence’.

Mbiti has here made a brave and generally credible attempt to master the difficult relationship between ‘gospel’ and ‘culture’. However, his neat categorization is problematic. He has tried to conceptualize Christ and the gospel as unchangeable realities that can be analysable separately from culture. It is as if one could take off the outer coverings of the onion of Christianity consisting of civilization and culture in order to find the core of the onion called gospel and Christ. Unfortunately you never find a cultureless core. Even Jesus never appeared except as a cultural being in space and time. The gospel is incapable of expression except in cultural terms. Even saying ‘God loves the world’ is a culture –saturated statement. It begs the question, ‘What is love?’ Nobody is capable of answering that question except in terms of their cultural experience.

This criticism should, however, help to strengthen Mbiti’s overall point that Christianity and culture should mutually impact one another. Any form of Christianity which is imposed on a cultural group without making sense to that group is not likely to survive in any meaningful sense. At best it can only create schizophrenic ‘Christians’ who go to church by day and then seek to meet their ‘real’ needs with other means by night. That has been the general trend of Christianity in Africa, or at least in Zimbabwe (Musasiwa 1990).

Mbiti’s plea for the localization of Christianity is therefore well taken. This localization ‘means translating the universality of the Christian faith into a language understood by the peoples of a given region’ even as happened when the church was born on the day of Pentecost as described in

Acts 2 (Mbiti 1970c:431). Mbiti asks: 'Are we to evangelize Africa only in the language of western or eastern Christianity? This has been done for too long, and few Africans can claim that they hear each in his own native language the mighty works of God. There lies the great challenge for the Church in our continent (:431 cf 1972a:57f).

By so arguing Mbiti is already preparing the way for the full-fledged translation theology that Sanneh and Bediako take to greater heights.

4.4 TRANSLATION THEOLOGY OF LAMIN SANNEH AND KWAME BEDIAKO

Bediako (1992, 1996b) and Sanneh (1989, 1993) pursue the quest for African Christian identity in complementary ways by focusing on the nature of the Christian faith (its universality and plurality) on the one hand, and on the agentic role of the African cultures, religions and languages on the other. They argue that the universality and plurality of the Christian faith make it a linguistically and culturally translatable movement. On the other hand God was already active in Africa before the missionaries came. The gospel had already been prepared for through Africa's cultures, religions and languages. When it finally came the gospel became all the more translatable into African cultures and idioms so that Christianity could legitimately claim to be an African religion. It is this translatability that has caused the phenomenal growth of the church in Africa (Bediako 1996b:6). Moreover this translatability of the gospel ensured that the agentic role of the African Christians became a more important factor than the missionary factor (Bediako 1996b:7; Sanneh 1993:166). This made it possible for Africans to be truly Christians without giving up their Africanness.

Walls (1980:214) points out that there have been three 'turning points in church history ... when the whole balance of the church, geographical and racial, has altered'. The first shift happened in the first century 'when Christians, having once been an all-Jewish community, became an overwhelmingly Gentile one'. The second one occurred during Dark Ages when the 'centre of gravity' shifted from Eastern and Southern Mediterranean and 'found a new base among the tribes of the north and west'. The third shift is the one currently taking place when the church has largely lost its hold in Europe and North America and 'found a new base, this time in the Southern Continents, and especially in Latin America and Africa'. Bediako (1992, 1996b) elaborates on this history by building his theology on an interpretation of the theologies of the patristic fathers of the

second century as a paradigm for what he calls the 'post-missionary' theologies of Africa. The key to interpreting these theologies is what he terms the 'hermeneutic of identity' (1996b:2) which raises the issue of identity into 'a theological category' (:5).

Combining the theologies of Bediako and Sanneh, we can therefore talk about 'identity through translatability'. An elaboration of this theme requires that we focus on what these theologians say about the value of the African heritage, universality and plurality of the gospel, translatability of the Christian faith, the need for a synthesis between the old and the new and the distinctiveness of the Christian faith.

4.4.1 Value of the African heritage

To talk of an African Christian identity presupposes the existence, before the coming of Christianity, of certain features which are considered typically African, are valuable in themselves and yet compatible with Christianity. Bediako prepares the ground for this assertion by drawing analogies from the first paradigm shift in the second century when Christianity, which was formerly an all-Jewish affair, became largely Hellenistic in outlook as well as in numbers. He utilizes the examples of Justin and Clement of Alexandria who saw the value and compatibility with Christianity of Greek Philosophy. Justin, for example, could claim that Socrates was 'prompted and motivated by the activity, though partial, of the divine Word, Christ' (Bediako 1992:46). By so doing 'Justin became the first person to seek to validate Graeco-Roman Christian identity in terms of Graeco-Roman tradition itself, at least in terms of a strand in that tradition' (:46).

The importance of this stand by Justin and those like him was that Greeks could become Christians without betraying their tradition but rather as an 'an act of loyalty to the best elements' in that tradition³⁸ (:46). This stance by Justin arose from the conviction that all non-Christian traditions contain both good and bad – what is compatible with the gospel and what is opposed to it (:46).

It is Bediako's strong concern that the same process of positively evaluating the pre-Christian African religious and cultural traditions was required when the gospel came to Africa. He contends that the African religiosity should have formed the basis for the evangelization of the continent. Apart from ensuring a more effective evangelization, it would also be a welcome recognition that

³⁸ Here Bediako is quoting the thoughts of J. Daniélou.

Africa had a religion where God was genuinely known before the coming of whites (Bediako 1992:2-3; 1996b:2). The question then is: If a positive evaluation of pre-Christian philosophic traditions was possible with the Church Fathers, why was it not similarly done when the gospel came to Africa? To Bediako (1992:235) the answer is clearly European ethnocentrism:

Behind the missionary unpreparedness for a serious encounter with academic or theological issues that would arise from the presence of Christianity in Africa, there lay the long tradition of an unquestioned presumption of European value-setting for the Christian religion. Missionaries, on the whole, saw in Africans and the African environment what they expected to find. In other words, what was observed in Africa was understood and interpreted, not in terms of Africa, but in terms of Europe, that is, of the European value-setting for the faith.

It is that 'European value-setting' that wrongly led to a negative image of Africa and to all kinds of negative evaluations of its pre-Christian religious traditions (Bediako 1992:225-252). Bediako points out how Africans were regarded as pagan and primitive, without civilised moral values. Europeans considered it their 'burden' to civilize Africans by Christianizing them, with nothing from their pre-Christian heritage to build upon. Such civilization was therefore to begin from a *tabula rasa*. Primal Religions of Africa were deemed unworthy of theological consideration. An example of this was the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 which concluded that Africa's Primal Religions 'contained no preparation for Christianity' (1996b:2). Consequently accepting the Christian religion was tantamount to participation in a 'western interpretation of reality' (Bediako 1992:248).

For Bediako it is not surprising that African theologians like Idowu, Mulago and Mbiti sought to overturn this negative evaluation of African religious traditions. Their theologies aimed to achieve integration between the African pre-Christian religious experience and African Christian commitment in ways that would ensure the integrity of African Christian identity and selfhood (1996b:1). Bediako's emphasis throughout is that '*theological consciousness* presupposes *religious tradition*, and tradition requires *memory*, and memory is integral to *identity*: without memory we have no past, and if we have no past, then we lose our identity' (1996b: 4, emphases added).

Bediako shows that in both traditions (second century patristic period and the post-missionary era in Africa) there are those who took a 'negative' view of the relationship between the gospel and culture, and therefore advocated for discontinuity between Christianity and the pre-Christian

traditions. In the second century patristic world he discusses the examples of Tatian whose views he summarizes as ‘intense renunciation of Hellenistic culture’ (1992:xvi) and Tertullian who maintained a ‘religiously-motivated distance from the culture’ (:xvi) to which he belonged and therefore represents another ‘negative response of the Christian to the cultural tradition in which he stands’. In the corresponding post-missionary period he isolates the example of Byang Kato who ‘was most notable as the dissenting voice in the chorus of positive evaluations of the African pre-Christian religious heritage’ and thereby ‘defeated the very purpose of theology as the struggle with culturally-rooted questions’ (:xviii). It is rather clear from the above that Bediako is not in sympathy with these theologians who attempt to divorce theology and the gospel from the cultural past. In particular Bediako agrees with African theologians like Mbiti and Idowu who point out the many features of the pre-Christian African tradition which are worthy of the Christian gospel.

4.4.2 Universality of the gospel and its pluralist outlook

Bediako combines a positive evaluation of the African pre-Christian religious traditions with the universal and pluralistic nature of the gospel and of the Christian church (1995:109). This runs counter to the European ethnocentrism and its consequent European value-setting for Christianity that prevailed before and during the era of colonialism. This European value-setting for Christianity is equivalent to the Judaizers who insisted that Gentiles could not be Christians unless they became circumcised and followed other Jewish customs. This demand compromised the very essence of the gospel – the fact that the Good News was for all people in all cultures, and that therefore just as Christ was incarnated in the Jewish culture he should be re-incarnated in all cultures where the gospel is spread. This was the basis of Paul’s confrontation with the Judaizers of the first century (Acts 15; Galatians).

Bediako continually laments the fact that during the age of colonialism ‘Africa had no Paul’ (1992:239-250), someone who could create an environment for non-western Christians to be themselves. After all, cultural requirements are not gospel requirements. One can be fully Christian while being fully African at the same time. The lack of a Paul during the introduction of Christianity to Africa allowed the setting in of the phenomenon of Afro-pessimism discussed in chapters one and two. African Christians in mission initiated churches largely lived, and many continue to live, on borrowed identity which is inimical to their integrity and well-being. Cultural

imperialism conditioned many Africans to believe that something is superior just because it is western; and that something is inferior merely because it is African.

Because of the above factors, African Theology in the post-missionary era was driven by two factors according to Bediako (1996b). The first factor was missionary underestimation of the value of African pre-Christian religious tradition. The second was African theological response to specific and more enduring issues of how the Christian gospel relates to African culture – hence the modern African Theology being typified as the theology of African Christian identity.

The implication for African Christians of a proper recognition of the universality of the Christian faith and its pluralistic manifestation is that they can consciously acknowledge Christ who, however, has always been part of African's ontological past as represented by the primal religions of Africa. But now he is more fully revealed, and as such he affirms those aspects of the African's ontological past that are compatible with God's revealed will as well as purge those negative aspects that contravene God's will. To insist on Africans being Christians without 'cultural continuity' is essentially to destroy their own identity and make them live on borrowed identity. The central problem with this approach is a theological one and that is negating the universality and translatability of the gospel and the incarnation of Christ in all cultures (1995:109).

Bediako builds a clear connection between the universality of the gospel and its pluralistic outlook. He finds the key to this connection in Mbiti's 'distinction between the phenomenon of Christianity – especially in its cultural embodiment as the missionary religion brought to Africa - and the Christian Faith' (Bediako 1992:311). It is in this light that Bediako (1992:356) also positively evaluates the work of Mulago for whom 'Catholicism must be in manifestation what it is in essence, namely, universal; and the universality meant is not one of uniformity, but one which embraces different cultural expressions of the life of the one universal Church'. It is from this angle that Bediako (1995:186) can confidently say that 'Christianity, in becoming a non-western religion, has become in actual experience the most universal of all religions'.

The concept of the universality of Christianity and its pluralistic outlook finds equal emphasis in Sànnèh (1989:6). He argues that as a result of the paradigm shifts that have taken place 'Christianity has become a pluralist dispensation of enormous complexity, and religious statesmanship requires

the flexible approach of translatability to foster this pluralism rather than opposing it as a threat'. According to Sanneh (1989:1) this became the stance of the Apostles who were driven by

a commitment to the pluralist merit of culture within God's universal purpose. On the fundamental issue of culture as a pluralist, nondivine enterprise, the apostles were not prepared to yield; yet such an attitude left them open to continued dealings with the Judaic heritage.

A clear implication of what Bediako and Sanneh are saying is that Africans can and should be part of the universal phenomenon of Christianity without giving up the African identity. On the contrary that very Africanness must enrich the African's *Christian* experience (Bediako 1992:371). The truth of that assertion is based on the premise of the universality of the gospel and its pluralistic cultural manifestations in the world, including Africa. That in turn calls for the translation of the gospel.

4.4.3 Need for translation

According to Bediako (1992, 1995 & 1996b) and Sanneh (1989), the universality of the gospel means that Christianity must be transposed from its western cultural setting to an African one, just as it was similarly transposed from its Jewish cultural setting into a Graeco-Roman one. Bediako (1995:109) boldly states, 'Translatability is ... another way of saying universality'. Several translations of the Christian faith into different cultural contexts have taken place in Christian history. Each of these has been in effect an 'incarnation' of the Christian faith into different cultural traditions, preserving both the particularity and the universality of the Christian faith. One particular type of translation that Bediako sees as essential to Christianity is mother-tongue translation:

In matters of religion there is no language that speaks to the heart and mind and to our innermost feelings as does our mother-tongue. The achievement of Christianity with regard to this all-important place of language in religion is truly unique. For Christianity is, among all religions, the most culturally translatable, hence the most truly universal, being able to be at home in every cultural context without injury to its essential character.

(Bediako 2000:32).

The theme of translating the Christian message to new cultural settings occupies centre stage in Sanneh (1989). According to Sanneh (:1) from its very beginning Christianity showed its nature of being a translatable faith. It relativized its Hebrew and Aramaic roots by being translated into other

cultural and language terms. At the same time it destigmatized Gentile cultures by adopting those cultures 'as a natural extension of the life of the new religion'.

Thus, 'translatability of the gospel' becomes a major preoccupation of Sanneh. He in fact characterises Christianity as 'a vernacular translation movement, in contradistinction to Christianity either as Scripture or as a dogmatic, creedal system, without, of course, denying the validity of those views' (1989:7). It is for this reason that he rejects the concept of 'mission by *diffusion*' which makes the 'missionary culture the inseparable carrier of the message' (:29), with missionaries making their cultures an inseparable aspect of the gospel. Instead Sanneh advocates a model which he calls 'mission by *translation*' (:29). The positive result of this method is that the

conversion that takes place in mission as translation rests on the conviction that might be produced in people after conscious critical reflection. What is distinctive about this critical reflection is that it assumes, either implicitly or explicitly, a relativized status for the culture of the message-bearer.

(Sanneh 1989:29).

The implication of what Sanneh is saying is that when people become Christians as a result of mission by translation their identity remains intact, for Christianity becomes their faith, rather than a foreign religion.

The translation that Sanneh is talking about should be seen in two closely related aspects. The obvious one has to do with language proper. The value of this is not to be underestimated. To Sanneh (1989:108) the mother-tongue is the language of the heart – the language that expresses one's deepest emotions. This is something a foreign language cannot do in the life of a person. However, an even deeper aspect of what Sanneh means by translation is a people's culture of which language is a symbolic representation. For Sanneh language is the outward aspect of culture, and thus represents the full richness of that culture:

... missionary interest... in the vernaculars of Africa touched on the affected cultures in a very profound way. In most of these cultures, language is the intimate, articulate expression of culture, and so close are the two that language can be said to be synonymous with culture, which it suffuses and embodies... Missionary adoption of the vernacular, therefore, was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message, a piece of radical indigenization far greater than the standard portrayal of mission as western cultural imperialism.

(Sanneh 1989:3 cf 1993:26³⁹).

It follows that translation, at this deeper level, is the whole process by which the faith is rooted in the culture and world view of a particular people. That is why Sanneh defends missionaries against the charge of being agents of colonialism. Once missionaries embarked on translation as their central method, they inevitably had the effect of empowering indigenous peoples with self-consciousness, identity and confidence, whatever their actual motivation might have been. He shows, for example (1989:105-106) that in actual motivation David Livingstone was committed to the three Cs (commerce, civilization and Christianity). Yet in reality it was his commitment to translation that gave potency to his work. 'We might say with justice that mission begot cultural nationalism, as the Slavic mission so clearly demonstrated' (:106). Sanneh (1989:53) graphically explains by way of an analogy the dichotomy between what the missionaries might have intended and the actual effect of their translation methodology:

When one translates, it is like pulling the trigger of a loaded gun: the translator cannot recall the hurtling bullet. Translation thus activates a process that might supersede the original intention of the translator. Mainly for this reason we distinguish between the motive of mission and the consequences, between the 'trigger', so to speak, and the 'bullet'. We should distinguish between the mission *intentions*, and their complex combination of cultural, political, and economic considerations, on the one hand, and, on the other, missionary *methods* in the development and employment of the vernacular (emphasis in the original).

It is this translatability that, according to Sanneh (1989:230), makes the Christian faith so different from Islam. For Christianity the paradigm of mission is the day of Pentecost where the thousands who gathered each heard the mighty works of God proclaimed in their different languages. For Islam, on the other hand, the centrality of Arabic as the language of the Koran, as well as the centrality of Mecca and Medina nullify any vernacular aspirations.

When Christianity is translated into an African cultural idiom in the manner that Bediako and Sanneh insist it should be, the result becomes an affirmation and preservation of the African

³⁹ Sanneh (1993:26) agrees with Newbigin's statement which says 'Central to culture is language. The language of a people provides the means by which they express their way of perceiving things and coping with them'.

Christian identity. It dispels the notion of Christianity being a foreign religion. It becomes what Bediako says it is: a non-western and therefore also an African faith⁴⁰.

4.4.4 Christian identity as a synthesis of the old and the new

Given what has been said above about the value of African pre-Christian traditions and the translatability of the gospel, most of Bediako's theology hinges around the need for a synthesis between the two. Bediako (1992:435) puts this need in the context of Christian world history by again utilizing the paradigm of the patristic fathers. He reads the patristic fathers in terms of a 'quest for an integral picture of the redemptive activity of God, in view of the fact that God is One and universal' leading also to 'an integrated Christian self-consciousness within Hellenistic culture'. This led the patristic fathers to 'trace a salvific dimension in the pre-Christian tradition and so by implication to identify "Christian" antecedents in it'. Such efforts by the patristic fathers became 'the authentic heir of the theology of St Paul'.

Bediako sees this patristic paradigm as being applicable in the African context. He therefore uses the paradigm to explain and justify the efforts of theologians like Idowu, Mbiti and Mulago who sought similar integration of the newly found Christian faith and the existing primal worldview. This integration, according to Bediako, becomes all the more necessary considering the extent of affinity between the primal worldview of African societies and the Christian gospel, particularly as demonstrated by Harold Turner's 'six-feature analysis' of the primal world-view (2000:87-88)⁴¹. To Bediako, as to Turner, this affinity explains the fact that Christianity has grown fastest among people of primal worldviews, including especially the peoples of the sub-Saharan Africa (1995:95). Thus Bediako's thesis on the translatability of the gospel and the need to integrate the past and the present in the Christian's self-understanding is sustained by theologians in both historical periods who took a 'positive' view of the relationship between the gospel and culture.

The task of African Theology is therefore, according to Bediako, that of 'demonstrating the true character of African Christian identity' by 'rehabilitating Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness' and integrating that cultural heritage under the lordship of Christ (1992:2-4

⁴⁰ Bediako's book *Christianity in Africa* (1995) is appropriately subtitled '*The renewal of an non-western religion*'. Part 2 of the book, comprising chapters 6 to 10, is devoted to this very theme of 'Christianity as a non-western religion: issues in a post-missionary setting'.

⁴¹ There were discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

passim; 1996b:2). Since primal religions belong to the African's ontological past they must be integrated with the new commitment to Christianity in order to preserve the African's unity of self, hence therefore integrating what we have been (ontological past) in what we become so that 'conversion to Christianity [is] coupled with cultural continuity' (1992:4; 1996b:4). The alternative to Africans apprehending Christianity in terms of the 'primal world-view with its stubborn refusal to make sharp distinctions between sacred and secular, spiritual and material' is to continue with imported enlightenment models, which are failing to 'connect with the redeeming, transforming activity of the living God in the African setting, and so are ineffectual in equipping God's people for mission and for the transformation of the African society' (Bediako 2001b:29).

In short African Christian identity, according to Bediako, comes about from a synthesis of the old and the new. Does this compromise the distinctiveness of the African faith? Sanneh and Bediako address this question in their theology.

4.4.5 Distinctiveness of the Christian faith

The quest for an identity that is both fully African and fully Christian permeates the writings of both Bediako and Sanneh. This is what leads them to the notions of translatability and of a synthesis between the old and the new that have been discussed above.

Both of them are clear, however, on the need to maintain the distinctiveness of the Christian faith in the process. Sanneh (1989:47f) has developed a 'tripartite model' to explain his view of the relationship between the Christian faith and the cultural forms into which it must be translated:

Christian cultural attitudes may be defined in three broad categories. First is *quarantine*, which is the self-sufficient attitude nurtured in isolation, sometimes even in defiance of the world. Second is *accommodation*, wherein attitudes of compromise predominate over those of defiance. Third is *prophetic reform*, in which a critical selectiveness determines the attitude toward the world (emphases added).

According to Sanneh (:46), 'Both quarantine and accommodation in fact threaten religious integrity: the one by cutting us off from the world, and the other by surrendering to it. Reform, on the other hand, points to God's action at the stage where the message intersects the world of culture, and mission is the promise and engagement with that action'. Sanneh's rejection of the 'quarantine' model is built into his very translation theology. What is now of interest is the equal rejection of

‘accommodation’ in the sense of a surrender to the world. In other words the product of translation must remain faithful to the original Christian faith.

The distinctiveness of the Christian faith becomes even clearer from a consideration of Bediako’s (1992:8) endorsement of Walls’ insight into the needed dynamic interplay between ‘making Christianity at home in the life of a people’ and ‘the conforming of a Church’s life to standards outside of itself’. Bediako (1992:35) finds historical illustration of this dynamic:

In a Gentile matrix, the Christians needed a new self-definition as they distinguished themselves from Judaism on the one hand, and distanced themselves from Greco-Roman religious rites on the other. In the process, they emerged as a third entity, ‘the third race’ (*tertium genus*) as they came to be called.

This is because ‘the gospel of Jesus Christ ... clarifies in a new way the nature of identity as ultimately rooted in God and Christ’ (:441). Thus, even though Bediako attacks Byang Kato’s ‘biblicist understanding of the Word of God’ (1992:400), he nevertheless gives him credit for insisting on Christian theology’s ‘rootage in the Biblical traditions’ (1992:413f). It is because of the very need to safeguard the distinctiveness of the Christian faith that Bediako is critical of Idowu’s minimizing of the newness of the gospel in Africa (1996b:5). More satisfying for Bediako (1992:331) is the position of Mbiti with its ‘affirmation of the ultimate and irreplaceable significance of Jesus Christ for African religious tradition and experience’.

In their insistence on the uniqueness of Christianity Bediako and Sanneh are warning that inculturation of the Christian faith can in fact be too successful. Bosch (1991:455) rightly sees this as the problem that happened in western Christianity:

The inculturation process has been so ‘successful’ that Christianity has become nothing but the religious dimension of the culture – listening to the church, society hears only the sound of its own music. The West has often domesticated the gospel in its own culture while making it unnecessarily foreign to other cultures. In a very real sense, however, the gospel is foreign to every culture.

This historical perspective lends credibility to the need to maintain the distinctiveness of the Christian faith in Africa, just as Sanneh and Bediako insist on.

4.5 THEOLOGY AS HERMENEUTIC OF IDENTITY: CHRISTIANISING THE AFRICAN TRADITION AND AFRICANISING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

We have labelled the theologians we have been considering in this chapter as ‘inculturation’ theologians. Their quest for identity centres around a common concern, and that is the relationship between the Christian gospel and the religiously driven African cultures. They are equally concerned to demonstrate that Christianity is not, or should not be, a foreign religion in Africa, which would make African Christians live on borrowed culture and be subjected to the charge of being agents of imperialism and colonialism. Walls (1980:214) correctly characterised the common concern of the theologians we have been considering as

making Christianity at home in the life of a people, rooting the gospel in its culture, its language, its habits of thought – ‘indigenizing’ it, in fact, making the church (in the words of the title of a well-known book about African independent churches) ‘a place to feel at home’.

This making of Christianity ‘a place to feel at home’ is indeed the common denominator which unifies the works of Idowu, Mbiti, Bediako and Sanneh. That is why they can all be considered under the rubric of inculturation theologians.

But there is an important but subtle difference which makes the works of Bediako and Sanneh an advance over the earlier African theologians. Bediako (1995:76f) correctly identifies this difference by describing the aim of Bolaji Idowu, Harry Sawyerr and John Mbiti as that of ‘Christianising the past’ as opposed to the more recent effort by theologians like Sanneh and Bediako which might be called ‘Africanising the Christian faith’. How do these differ?

Christianising the past African religious tradition has been graphically explained by Walls (1980:218f):

Among current African theologians –John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, Harry Sawyerr come to mind – no question is more clamant than the African Christian identity crisis. It is not simply an intellectual quest. This massive shift in the center of gravity of the Christian world which has taken place cannot be separated from the cultural impact of the West in imperial days. Now the Empires are dead, and the western value-setting of the Christian faith largely rejected. Where does this leave the African Christian? Who is he? Where is his past? A past is vital for all of us – without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are. The prime African theological quest at present is thus: What is the past of the African Christian? What is the relationship between Africa’s old religions and her new one? ... One reason for the search and debate is the heart cry of the African Christian to know whether the same God was with his ancestors as he calls on now, and whether both were the same as Abraham called on.

At the heart of the search by those earlier theologians is the desire, almost anxiety, to show areas of continuity between the new Christian faith and the old African traditional religions. Indeed, as we have already noted above, many areas of continuity exist. Mbiti has adequately demonstrated the continuity existing in areas such as the names of God, morality, spirituality and others. This is adequately summed up by Bediako (1995:76) who says that the 'essential thrust of this first flowering of African theological literature in the twentieth century has ... been an effort towards indigenization, a rooting of Christianity in African life by claiming for it a past in the spiritual harvests of the African pre-Christian religious heritage'.

But the anxiety for the demonstration of such continuity goes so far as to even risk criticism of being syncretistic by Christian writers like Byang Kato and of 'rewriting the old religion in the "missionary" interest' by non-Christian writers like Okot p'Bitek (Walls 1980:214). Some of that criticism is indeed justified, such as the criticism of contriving similarities between the African traditional religions and Christianity. Take Idowu, for example. In his anxiety to demonstrate the continuity between Christianity and the African religious tradition, he has contrived a compatibility between the two systems even in areas where they are incompatible. He tries too hard to Christianise the African religious tradition. For example, he interprets the divinities of Nigeria in a way that devalues those divinities in order to demonstrate the 'monotheism' of the African traditional religions of Nigeria. But since these divinities are in fact worshipped by the people, Idowu's argument in favour of monotheism sounds contrived. This raises the possibility of distorting the African religious tradition by forcing it into the Christian mould. It also raises a further question that Bediako (1996b:5) finds disturbing. If the 'old' and the 'new' are radically continuous, wherein lies the newness of the new? In other words, is it really necessary for Africans to become Christians if Christianity does not offer something fundamentally different from their religious traditions? This flaw in Idowu's thought was bound to catch up with him. This is demonstrated in his later writings when Christianity is virtually laid aside.

Behind this flaw in Idowu's thinking lies the question of whether accepting something new must necessarily mean abandoning one's identity. In a world which has become a global village in which cultures mingle, the factor of cultural change is an inevitable reality. All cultures must absorb new elements in the process of adaptation. In the case of Africans, visible changes have taken place in many areas of life as a result of cross-cultural fertilisation, including clothing, types of housing,

food, means of communication, transportation systems and even language. These cultural adaptations do not necessarily threaten the identity of Africans as long as such changes are so internalised that the new cultural forms are accepted as 'ours'⁴². In the same way Christianity can be accepted with its new elements without being perceived to be antithetical to African identity.

Mbiti provides another example of contriving similarities between Christianity and African traditional religions. He in fact reads African traditional religions in the light of the Christian faith and thereby distorts the former. Three examples of this will suffice for our purposes here. The first example is the way Mbiti balances the transcendence and the immanence of God in African traditional religions (1969:29 cf 1970:12-18). While the transcendence of God is manifestly demonstrable in African traditional religions, his immanence is not evident in many African societies. This writer showed that this is in fact an area of conflict between the two religions. In the African traditional religions of Zimbabwe:

God is transcendent – so remote and removed from everyday life that people cannot, indeed should not, bother him with their affairs. Only the few things that the living-dead cannot do for people (e.g. the provision of rain) need to be referred to God through the *mhondoro* (tribal ancestral spirits). This contrasts with the biblical image of God as both transcendent and immanent, both Creator and Father.

(Musasiwa 1990:49).

By contrast Mbiti (1970:17f) asserts:

The commonest acknowledgement of God's immanence comes out in the various acts of worship, such as sacrifices, offerings, prayers, and invocations. In this way, people affirm their belief that the transcendent God who is above all, is also the immanent God who is close to all and to whom they can turn through these acts of worship. For most of their life, many African peoples place God in the transcendent plane, making him seem remote from their daily affairs. But they know that he is immanent, being manifested in natural objects and phenomena, and they turn to him in acts of worship at any place and any time. Thus for them, God is in theory transcendent, but in practice immanent.

Mbiti quotes as examples of 'immanence' the beliefs of the Lugbara, the Turu and the Lango peoples who consider the actual manifestations of God as 'bad' or 'dangerous' (1970:16-17) and therefore not welcome. Yet apart from such manifestations being exceptional, they in fact help to prove God's distance from his people, rather than his nearness in the biblical sense of him being

⁴² In actual fact, however, the rapidity of the adoption of western cultural forms and the wholesale displacement of African traditional forms has amounted to the dis-Africanization that Mazrui complains of as discussed in chapter three.

Father. Even the acts of worship to which Mbiti refers in the above quotation happen through mediation and do not therefore necessarily prove God's immanence. Mbiti is therefore truer when in a later work (1978:94f) he writes concerning the many ceremonies and rites in Akamba life:

[I]t is significant that God is rarely brought into the picture, except on major occasions when people solicit His intervention and assistance. And even on such occasions it would be incorrect to assert that the people experience a spiritual fellowship with God, which could approximate the Christian sense of worship. God is 'utilized' rather than 'worshipped', and, with perhaps a few exceptions, the same distinction might be made about African societies.

We can assume from these quotations that Mbiti's thinking in 1978 had developed to a stage where he no longer needed to read African religiosity in Christian terms as he had done in 1970. By saying that 'God is rarely brought into the picture, except on major occasions' Mbiti is being truer to the transcendent conception of God in African religions than he was before.

The second example of Mbiti's overzealousness in portraying the way African traditional religions are close to Christianity is the claim that ninety percent of prayers in African traditional religions are addressed straight to God (1975). Firstly it should be noted that Mbiti's analysis is heavily dependent on the written prayers reproduced in his book. Yet by Mbiti's own admission (1969:3f) African tradition is an oral tradition. Its prayers are spontaneous, what is said depending on what has occasioned the prayers. There is therefore a strong possibility that the prayers Mbiti reproduces in his book (1975) are already biased towards demonstrating compatibility with Christianity. Moreover the reality that I have observed in Zimbabwe is that most prayers in African religious traditions are addressed to the living-dead (*midzimu*) or the spirits of tribal heroes (*mhondoro*) rather than to God.

The third example of Mbiti contriving similarities between the African traditional religions and Christianity is the way he diminishes the role of intermediaries in African traditional religions. Mbiti (1975:12) says, for example:

The role, nature and position of *intermediaries*, if any, do not emerge clearly in these prayers. The majority of the prayers have absolutely no intermediate figures between the speaker, man, and the addressee, mainly God. People take the position of being heard directly by God or the other spiritual realities, in which case there is no need for intermediaries.

What Mbiti says may be reflected in the particular selection of written prayers reproduced in his book. But this contradicts the valid stance he had taken in an earlier work (1969:27, 80,83). It is

also contrary to the very nature of the African society itself. In African society a person with a lesser position does not directly go to an important person with a request. For example, a would-be son-in-law must always find an intermediary to help negotiate for the marriage of his fiancé. When it comes to God who is the highest being (transcendent), intermediation becomes even more important. In this respect I affirm my earlier findings concerning African traditional religions:

God is considered too important and too remote to be concerned with daily practical issues. Therefore ancestral spirits are delegated to deal with those practical issues and to mediate between God and the living. The rationale is that the ancestral spirits were once like us and know our needs; but they are now in spiritual form like God and can therefore communicate with Him in a way that we can't. The spirits draw the attention of the living to their demands and wishes through various forms of discomfort, suffering or death which are then diagnosed by spirit mediums and witchdoctors.

(Musasiwa 1990:47f)

However, while we can criticize the above theologians for their overenthusiastic Christianising of the African religious tradition, we have to applaud their motive in so doing. It is their way of pursuing a quest for African Christian identity. With the widely acknowledged massive turning to Christianity of the African populations, it became important to these theologians that these Christians should not in the process abandon their past, and therefore give up their African identity. So much for the earlier efforts to 'Christianise the past'.

We turn now to the second and more recent efforts of the 1990s and beyond to make Christianity a 'place to feel at home'. The earlier concentration on the 'theological meaning of the pre-Christian primal heritage' helped later generations to take off in their exploration of other themes 'from genuinely African categories' (Bediako 1996b:6). Indeed the exploration of other themes became a necessity because of the limited scope covered by earlier theologians. For example Bediako (1992:290) says concerning Idowu in particular, 'His books and articles offer little evidence of serious interest in the themes and issues which have usually constituted the traditional fare of Christian (hitherto predominantly European) theology'. Examples of themes not covered in the work of Idowu and the early inculturation theologies include Christology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology etc.

By contrast the overall focus of attention by later theologians like Sanneh and Bediako was no longer primarily the Christianisation of the African religious tradition but the Africanization of the

Christian faith. That means being able to explore other theological themes using African categories of thought. We have already analysed their use of the concept of 'translation' to articulate such Africanization of the faith.

One major problem with Sanneh (1989), however, is that while he properly acknowledges that translation involves the whole of culture rather than just the linguistic aspect of it, he does not develop any such cultural themes to any depth. Most of his intellectual energy is spent on relativizing the factor of colonialism and cultural imperialism in missions. By reducing missionary methodology to 'translation' and its empowering effect on receivers of the gospel, he can be justly criticised for reductionism on the one hand, and of being an apologist for western missions on the other. Sanneh is underestimating the ideological use (or rather abuse) of the Christian faith by those whose imperial motives has been cultural, political or economic subjugation of Africans. No amount of linguistic or cultural 'translation' can offset this damage. In spite of the missionary 'translation' methodology we still have many Africans today who have been brainwashed into believing that Christianity can only be validated by western cultural modes of dress, worship, thinking styles etc. Therefore translation, while being a useful and indispensable tool for effecting African Christian identity is not enough. As the next chapter will show, we also need serious contextualization that makes the Christian faith liberative in all aspects of the African Christian's life, including the political, economic and gender aspects.

Some of the criticism we have levelled against Sanneh are applicable to Bediako in so far as his theology of identity is confined to cultural issues. However, Bediako is a lot more helpful on those cultural issues as he gives concrete examples of 'Africanising the Christian faith'. He tackles some themes in Christian theology that had received scant attention from the first generation of African theologians, and gives those themes an African character. A good example of such an attempt is his book *Jesus in African culture: A Ghanaian perspective* (1990).

One of the themes Bediako treats from an African perspective is Christology. Instead of the usual western debate on the two natures of Christ, Bediako (1990:9-13) argues that Jesus should be regarded as the greatest ancestor so as to be properly integrated in the African world-view and prevent African Christians living as half Europeans and half Africans. This is based on how the ancestors are held in deep reverence by the Akan people. Some important functions attributed to

ancestors are then seen to be supremely fulfilled in Jesus. One such function is that of being mediators between the living and God, a role which can now be transferred to our Ancestor Jesus as the 'sole Mediator' (:16). Furthermore, Jesus becomes the true conqueror of the evil powers that are perceived to be a threat to Africans. He 'sums up in himself all their powers and cancels any terrorizing influence they might be assumed to have upon us' (:18f).

Jesus is re-interpreted in terms of other African religious themes arising from the book of Hebrews such as sacrifice, priestly mediation and other ancestral functions. Bediako (1990:35) summarizes their relevance to a re-interpretation of Jesus by saying:

In relation to each of these features of our religious heritage the Epistle to the Hebrews shows Jesus Christ to be truly the answer to the spiritual longings and aspirations which our people have sought to meet in the ways that our traditions have evolved.

It is Jesus, for example, who has the 'power over death, the final enemy' (:41) which other ancestors could not overcome. Building on the positive view held of ancestors among the Africans Bediako (:41f) asserts that 'the way is open for appreciating more fully how Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors.'

Bediako's kind of theologising is extremely important in Africa where a major problem among African Christians has always been a lack of a unified religious view of life. Out of this writer's research in Zimbabwe, for example, came the following finding:

Because Christianity came dressed in western culture it was as superficially received as the western culture itself was. Syncretism was the result. More and more Africans were baptized and affiliated to the church, outwardly doing what the missionaries expected them to do. Yet deep down they remained African and privately continued to practice African Traditional Religion which was an integral part of their culture.

(Musasiwa 1990:70)

Bediako (1995:68) is showing a way out of this dilemma of 'living in two worlds', ensuring that those who turn to Christ can do so without betraying the essential part of their past and also without diluting the essence of the Christian faith. This is a true example of Africanising the Christian faith. That which we saw Mbiti calling for is in the process of being actualised by people like Bediako. The theology of Jesus as the Supreme Ancestor is of course as controversial as any new theology is

bound to be. Some Africanists will protest that Jesus does not qualify to be regarded as an ancestor by virtue of the fact that he died too young, was not even married and, more importantly, was not an African. Some fundamentalist and evangelical Christians will protest that applying the category 'ancestor' to Jesus is compromising the Christian faith by associating it with a non-Christian religion. The purpose here is not to determine which of these views is correct. Rather, we are using this as an illustration of the attempts that are now going on to Africanize the Christian faith, attempts which should be developed and refined as the debate continues.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Looking over the terrain covered in this chapter we now condense the essential features of the quest for African Christian identity that have emerged from the representative theologians we have considered and thereby consolidate what we have harvested from those considerations. Four significant fruits arise from the quest for African Christian identity by theologians like Idowu, Mbiti, Bediako and Sanneh whom we have chosen as representative theologians in sub-Saharan Africa.

Firstly it has clearly emerged from our study that these theologians have, at least in terms of theological construction, successfully overturned the negative evaluations of the African traditional society that prevailed in Europe and America before and during the colonial era. This is highly commendable. This effort is in line with the Christian theology of creation; God created humankind in his image (Gen 1 and 2). That being the case it means that Africans too are the bearers of that image. We should therefore expect to find beauty and goodness in elements of their culture, as we would expect to find in every other culture. Furthermore, the efforts of these theologians agree with the Christian theology of revelation. If it is in the nature of God to always reveal himself, then he would not have left himself without a witness in African cultures. That is why theologians like Idowu and Mbiti could successfully argue for continuity between Christianity and those elements of African traditional religions that are compatible with the Christian faith. This God who reveals himself continually would also not be so disdainful of vernacular language as to speak to the Africans in a foreign language. That is why Bediako (1995:60) can be so bold as to speak of 'divine speech as vernacular'. In short the positive African pre-Christian religio-cultural heritage is affirmed, giving African Christians a chance of affirming their own identity.

Secondly these theologians have helped to ensure a reaffirmation of the universal and pluralistic nature of the Christian faith. To put it succinctly, 'the universal only speaks dialect' (Bosch 1991:453)⁴³. According to the theological model of incarnation that has inspired the inculturation model, the church is 'born anew in each new context and culture' (Bosch 1991:454). The affirmation of the positive aspects of the African heritage without an affirmation of the universality and plurality of the Christian faith would not have led to a successful outcome, for then Christianity would not have accommodated the African heritage, no matter how positive some of its aspects were said to be.

Thirdly, and naturally following from the above, our theologians have advocated for an identity involving a synthesis of the new and the old, the universal and the particular. What Mbiti and Bediako have sought to do is what the second century apologists successfully did. Tillich (1968:26) explains the three-fold methodology of the Apologists in the face of severe attacks on Christianity. They first sought to establish a 'common basis of some mutually acceptable ideas' by elaborating 'the truth that is common to both Christians and pagans'. Secondly they pointed out defects in paganism. Thirdly they showed how Christianity is the fulfilment 'of a longing and desire in paganism'. Bediako and Mbiti clearly show this same three-fold methodology as they seek a synthesis of the old and the new.

This methodology is, of course, not without its dangers. Referring back to the Apologists of the second century Tillich (1968:27) explains that there is

... one danger in apologetics; the common ground may be overemphasized at the expense of the differences. Then you merely accept the other as he is, without giving him anything different. A way must be found between the two extremes of either throwing indigestible material at the other from an external position, or telling him what he already knows. The latter is the way liberal theology has often acted, while the former is the way of fundamentalism and orthodoxy.

We have noted how Idowu falls into the danger that Tillich labels as 'liberal theology'. We have observed that the universality of the Christian faith does not thereby mean that it can accommodate every cultural trait. Walls (1996:7-9) explains that the 'indigenizing principle' and the 'pilgrim principle' are equally and essentially part of the Christian gospel. He explains the gist of this double principle of the gospel by saying:

⁴³ Bosch attributes this thought to P. Casaldàliga.

Not only does God in Christ take people as they are: He takes them in order to transform them into what He wants them to be. Along with the indigenizing principle which makes his faith a place to feel at home, the Christian inherits the pilgrim principle, which whispers to him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.

(Walls 1996:8)

It is the combination of the 'indigenizing' and the 'pilgrim' principles that makes Christianity both a particular (hence plural) and a universal faith:

Just as the indigenizing principle, itself rooted in the Gospel, associates Christians with the *particulars* of their culture and group, the pilgrim principle, in tension with the indigenizing principle and equally of the Gospel, by associating them with things and people outside the culture and group, is in some respects a *universalizing* factor (italics in the original).

(Walls 1995:9)

It is for this reason that some of the theologians we have considered have affirmed both the value of the African heritage but also the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. It should be noted that this synthesis has involved a two-way transformative process. The pilgrim principle noted above involves the Christian faith transforming the African culture, or rather transforming Christians so that they become the 'third race' (Young (1991:14). But if Africans are Christianised, we have seen that the reverse is also true – Christianity also stands to be Africanized as we have seen especially in Bediako's hermeneutic of identity. Unlike the old 'accommodation' theology, the new Inculturation Theology has involved 'modifying the "prefabricated" western theology' and practice (Bosch 1991:448). As Bosch (:454) further explains it, 'there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture'. It is only in this way that a new African-Christian identity can emerge and be affirmed.

Fourthly, at least some of our theologians have begun to assist us to affirm the identity of the African Christians by a re-reading of the history of Christianity in Africa – from the underside. The question at issue here is, 'Who are the historical agents – those who are perceived as the critical forces behind historical events? For too long history, even the history of Christianity, has been read from the standpoint of dominant forces – in our case from the standpoint of missionaries who accompanied and even reinforced the forces of colonialism and imperialism. It is what the dominant forces did that was perceived to determine the course of history. All that the poor and the oppressed

could do was either to acquiesce or react to the dominant forces. Now new, empowering paradigms of history are emerging (Maluleke 2000b:5). It is in this light that we affirm the new reading of the history of African Christianity emerging especially from Bediako and Sanneh. Sanneh is very clear that receptor factors must be given priority over missionary factors in the transmission of the gospel to Africa. It is not what the missionaries did, but the way the Africans received the gospel in its vernacular medium that must receive emphasis. Similarly Bediako's emphasis is on the agency of the Africans. He explains (1996b:6) that in this period African theologians have

ceased to be beholden to western assessments and interpretations of Africa. Not what western missionaries did or said (or failed to do or say), but what African Christians would do with *their* Christian faith and commitment, was now seen to provide the determining factors in the development of Christian thought in Africa.

This kind of thinking is not without its dangers. Maluleke (2000b:4) points out the danger of failing to adequately account for the past by ignoring the historical suffering of the African people as 'so many optimistic Africanists (as opposed to so-called Afro-pessimists)' do. We should not deny that 'Africans are, have and continue to be victimized from within and without'. This caution is appropriate, and we see it particularly applicable to Sanneh who seriously underplays the colonial and imperialist factors in nineteenth and early twentieth century missions. For example Sanneh (1993:17) insists that any cultural imperialistic intentions that missionaries might have had were undermined by their employing mother tongues in their Scriptural translation which to him was a 'tacit surrender to indigenous primacy'. As already argued, the mere use of the vernacular, though significant in itself, was not adequate to stem the tide of cultural imperialism expressing itself in various forms of manipulation and brainwashing.

Nevertheless, African Christian identity is affirmed by a recognition of the agency of the Africans. According to Bosch (1991:453) the affirmation of the agency of the Africans is a crucial way in which the 'inculturation' model differs from its predecessors which were typified as 'accommodation', 'adaptation' etc. In those earlier models 'the process was one-sided, in that the local faith community was not the primary agent. In inculturation, however, the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community'⁴⁴ (:453). When Jesus came to establish the kingdom of

⁴⁴ Here Bosch acknowledges his indebtedness for this thought to Luzbetak, L J 1988, *The Church and cultures*. New York: Orbis Books.

God his operational base was not the rich and the powerful Scribes, Pharisees and priests of Judea, but the peasants of Galilee. It was through their agency that he was to establish the kingdom of God.

We should nevertheless acknowledge that Inculturation Theology has not gone far enough in its quest for identity. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's critique of this theology in 1975 still largely rings true today, nearly twenty seven years later:

But I fear that African Theology⁴⁵ has failed to produce a sufficiently sharp cutting edge. It has indeed performed a good job by addressing the split in the African soul, and yet it has by and large failed to speak meaningfully in the face of a plethora of contemporary problems which assail the modern African⁴⁶. It has seemed to advocate disengagement from the hectic business of life, because very little has been offered that is pertinent, say, about the theology of power in the face of the epidemic of coups and military rule, about development, about poverty and disease and other equally urgent present-day issues. I believe this is where the abrasive Black Theology may have a few lessons for African Theology.

(Tutu 1997:43)⁴⁷

We hasten to add African Women Theology which certainly also has 'a few lessons for African Theology'. But this is already anticipating the subject of the next chapter where we balance the 'inculturation' model we have been considering with an equally important 'liberation' model in the quest for African Christian identity.

⁴⁵ By 'African Theology' Tutu was referring to what we have been calling 'Inculturation Theology' in this chapter.

⁴⁶ There are signs that Inculturation Theology is beginning to recognize the importance of including the 'plethora of contemporary problems which assail the modern African' if it is to remain relevant. For example the Africa Theological Fellowship in 1995 initiated a study process on 'The Church in the African state towards the 21st century'. This culminated in a conference of African theologians held at the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre in Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana, from 14-19 September, 1997. The next such gathering at Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire in September 2001 was on the theme of 'The African renaissance and the Christian faith'. The fact that the Africa Theological Fellowship covers all regions of Africa has helped to foster mutual enrichment between inculturation and liberation theologies in Africa. Some of the relevant papers from both of these conferences which I was privileged to attend have been reflected in this thesis.

⁴⁷ This paper was first published in 1975 in the *Journal of religious thought* vol.2

CHAPTER FIVE

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN THE LIBERATION THEOLOGIES OF AFRICA

'Political independence alone does not bring self-confidence to a people to whom human dignity and self-respect have been denied for almost a century. More important is psychological independence and it takes a cultural evolution or revolution to make a people psychologically free' (Magesa 1978:507).

5.1 ORIENTATION

This chapter takes a close look at the contribution of liberation theologies to the quest for African Christian identity. The point of view taken in this chapter is that the quest for identity is 'intrinsic to the struggle for liberation' (Frostin 1988:14). In contributing to the struggle against political, economic and social oppression the various liberation theologies to be considered are in fact engaged in a quest for African authenticity (:14). The task of this chapter is to examine the extent to which this is indeed the case.

The South African Black Theology and the African Women Theology will be the main focus of attention. However, because these are species of Liberation Theology they share a common methodology applied to different contexts. In order to consolidate their areas of similarity section 5.2 will take a general look at the role of Liberation Theology in the quest for identity. Section 5.3 will then concentrate on Black Theology in order to reveal its particular nature, purposes and strategies. Through this analysis the various ways in which Black Theology contributes to the quest for African identity, and its shortcomings in terms of this particular agenda will be revealed. Section 5.4 will take a similar look at African Women Theology. Section 5.5 will then summarise the most salient points arising out of the above analysis, thereby consolidating the view that in spite of various shortcomings these theologies are a powerful contribution to the quest for African Christian identity.

5.2 THE ROLE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

5.2.1 General considerations

When the term 'Liberation Theology' is used in the singular in this thesis it denotes a theological paradigm which groups various 'theologies where the underprivileged are the chief interlocutors' (Frostin 1988:11). These theologies focus on those forms of oppression which are manifested in the areas of class, race and gender and the struggle for liberation by those who are underprivileged in these areas.

The stance adopted in this thesis is that oppression on the basis of class, race or gender will also have a serious negative impact on the identity of those so oppressed. It will therefore be shown that the quest for liberation by those forms of African theology that deal with class, race and gender also translates into a quest for African identity.

Several features, all of them with a bearing on identity, are common to the various forms of Liberation Theology in Africa. We therefore begin by using 'class' to articulate common features of liberation theologies. Such issues as context as a theological hermeneutical category and liberation as a theological goal will receive attention in this section. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 will then draw on these common features in the discussion of identity as articulated or implied by Black Theology in South Africa and African Women Theology in the whole of sub-Saharan English speaking parts of Africa.

5.2.2 Context as an essential theological category in Liberation Theology

Although it may be argued that all theologies are informed and coloured by their contexts, not all theologies are in fact engaged in doing contextual theology per se (Mofokeng 1990:174). By contrast Liberation Theology foregrounds the historical context of its interlocutors as a prime theological category. Frostin (1988:8) explains that the Liberation Theology paradigm 'implies that theology should not be ahistorical but that the theologian must analyse his or her role in the social conflicts, to discover how the context shapes the perception of theologically relevant issues'. This theology can therefore be typified as a contextual theology of liberation.

By calling context ‘an essential theological category’ in Liberation Theology we are implying that in Liberation Theology ‘context’ is decisive in determining the nature and content of theology. Christian theology is not made up of ahistorical timeless truths. According to Liberation Theology there is no value-free theologising. Theologians come to their task loaded with interests, values, allegiances, ideologies and presuppositions determined by their contexts. While western theologies may conceal these contextually determined realities, liberation theologies seek to foreground them (Frostin 1988:190). Even the Bible, which is one of the primary sources of Christian theology, is a heavily contextual book. In reality it consists of a series of contexts in which God is depicted as interacting with people in space-time history. This fact is well articulated by Kraft (1979) who describes the Bible as an ‘inspired classic casebook’, meaning a ‘book of case histories’ which are ‘illustrative real-life exemplifications’ (:198) of human interactions with God. The importance of context in the Bible becomes evident from the fact that ‘even the most theological portions (e.g. Romans) participate in the “eventness” of the fact that they were written as letters from specific persons to specific persons to meet specific needs’ (:198). Biblical case studies are therefore selected illustrations of interactions between God and human beings, and human beings with each other, in various life situations or contexts. Because of their wide applicability and enduring nature these biblical cases are therefore appropriately described as ‘classic’ (:201). Kraft’s conclusion is that the ‘Bible may thus be usefully seen as an inspired classic casebook and the process of canonization as the Spirit-guided process of selecting those cases to be preserved as classic cases’ (:201f).

Though some of the liberation theologians may disagree with some elements of Kraft’s statement, they all agree with the essential point being made about the contextuality of the Bible. Mosala (1986b) presents the most radical articulation of the contextuality of the Bible. To him the Bible is not just historically rooted; it in fact ‘has its roots in ruling class ideology’ (:179). Its interpretation today is similarly historically and ideologically rooted in class interests.

Thus the insistence on the Bible as the ‘Word of God’ must be seen for what it is: an ideological manoeuvre whereby ruling class interests in the Bible as in our society today are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual and economic divisions. In this way the Bible becomes an [a]historical interclassist document.

(Mosala 1986b:179)

We shall return to the issue of ideology that Mosala, Boesak and other black theologians of liberation raise. What is pertinent to acknowledge at this point is the contextuality of not just the Bible but of theology generally. Contextual theology of liberation in fact insists on context as the primary determinant of theological method. Therefore it is not enough to define context only in general terms. Mofokeng (1990:169), in discussing the context of theological work insists that it is not enough, for example, to identify Africa as a geo-cultural context for theology. In other words additional factors of race, class and gender must be part of theological definition and methodology.

Contextual theology of liberation does not therefore claim political neutrality. It in fact exposes as ridiculous the portrayal in other forms of theology 'in which the landless and land owners, the powerful and powerless, the perpetrators of social discrimination and their victims are comrades in the actual execution of that theology' (Mofokeng 1990:174). Instead of such neutrality contextual theologies of liberation adopt what is commonly known as the 'preferential option for the poor'. For example the Black Theology of liberation 'in solidarity with other liberation theologies, is deeply rooted in the dusty townships and poverty-stricken rural areas of this land. It stands firmly on the side of the oppressed, and elevates their dreams and hopes to the top of the theological agenda' (:174f).

Among the many articulations of the need to elevate context to theological category in Liberation Theology is the following statement by Goba (1988:105)

It is my contention that a theology of the oppressed cannot afford the leisure of articulating an abstract theological system. It is compelled by the sheer political situation to provide a spirituality, one which deals with concrete problems such as economic exploitation, poor education, poor housing, and racial discrimination. In other words, it is a spirituality of involvement of the people as they struggle against the forces of oppression..

Such a focus on context by Liberation Theology has a bearing on the quest for identity. As shown in chapter three, identity itself is a very contextual issue. It has to do with the way a social group defines itself in relationship to all the environmental factors that inevitably impact on their identity. It was shown that the historical context of Africa, including slavery and colonialism, as well as Africa's current socio-political context of disease, conflict and poverty have all contributed to Africa's identity crisis. By elevating Africa's multifaceted context to a theological category, Liberation Theology is inevitably addressing the problem of identity.

5.2.3 A focus on the oppressed as interlocutors

In order to sharpen the application of Liberation Theology to matters of identity we have to go further than its focus on context. Liberation Theology adopts the underprivileged as its chief interlocutors. Frostin (1988) makes this the first distinguishing characteristic of the new theological paradigm of liberation as articulated by third world theologians. It is a theology that focuses on social relations as opposed to the tendency by western theology to focus on abstract ideas. Furthermore Liberation Theology makes a preferential option for the poor. It is a theology which addresses the concerns and questions of the underprivileged.

It may be useful to compare the option for the oppressed as interlocutors of theology with the well-known and influential position of Schleiermacher, who addressed 'the cultured critics' of religion. In an important contribution to the first EATWOT conference, Gustavo Gutiérrez – widely regarded as the nestor of academic Liberation Theology – interpreted modern western theology in the light of Schleiermacher's approach. The chief interlocutor of 'progressivist' western theology, he maintains, has been the educated nonbeliever. Liberation Theology, by contrast, has chosen 'nonpersons' as its chief interlocutors, 'the poor, the exploited classes, the marginalised races, all the despised cultures'.

(Frostin 1988:5)

Several issues arise from the preferential option for the poor as theology's chief interlocutors. Firstly, this determines the perception of God. The main issue for Liberation Theology is not whether or not God exists but on whose side God is (Frostin 1988:7). For Liberation Theology the answer is unequivocal. God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. Boesak (1978:43), for example, clarifies this point by saying:

As in the Old Testament, the God who comes to us in Jesus the Messiah is the God who takes sides. He is neither indifferent nor aloof. He sides with the poor and the weak, prefers to speak of himself as a 'servant,' becomes 'a friend of publicans and sinners.' His own background is that of the much despised *am ha'aretz* – the poor of the land. He is the Oppressed One whose life reflects so much of the life of oppressed people. He was a man without majesty, as Isaiah puts it, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. He knew what it was like to live without having a sense of belonging, to be ready to flee for his life at a moment's notice, to be on the alert constantly so as not to fall into the traps of the informers. He lived on earth very much the same way blacks are forced to live. He has made their life his own, he has identified himself with them: He is the black Messiah.

Maimela (1986:106f) articulates similar convictions and says that 'In the light of this preferential option for the poor, the church is called upon to abandon its false neutrality (which is nothing but an

implicit support for the ruling and economic elite), to move out of its position of ghetto power, and to shake off the protection given it by the beneficiaries of the unjust status quo’.

The second implication of focussing on the poor as interlocutors of theology is the epistemological value of contrast experience. Frostin (1988:5) explains the epistemological value of the experience of the poor in Liberation Theology as follows:

Usually, in western theology the relation to the poor is an ethical, not an epistemological, question but such a distinction cannot do justice to the idea of the poor as interlocutors. According to the theologians of liberation, solidarity with the poor also has consequences for the perception of the social reality, as seen in the phrase ‘the epistemological privilege of the poor,’ reportedly coined by Hugo Assmann. This startling expression suggests that cognizance of the experience of those defined as poor is a necessary condition for theological reflection.

Thus Black Theology is a theology of the oppressed ‘for the liberation of the oppressed’ (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992:26). Speaking about the Kairos Document, Verstraelen-Gilhuis (:22) says that the document ‘conceived in Soweto ... can be viewed as "people’s theology" which mediates the cry of fury, powerlessness, and hope arising in the black townships.’

It becomes clear then, that the experience of the oppressed is lifted into a theological category. This is highly significant, for when theology speaks with the voice of the marginalized, the oppressive, dominant ideologies are truly subverted (Frostin 1988:94f).

The third implication of the focus on the marginalized as interlocutors of theology is the impact of such a methodology on their identity. If God is on their side, and if the very enterprise of Theology is to be done from their perspective, it follows that they do not have to see themselves as ‘the wretched of the earth’ – to borrow a description that forms the title of the book by Frantz Fanon (1967). Instead they can see themselves as the blessed of the earth (Lk 6:20), not because they are poor, but because God has chosen to fight on their side.

5.2.4 Social and conflict analysis

Using tools derived from social sciences in general and the Sociology of Knowledge in particular, Liberation Theology has identified ‘conflict’ arising from oppression as the basic social reality. Frostin (1988:7) reveals six different levels of oppression identified by Liberation Theology. These

are economic (rich-poor), classist (capitalists-proletariat), geographic (North-South), sexist (male-female), ethnic (e.g., white-black) and cultural (dominant-dominated cultures).

Conflict analysis by Liberation Theology reveals that conflict does not arise merely because some people are poor or that they are suffering in some other ways. Rather because of the arising of the 'modern historical consciousness' (Maimela 1991:142-145) there is an acute awareness that suffering is a product of man-made historical realities and social structures. People are not poor and oppressed because of divine predestination but because other human beings are exploiting, oppressing and marginalizing them for their own benefit. The same modern historical consciousness has given rise to the 'belief that truly free human beings are those who have the right to take power into their own hands in order to create the world and future they want, in fulfilment of the fundamental human aspirations for freedom and justice' (:142). The result of such awareness is that the powerless and the oppressed 'opt for a radical change which may involve them in a confrontation with those who want to maintain the present unequal material relationships' (Maimela 1986:102).

These conflictual realities are mainly ignored, or rejected outright, in traditional theologies, some of which privatise and spiritualise the Christian faith. The reason for this is that traditional theology 'was done from the point of view of the privileged, the powerful, the well-fed, and the rich. This was done to serve the interests of those who were comfortably situated and protected by the prevailing social arrangements against the rough edges of the oppressive structures' (Maimela 1986:103). Where the conflictual realities of society are acknowledged, however, taking sides with the oppressed poor becomes a pressing need. This in turn brings about conflict between liberation and dominant theologies. Brown (1978:69), in his reflections on liberation themes, expresses this reality succinctly:

To be 'for the oppressed' (which sounds right and proper) also means to be 'against the oppressors' (which sounds divisive and threatening). The attempt not to take sides is in fact a decision to side with those in power, which means siding with the oppressors and thereby helping them keep control over the oppressed. There is no neutrality.

In some cases dominant theologies take the form of overt ideological legitimization of the domination of powerless by the powerful groups. It will be seen in later sections that this was the case with the 'state theology' (Kairos Document) that legitimised apartheid, and sexist theology that continues to

legitimise male domination. This in turn affects the identity of the oppressed group. If the dominated groups believe that their domination is part of the divine order of creation they may suffer from a continued inferiority complex. They will then accept the rule of the dominant group as being natural and maybe even in line with God's will. As discussed in chapter one, this is what the Comaroffs (1991) meant by 'hegemony'. When the oppressed become conscious of it and contest it, then hegemony slides into ideological legitimisation of oppression.

An example of this is the oppression of the blacks by the whites during the South African apartheid era. White 'superiority' and black 'inferiority' were sanctioned even on religious grounds and became an ideological legitimisation of the oppression of the later by the former. Liberation Theology's alternative to this subservience is a counter-ideology of liberation which affirms the equal worth of all people under God. Thus Liberation Theology sees theology itself as a battleground 'between an established, "hegemonic" paradigm and a counter-hegemonic approach, emerging from what is called the periphery of power' (Frostin 1988:1). The preferential option for the poor naturally then leads Liberation Theology to adopt the perspective of the poor. That is why, for example, the report of the first EATWOT conference is sub-titled 'A theology from the underside of history' (:7). In this way Liberation Theology becomes a quest for identity.

5.2.5 Liberation as theological goal

The preferential option for the poor in Liberation Theology leads to the conclusion that liberation itself is a legitimate theological goal. This arises from a conviction about both the nature of oppression and the nature of the gospel.

Oppression in Liberation Theology is regarded as the height of structural evil. Evil is not seen as just a private matter between an individual and God. It is very much structural as well (e.g. Boesak 1978:passim). Moreover the structural evil of oppression has an impact on the identity of those who are oppressed. This is seen, for example, in Goba's analysis of oppression:

Oppression denies us as members of the black community our humanity. It destroys our ability to live fully and to exercise all our intellectual capacities. There is a sense in which it ruthlessly destroys our ability to shape and direct our destiny. It is like death. It creates even doubt about our own existential authenticity, producing a profound inferiority complex or false consciousness.

(Goba 1988: 96)

In that quotation Goba leaves no doubt about the way oppression destroys identity. To destroy a people's humanity means to create doubt about their 'existential authenticity' and to lead to a 'profound inferiority complex' which makes it impossible for them to 'live fully' and to 'exercise all [their] intellectual capacities'. It is no wonder that to Goba oppression 'is like death'.

If that is how serious oppression is the gospel cannot be good news if it becomes silent on this issue. The conviction of Liberation Theology is that the gospel is in fact not silent on this issue. It makes liberation part of the very essence of the gospel. Boesak (1978:9-10) articulates the conviction of many liberation theologians when he says:

Black Theology is a theology of liberation. By that we mean the following. Black Theology believes that liberation is not only 'part of' the gospel, or 'consistent with' the gospel; it is the content and framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Born in the community of the black oppressed, it takes seriously the black experience, the black situation. Black Theology grapples with suffering and oppression; it is a cry unto God for the sake of the people. It believes that in Jesus Christ the total liberation of all people has come.

Now if oppression destroys people's identity, liberation has the opposite effect. Liberation is not just about political and economic freedom. It is also about people believing in themselves and acquiring dignity and human worth. Liberation is therefore at the heart of a people's sense of identity.

5.2.6 Activating the agency of the oppressed

The issue of liberation as a theological goal naturally raises the question of who is responsible for effecting that liberation. The answer given by Liberation Theology, at least at the theoretical level, is that the poor themselves must be empowered to be agents of their own liberation. It will be seen in the following sections that the views of black theologians are in line with those of Paulo Freire (1993) who answers the question of who should be the agent for liberation by saying that the oppressed, who alone understand the effects of oppression and therefore the necessity of liberation, must be agents of such liberation. He asserts that '[a]uthentic revolution attempts to transform the reality which begets this dehumanising state of affairs. Those whose interests are served by that reality cannot carry out this transformation; it must be achieved by the tyrannized, with their leaders' (:111). This is also in line, for example, with the rejection by the Black Consciousness Movement of the patronage of white liberals (see chapter 3).

The stance by liberation theologians that the oppressed people must take responsibility for liberating themselves has fundamental ramifications on the issue of identity. When people are empowered enough to be responsible for their own liberation their sense of identity assumes positive proportions. It means they do not see themselves as helpless victims of an oppressive system. Nor do they see themselves as helpless recipients of 'liberation' coming from other people working on behalf of the oppressed.

5.2.7 The importance of theological praxis

If, according to Liberation Theology the oppressed are responsible for their own liberation it follows that theology as an enterprise must consist of a dialectic between action and reflection. Frostin (1988:9) summarizes this stance of Liberation Theology by saying "doing theology" is here seen as a "hermeneutical circulation" of theory and praxis where action forces the theologian to look at theory and theory forces the theologian to look at action again'. According to the liberation paradigm knowledge is not an intellectual activity of grasping reality as it is, but one of transforming and constructing a new world (:9). Therefore for Liberation Theology 'the dialectic between theory and praxis is closely related to the insistence on a contextual methodology. Liberation Theology is a fruit of the process of liberation and cannot be properly analysed in isolation from this context' (:10).

It is only when theology becomes praxis that the agentic role of the oppressed, and therefore also their identity, can be meaningfully expressed. At the heart of this praxis is 'struggle' which emerges as the heart of the methodology of liberation theologies. They take theology itself, the church, government and all other aspects of society as sites of the struggle. According to Nolan (1988:215), 'A site of struggle is a place in society where, in one form or another, the struggle for liberation takes place. The factory, the mine, the school, the university and the community can be called sites of struggle'. As we consider Black Theology and African Women Theology we will notice the many spheres of life which they turn into sites of struggle.

5.3 BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE QUEST FOR AFRICAN IDENTITY

We have looked at Liberation Theology generally in order to set the background for a closer look at Black Theology in South Africa as one of its particular expressions.

5.3.1 Nature and purpose of Black Theology

In order to appreciate the contribution of Black Theology to the quest for African identity, we have to first explain what that particular theology is and why it arose.

Boesak (1988:15) agrees with the following definition of Black Theology given by the USA National Committee of Black Churchmen in 1966⁴⁸:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of 'blackness'. It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.

The critical part of the above definition lies in the opening affirmation of Black Theology being 'a theology of black liberation'. That already puts Black Theology into the general family of Liberation Theology discussed above, but with the particular focus on 'the affirmation of *black* humanity'. However, while the above definition specifies black emancipation 'from white racism' Black Theology as it developed in South Africa since the early 1970 became concerned with both race and class issues⁴⁹, the two being interrelated (Maimela 1998:115-116). Liberation had to address both psychological dehumanisation and economic dispossession of blacks by whites.

In explaining what Black Theology is we are inevitably at the same time having to concern ourselves with the reasons for its coming into being. Maluleke (1996b:36 cf Dube 2000:3) graphically captures the reason for Black Theology in South Africa by referring to a commonly quoted anecdote:

When the white [man] came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us: 'let us pray.' After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.

⁴⁸ Whereas Boesak puts the date for this declaration at 1966, Frostin (1988:60) puts the date at 1969. For the purpose of our argument here the exact date is immaterial.

⁴⁹ Motlhabi (1994:113-141) argues that 'culture' should become, or is already becoming, another part of the agenda of Black Theology. He therefore argues that 'if South African Black Theology is to extend its scope of reflection to traditional and current religio-cultural aspects, on the one hand, and African Theology to contemporary liberation concerns, on the other, then there would be no need to have two main, distinct "indigenous" theologies on the African continent. What would be needed would be a single theology, having common concerns, but responsive to the particular needs of different situations and conditions experienced in different African countries' (:114). He suggests 'African Theology' as the home for such integrated theology.

Concerning this anecdote Maluleke (1996b:37) says the task now facing a Black Theology of liberation is not to eject the Bible but to 'shape the Bible into a formidable weapon in the hands of the oppressed'. The purpose of Black Theology can therefore be described in negative terms as a reaction to racial and economic oppression – 'the scandal of the fact that millions of African Christians have been and continue to be enslaved, dispossessed and oppressed by fellow white Christians in the name of the very Christianity which they share' (:37). In positive terms the purposes of Black Theology can be summarized by three words used by Maimela (1991:158): 'black liberation, self-realization and fuller humanization' (emphasis added). As this chapter progresses it will be clear that Maimela has correctly identified the purposes of Black Theology.

Although Black Theology is a religious and theological affirmation of blackness the emphasis goes beyond skin pigmentation. As Maimela (1998:114) states blackness is, apart from being a physiological state, 'an ontological symbol which refers to a situation of oppression as well as to an attitude, a state of mind that is determined to work with and alongside God, who always sides with the oppressed and underdogs to liberate humans for the freedom for which they were created'. Some black theologians identify Jesus as the black Messiah, not because of his literal skin colour, but because of the conviction he identifies himself fully with them and with the cause of their liberation (Boesak 1978:42-43).

Black Theology can be virtually equated with both black consciousness and black power. It is concerned about the positive collective power that comes from a consciousness and acceptance of blackness. This is how Boesak (1978) summarizes the connection between Black Theology, black consciousness and black power (:142):

As far as I can determine, for most South African black theologians black consciousness is Black Theology (or very closely related). Black consciousness implies 'the awareness by black people of the power they wield as a group, economically and politically.' This is again the relation with black power. Black Theology calls upon black people to affirm this. It is not only concerned with internal bondage, but also with external enslavement. It is an awareness of 'the failure of white theology to work selflessly towards the values and ethics Christianity claims to uphold.'

We may summarise the above understandings of Black Theology by saying that it is a theological legitimation of black consciousness and black power for the purpose of black liberation (Paris 2001:27). In Boesak's words (1978:13) it is 'part of the black struggle toward liberation from

religious, economic, psychological, and cultural dependency'. The inclusion of religious, psychological and cultural liberation in the definition brings Black Theology to the centre of our discussion on the quest for African identity.

5.3.2 The struggle for liberation against forces that dehumanize blacks

We have already noted how social and conflict analysis and struggle for liberation are at the heart of the methodology of Liberation Theology. Black Theology in South Africa' as one aspect of Liberation Theology, deals with the black/white divide in particular. At its heart therefore Black Theology is a struggle against the dehumanising forces of apartheid racism and its related aspects. Black Theology's concern has always been concerned with apartheid sin as a social evil with severe consequences for black African identity. 'It is out of this painful context of oppression, dehumanization and destruction of black personhood that Black Theology was born as a theological protest against racial domination and human beings' inhumanity to other human beings' (Maimela 1998:112).

Goba (1988: 75-81) helpfully utilises Gregory Baum's three levels at which social evil functions in order to diagnose the sin of apartheid and its effects. These categories exist at the institutional level, the ideological level and at the level of false consciousness. We will employ these same categories, but with a particular emphasis on the role of Black Theology in the struggle against forces of apartheid dehumanisation.

Struggle against oppressive institutions

The first and most visible level of apartheid evil against which Black Theology had to contend are the various unjust apartheid institutions of dehumanisation in the political, economic and other social spheres (Goba 1988:75). It is a well known fact that the creation of Bantustans⁵⁰ was a way of disenfranchising the black majority population of the country. It was also a divide-and-rule strategy which sought to make the different tribes into separate 'nations' without applying the same principle to the white tribes (the Afrikaners versus the English speaking whites). Economically the means of production were concentrated in the hands of the minority white population. One glaring example is that the majority black population was allocated only 13 percent of the land – being also

⁵⁰ These were the so-called black 'homelands' which the apartheid regime used not only to keep blacks out of white areas, but to keep black tribes of South Africa divided and therefore disempowered.

the least productive parts of the country (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992:12). All institutions like schools and hospitals were segregated with the best resources concentrated in the white institutions.

This unjust segregationist policy was a recipe for discontent. It therefore became necessary for the apartheid system to create institutions of repression in order to deal with the discontent. The army, the police and the secret service were used with ruthless efficiency to suppress the black population. The Truth and Reconciliation hearings uncovered some of the gruesome horrors perpetrated by these institutions of repression. Details of some of these are contained in Tutu's *No future without forgiveness* (1999). They include abductions, torture, murders, insults and other forms of humiliation perpetrated by state agents against the majority black population.

By being oppressive, the apartheid institutions were *ipso facto* dehumanising – constituting forces waging a war against African identity. For example, deprivation of land, the most important means of production for the African has devastating effects on the people's collective identity. In Zimbabwe Shona culture, for example, people are sometimes referred to as '*vana vevhu*' (sons and daughters of the soil). Depriving people of their land is therefore robbing them of their source of identity. It is also a cruel means of taking away their self-determination and reducing them into dependents. Concerning South Africa, in particular, Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1992:12) says that after the Native Land Act of 1913 which assigned only 7 percent (later 13 percent) of the land to the black population, 'the black population had been reduced to a labour pool for the mines and farms of the whites'. They had become labour units for the whites instead of being respectable people in their own right. Because of the migratory labour system family life also disintegrated (Frostin 1988:120), adding to the dehumanising effect of apartheid capitalism.

Because of the dehumanising effects of such oppressive institutions on blacks and their identity, black theologians found it necessary to develop a theology of struggle which refused to dichotomise between 'spiritual' and 'socio-political' spheres of life. Boesak (1978:18f), for example, asserts in a section entitled 'Yahweh is the Liberator – the Word is Liberation':

Nothing is more central to the Old Testament proclamation than the message of liberation. God's history with Israel is a history of liberation. Yahweh's great act of liberation forms the content of the life and faith, the history and confession of Israel. As Liberator Yahweh has revealed himself to Moses and Israel, and by this name he wants to be evoked for all generations to come (Ex. 3:15).

Boesak (1978) goes on to explain that the same message of liberation pervades the New Testament witness to the Messiah. In his interpretation 'Jesus purposely places himself in the prophetic tradition of preaching the liberation message, offering himself as the fulfilment of the messianic prophecies' (:20f). He then denounces the 'tendency to spiritualize the biblical message' which 'stems from a western, dualistic pattern of thought foreign to biblical mentality' (:22). Thus, for example, the poor whose liberation Jesus proclaimed in Luke 4 should be understood as 'those who are materially poor in the first place, in other words, those who die of hunger, who are illiterate, who are exploited by others, those who do not even know that they are being exploited, who are denied the right to be persons' (:23).

The implications of what Boesak is saying is that Christians should be part of the struggle against dehumanising institutions as part of their living proclamation of the gospel of liberation. This is because

[t]he 'white power structure,' far from being just a term, represents a reality blacks encounter every day. It represents the economic, political, cultural, religious, and psychological forces which confine (sic) the realities of black existence. Concretely, for black South Africans the white power structure is manifested in apartheid. Whatever grandiloquent ideal this ideology may represent for white people, for blacks it means bad housing, being underpaid, pass laws, influx-control, migrant labor, group areas, resettlement camps, inequality before the law, fear, intimidation, white bosses and black informers, condescension and paternalism; in a word, black powerlessness.

(Boesak 1978:57).

It goes without saying that a quest for African identity must involve struggle against this dehumanising 'white power structure'.

Struggle against oppressive ideology

Goba (1988:76) points to Gregory Baum's second level of social sin, which is 'the role of symbols and ideas which support oppressive political structures.' This is the ideological legitimation of oppression expressed through 'cultural and religious symbols'.

This brings us to a hotly debated issue within Black Theology in South Africa, which is whether racism is the cause or the effect of economic exploitation. According to Frostin (1988:107-109) the answer depended on whether an analyst adopted an attitudinal or a structural interpretation of

racism. The attitudinal interpretation saw racism as an ethical problem affecting people's attitudes to different races and resulting in prejudice and discriminatory behaviour. Any economic unfairness would then result from this racial prejudice. The structural interpretation, on the other hand, puts an emphasis on structures of domination of one group by another, legitimised by the ideology of race. The most potent of these structures of domination is capitalism legitimated by the ideology of the inherent superiority of the white race and the inherent inferiority of the black race.

Black theologians like Alan Boesak took the structural view that said that of racism was a legitimisation for economic, political and social structural domination (Frostin 1988:108). Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1992:13) expresses a similar view that the use of race as a measure of worth (or lack of it) was, in the view of some analysts, an ideological justification (legitimation) of political and economic exploitation of blacks by whites. On the other hand Goba (1986), writing from a black consciousness perspective was persuaded to give more weight to the attitudinal aspect of racism. According to him 'my oppression is ontological, it pertains to who I am' (:67). Furthermore, to 'view the black problem as part of the general problem of class oppression' is to 'make a big mistake because this tragically underestimates the uniqueness of the black situation and black experience as a whole' (:67).

In his later work (1988) Goba had significantly shifted towards the structural view of racism. He was now prepared to accept that racism is 'the rationalization of economic and political exploitation by a theory of the inherent biological inferiority of the black race' (1988:76)⁵¹. This debate may be important for black theologians in the sense that it determines what tools they emphasise in the fight against racism. Mosala (1989a), to whom the class analysis is more dominant, calls upon Black Theology to adopt a Marxist approach to the class struggle. On the other hand for Goba (1986), at least before the seeming shift in his thinking, black consciousness becomes a more important tool for fighting racism. However, for the purpose of analysing the quest for identity in African theology it is not critical that we settle this question on one side or the other. We would agree with Frostin (1988: 105) that apartheid is a complex ideology with four 'sub-ideologies - racism, capitalism, Afrikaner nationalism, and the ideology of the National Security State'. What is important is to recognise that each approach to the fight against apartheid racism made its own valid contribution to the quest for identity. The class based approach which saw racism as a legitimisation of capitalist

⁵¹ Goba credits this thought to Peter Hodgson.

structures of greed and emphasised a struggle against those dehumanising structures positively contributed to the affirmation of all people's identity. Blacks were the vulnerable and therefore exploitable group by the capitalist system. They were alienated from their lands and reduced to units of underpaid labour in mines and factories. They were therefore degraded as human beings. A fight for economic justice and political equality *ipso facto* becomes a fight for an empowered identity.

On the other hand the black consciousness approach to the fight against racism helped to accept the ontological validity of their own being as blacks. Black theologians operating from this perspective recognised that the biggest weapon in the hands of the oppressors was the mind of the blacks themselves. As long as they accepted the validity of the ideology of their inferiority they would remain an oppressed group. This view is well expressed by Boesak (1978:6) when he says that the 'greatest ally of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Getting rid of an implanted slave mentality is central to the philosophy of black consciousness.' Therefore the black consciousness route leads to the same beneficial effect of liberating the identity of the oppressed.

The above survey shows that there is support both for the view of racism as a legitimization of structures of oppression and as an attitudinal problem in its own right. Black Theology shows considerable consensus on the need to fight it on both levels even though emphasis might differ from one theologian to another. The biggest dissensus, however, remains on the role of ideology in the black theological fight against racist ideology. Boesak and Mosala (1989a) typify opposite ends of the spectrum in this debate.

According to Boesak (1978) true Christianity (by which he means the Christianity that operates from a liberation paradigm) is not ideological. He arrives at this position by first of all defining ideology as 'an idea or system of ideas, a doctrine or theory or system of doctrines or theories used to justify and perpetuate existing structures of injustice' (:102). Drawing on the ideas of J. Verkuyl and André Dumas, Boesak proceeds to argue that there is a 'strange resemblance of ideologies to religious faith' and that '[t]he ideologies try to replace the very content of faith, either in the extreme form of total ideologies like Marxism, or in the diluted form of an ideological ethos' (:103). That is why 'it remains very problematic indeed to speak of the identification of Christian faith with an ideology either as a matter of course or as a necessity' (:105). Theology only becomes an

ideology if, according to the above definition of ideology, it is used to legitimise existing systems of injustice. In that case, according to Boesak, it ceases to be a witness to the true Christian faith for '[a]ny theology which does not take God's liberation of the poor and the oppressed as its central point of departure thereby excludes itself effectively from being a witness to the divine presence in the world' (:105). 'If, as Black Theology holds, the truth of biblical revelation is God's liberation of the oppressed, then the theology inspired by an oppression-mindedness is not biblical theology but an ideology' (:105). That is why Boesak calls 'white theology an ideology' (:106) and alleges that the 'Dutch Reformed theology still functions as a theological justification for apartheid' (107f). As an example of this Boesak (:108) refers to the *Landman Report*, on race relations in South Africa 'commissioned by the General Synod of the white Dutch Reformed church' and proceeds to say:

The Report accepts Apartheid as sanctioned by the Word of God. Nowhere, however, is there a sign that black people who suffer under this system have had the right to voice their opinion before the commission. Nowhere does one find a thorough critique of the validity of the white government's policy and its implications. The Report nowhere questions the fact that this policy is forced by less than four million whites on almost twenty million black people who were denied the right to share in the decision. Nowhere in the Report is there recognition of the fact that the people who suffer under Apartheid (and even some whites!) regard this system as unchristian and evil.

Boesak (108) concludes from this that '[t]he Report's treatment of Christian ethics is invalid, because it forces the Christian ethic into the framework of Apartheid and subjects it to the national ideology, instead of subjecting the ideology to the critique of God's liberating Word'.

This is the basis on which Boesak argues for Black Theology not being an ideology. It is not neutral theology, for no theology can be, but its central interest in the liberation of the oppressed aligns it to the Word of God, and therefore it does not fit the criterion for an 'ideology'. True faith 'continually tests programs by the criteria of the gospel of Jesus Christ, discerning where they serve liberation, justice, and the wholeness of life within every situation' (:121). It is only in extreme cases, such as Cleage's exclusive identification of the gospel with Christian black nationalism that Black Theology is in danger of becoming an ideology. In Boesak's words:

Cleage claims God solely for the black people, a conception which of necessity requires a national God, something we have also encountered when we dealt with white Christian Nationalism. This conception of God is denied by both the Old and New Testaments. God will neither allow himself to be claimed by any one people, nor will he be reduced to a mere symbol of their nationalistic aspirations.

(Boesak 1978:119).

Boesak's refusal to identify Black Theology with any ideology is understandable on the basis of the negative definition of ideology that forms the basis of his theology. At the same time this has opened Boesak to serious attack by fellow black theologians. Goba (1986:65), for example, sharply criticises Boesak and says, 'I want to emphasize that all theology is ideological in the sense that it projects a political vision of those who participate in it. This is why I disagree with Allan Boesak [whose ahistorical perspective represents] a profound misunderstanding in the nature of a theological hermeneutic'.

Mofokeng (1990:174) also proceeds on the assumption that all theology is contextual and ideologically biased in spite of any claims to the contrary. For him

[t]he real questions that distinguish one contextual theology from the other have to do with its socio-political context and the interests it advocates. ... Whose concrete and spiritual interests does it serve?' ... Black Theology of liberation for its part, in solidarity with other liberation theologies, is deeply rooted in the dusty townships and poverty-stricken rural areas of this land. It stands firmly on the side of the oppressed, and elevates their dreams and hopes to the top of the theological agenda.'

A more sustained critique of Boesak's ideas comes from Mosala (1986b, 1989a). The two related angles from which he attacks Boesak are firstly, his assumption that ideology must always have a negative meaning and, secondly, that the Bible as a whole is therefore the non-ideological Word of God. As we have already noted above, what follows from this stance is that Black Theology, being derived from the Bible, is a non-ideological commitment to liberation. Mosala rejects these assumptions. To him ideological commitment on the part of the black theologian is a necessity. This is because ideology *per se* is not of necessity an evil phenomenon. To Mosala (1986b:194) ideology 'is not a lie. It is rather a harmonisation of contradictions in such a way that the class interests of one group are universalised and made acceptable to other classes.' In other words the concept of 'ideology' can carry a positive, or at least neutral, sense of 'that cultural cognitive process by which we give meaning to our existence' (Goba 1988:98). What makes ideology good or bad therefore is

whether it exists to promote the interests of the dominant class of oppressors or those of the oppressed for their liberation.

To Mosala the Bible itself is a site of ideological struggle between the oppressive dominant and the oppressed liberation forces. It is in fact dominated by the interests of the dominant classes of the times of its composition. It therefore suits today's dominant classes to convince the oppressed that the Bible is the Word of God which should only be obeyed but never questioned. By adopting the 'Word of God' as a hermeneutical starting point, theologians like Boesak are therefore manifesting 'ideological captivity to the hermeneutical principles of a theology of oppression' resulting in 'the inability of Black Theology to become a theoretical weapon of struggle in the hands of the exploited masses themselves'(1986b:176).

Mosala therefore contends that there is no such thing as a non-ideological appropriation of the Word of God. What is necessary is to identify the class interest of the oppressed and apply these interests even in the critical reading of the Bible. Only an ideological use of the Bible can turn it into a weapon of struggle for the oppressed.

We shall return to the issue of hermeneutics as a weapon of struggle. For now we need to note that Boesak and Mosala at least share a common conviction that ideology is very often used as a weapon of legitimating oppression. What Boesak fails to realise, however, is that ideology can also be used in a liberative manner. This is why the Bible can be used in an ideologically oppressive way or in a liberative way. Even Boesak who accepts the Bible as the Word of God has acknowledged several times how apartheid oppressors appealed to the Bible to legitimate their oppression. Mosala is therefore right in warning about the danger of hermeneutic slavery to the ideology of the oppressors.

The question that Mosala fails to answer is the basis upon which an ideology of struggle for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed can be said to be epistemologically more justifiable than the ideologies of oppression. Maimela (1986:105) helps to fill this gap by arguing that the experiences of the poor are in fact closer to the truth than the experiences of dominant forces. What he says forms the basis of what has been called the epistemological privilege of the poor.

Since the situation in which the oppressed majority find themselves is closer to reality, the reality of the conflictory and unacceptable nature of our world, black theologians argue that,

in order to see reality as it is, it is imperative that Christian theologians should try to see and understand society from the point of view of the poor, of the little ones, of the marginalised, and of the oppressed black. This preferential option for the poor is one which theologians should make so as to be able to see society in a new light, as society which has sentenced the oppressed black majority to a life of misery and suffering.

What is needed is an ideologically appropriate hermeneutical key for a liberative appropriation of the Bible, culture and any other sources of Black Theology (see discussion on hermeneutics below).

Struggle against false consciousness

To rehabilitate African identity, the third related phenomenon of social sin against which Black Theology must contend is false consciousness (Goba 1988:77). But what is false consciousness? We may here define false consciousness as any distorted perception of, or belief about, oneself that results from oppressive dominant ideologies and hegemonies⁵². It is the negative result of such ideologies and hegemonies on self concept – a negative shaping of people’s sense of identity. False consciousness in this usage affects both the oppressors and the oppressed, the dominant and the dominated. For the dominant classes this false consciousness manifests itself in a superiority complex which makes them believe that they are the standard of judgement of being. For the oppressed classes false consciousnesses may manifest itself in inferiority complex.⁵³ Goba (1988:96) clearly states that oppression ‘creates even doubt about our own existential authenticity, producing a profound inferiority complex or false consciousness’. This inferiority complex may express itself through an adoption of standards of civilisation which are western in orientation and the despising of everything African. For Tutu (1997:37) this was the worst sin inflicted by whites on blacks in Africa:

The worst crime that can be laid at the door of the white man (who, it must be said, has done many a worthwhile and praiseworthy thing for which we are always thankful) is not our economic, social and political exploitation, however reprehensible that might be; no, it is that his policy succeeded in filling most of us with a self-disgust and self-hatred. This has been the

⁵² See chapter one for a discussion of the difference between ‘ideology’ and ‘hegemony’ according to the Comaroffs (1991).

⁵³ The issue of ‘false consciousness’ is more complex than I have indicated here. There are a number of other ways in which ‘false consciousness’ on the part of the oppressed has been expressed. Freire (1993) talks of ‘the *submersion* of [their] consciousness’ (:62) which can make the oppressed aspire to elevate themselves by being as much like the oppressors as possible (:27f). Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) refer to this same phenomenon as the ‘colonization of consciousness’ by which the Tswana and other tribes in South Africa were ‘drawn unwittingly into the dominion of European “civilization” while at the same time often contesting its presence and the explicit content of its worldview’ (:26).

most violent form of colonialism, our spiritual and mental enslavement, when we have suffered from what can only be called a religious or spiritual schizophrenia.

It is this sense of inferiority that constitutes part of what we are calling 'false consciousness'.

False consciousness on the part of the oppressed may also express itself through brutality toward fellow oppressed people. When the oppressed internalise the image that the dominant classes have of them they may end up being so dehumanised that in turn become brutal towards the fellow oppressed. Tutu (1999:155) has a poignant depiction of the possible tragic results of false consciousness on the part of the oppressed:

Those who opposed apartheid could also end up, as Bishop Peter Storey so poignantly described in the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela hearing, becoming like what they most abhorred. Tragically, they themselves frequently became brutalised and descended to the same low levels as those they were opposing. The victims often ended up internalising the definition the top dogs had of them. They began to wonder whether they might not perhaps be somehow as their masters and mistresses defined them. Thus they would frequently accept that the values of the domineering class were worth striving after. And then through the awful demons of self-hate and self-contempt, a hugely negative self-image took its place in the centre of the victim's being, corrosive of *proper* self-love and self-assurance, eating away at their core... Society has conspired to fill people with self-hate which they then project outwards. They hate themselves and destroy themselves by proxy when they destroy those who are like this self they have been conditioned to hate.

Goba (1988:77) points out how the apartheid regime had institutions 'designed to foster false political consciousness'. These included segregated schools 'designed to keep blacks in a state of servitude, instilling in them through a highly sophisticated educational machinery a perpetual sense of inferiority.' On the other hand white schools were 'designed to justify and legitimate the racial ideology of the present ruling white regime.'

What is the answer to the problem of false consciousness? Black Theology's answer is to affirm the values of the black consciousness. This is an attempt to help black people to redefine themselves by their own liberative criteria rather than internalise the ideology of oppressors. This ideological struggle for identity was to be extended from the arena of theological debates down to the level of church praxis. So, for example, Goba (1988:81) extends the following challenge to the black church:

The church must help its members to question on the basis of the gospel the presuppositions of the existing political structures of Apartheid. The black Christian communal praxis

succeeds in its quest when it fosters a positive self identity among black Christians. This identity challenges the values of the white dominant group. It succeeds only if it evolves a different kind of political consciousness, one which produces concrete alternative life styles.

This discussion on false consciousness shows that for Black Theology the ideological struggle is as important in the quest for black identity as the organizational struggle of political leaders or the military struggle of the people who were fighting against apartheid forces in the bush. The struggle against false consciousness was a struggle to release blacks from internal oppression.

Struggle for black power

So far in this section we have seen how the quest for African identity in Black Theology involves struggle against oppressive institutions and ideologies. Those are the negative aspects of the struggle. But since identity cannot be achieved by merely struggle *against* oppressive realities there must be a positive thrust of what Black Theology is struggling *for*. One part of the positive aspects of the struggle has already been indirectly suggested in the discussion of false consciousness. In fighting against the false consciousness induced by the oppressive apartheid institutions and ideologies Black Theology is *ipso facto* struggling for a true consciousness of black worth. We concentrate now on the second positive aspect of the struggle – the struggle for black power. While true consciousness can be achieved even without political and economic power as the Black Consciousness Movement argued, it definitely would be enhanced by the wielding of power as black theologians argued.

In fact according to black theologians to be without power is to be degraded. For Boesak (1978:40) ‘slavery is not only subservience; it is also idolatry. It means that one human being is degraded to a subhuman status while the other must deify himself in order to justify his superior position’. Similarly ‘Buthelezi insists that to be denied participation in power is to be degraded to subhuman life and to be excluded from one’s proper place in creation’ (Frostin 1988:141).

An endorsement of black power presupposes a positive understanding of power by black theologians. Boesak (1978:47) makes it clear that apartheid power was evil power in the sense that it was power *over others*. ‘Contrasted to that is power shared *with others*, which, means that power is not an alienated force, but service to others’. Furthermore ‘[b]ecause human power is grounded in the power of God, it must reflect the character of the divine power in order to be genuine. God’s power is a liberating, creative power (:51). This power which black theologians are calling for is

both the internal power of being and its outward manifestation in transformed structures. This is well articulated by Boesak (:50):

These two realities, the inner and the outward, do not represent two visions of power. They are complementary to one another, merely two sides of the same coin. The one cannot survive without the other. The inner reality, the identification with one's self, self-affirmation – this is essential and comes first, for it is the indispensable precondition for the quest for human freedom (Freire). But it cannot survive without the other – the outward practical manifestation of this realization. The power to be, the courage to affirm one's human dignity, must inevitably lead to the transformation of structures to fulfil its search for completion and wholeness.

Thus 'black power' demands 'a structural, not only an attitudinal, change of society. In other words, the concept signals a disagreement with Senghor's spiritualising concept of culture⁵⁴. According to the advocates of black power, new political and socio-economic structures are an intrinsic dimension of a new consciousness' (Frostin 1988:88).

When black theologians call for black power, they are engaged in a quest for African identity, for a full realization of the humanity of African people. This is because to share power 'is to be fully human. It means to be able *to be*, to live in accordance with one's God given humanity. It means to be able to realize this essential humanity in the socio-historical world in which people have responsibility. Human responsibility presupposes freedom, which is power shared' (Boesak 1978:51). Black power in particular, says Boesak (:56) is the

answer to the white power structure, the answer to racism, degradation, humiliation, exploitation, and alienation. Black power means discovering that the white power structure defines the reality of black life. It means discovering that there is no innocent way of going through life—that innocence is a refusal to face reality, a clinging to empty promises, which makes blacks apathetic. It is learning to discern what really matters, for instance, that the solution does not lie in screaming to white people that they are devils, but in confronting their power with another kind of power.

That other power according to Boesak (1978:71) is 'the continuous historical effort of black people ... to use resources of culture, politics, and economics to force upon white people a change in existing structures that have not been affected by mere moral persuasion and appeals to conscience'.

⁵⁴ Senghor was a leading advocate of Négritude on the African continent (see chapter 3). Négritude was more about inner convictions than structural changes in society.

This statement reinforces what has already been discussed above concerning Liberation Theology's stance on the need for orthopraxis as opposed to the orthodoxy and abstraction of western theology.

Hermeneutics as a weapon of struggle

The struggle against apartheid forces of dehumanization manifested in institutions, ideological legitimation of oppression and false consciousness required that Black Theology utilize hermeneutics as an ideological weapon of struggle. Here we return to Mosala who provides us with the most articulate approach to this methodology.

For Mosala (1986a, 1989) the notion of 'struggle' is the most fundamental human reality. He argues (1986a) that all human reality should be interpreted in terms of two basic relationships. Firstly there is the relationship between Humans and nature. This is the *economic* relationship and is the most basic determinant of all other relationships. While humans are part of nature, they also objectify it and exploit it to meet their needs and wants (e.g. food, shelter, clothing). The second basic relationship is that between humans themselves. This is the social relationship whereby humans cooperate to tame nature. In the process *culture* develops around the meeting of economic needs, and includes social organisations (governance) and religion. Basically however, all culture (including religion) is a reflection of economic relationships and the contradictions that arise from those relationships. Utilising a Sociology of Knowledge perspective Mosala argues that reality cannot be correctly interpreted in idealistic, metaphysical, ahistorical terms (the Platonic style of thinking). Therefore one cannot talk of goodness, or even of God as a reality, detached from concrete socio-economic history. Religion must, therefore, be pushed back to its material social-historical base. Man's understanding and positing of divine reality must of necessity correspond in some important ways with the level of development of historical society (:94). This is where Mosala's concept of periodization comes in. Because of his evolutionary view of history no social analysis is valid unless it is made in terms of the relevant period of history and the economic relations (stages of production) obtaining during that time.

At every stage of human economic and cultural relationships there are necessarily contradictions that make struggle the basic datum of human reality. In South Africa such a struggle has, in recent history, been between dominant forces represented by the apartheid capitalism and the marginalized and disposed blacks that his theology seeks to liberate. Mosala's utilization of Marxian tools of

analysing factors of production and their periodization locates his quest for identity primarily in the socio-economic field, but he also touches on cultural factors in his discussion of African Instituted Churches. In order to liberate the black dispossessed classes, Mosala has developed a well-articulated and sharply focused approach to biblical hermeneutics. The importance of this issue lies in the fact that in South Africa the Bible was the most significant shared text for both the oppressors and the oppressed. It therefore became a significant ideological battle-ground or site of struggle in the shaping of consciousness. We have already noted Mosala's conviction that biblical texts were written from an ideological point of view, mainly to promote the interests of the dominant groups. This increases the likelihood of the Bible as a tool of oppression, especially if the oppressed can be persuaded to accept it at face value as the 'Word of God'.

Mosala (1986b:178f) supplies several examples to illustrate his thesis:

What then is meant by the Bible as the 'Word of God'? The ideological import of such a theological statement is immense. For the 'Word of God' cannot be the object of criticism. Least of all can the 'Word of God' be critiqued in the light of the black experience. The only appropriate response is *obedience*. At best the black experience can be seen in the light of the 'Word of God' but not vice versa. If the Bible is the 'Word of God', therefore, the implication is that even the 'law and order' God of David and Solomon cannot be the object of criticism in the light of the black experience. The black struggle cannot be hermeneutically connected with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited Israelites against the economic and political domination of the Israelite monarchic state which was undergirded by the ideology of the Davidic-Zionist covenant (2 Samuel 7). Neither can any hermeneutic affinity be established with the landless peasants, exploited workers and destitute underclasses that made up the followers of Jesus. One cannot select one part of the "Word of God" and neglect the other.

In this stance Mosala is unreservedly supported by Maluleke (1996a:12):

I propose that the equation of the Bible with 'the Word of God' is not only naïve but it is a dangerous form of naiveté. Furthermore, I propose that this equation has been and will continue to be more debilitating for black and African theologies than any of the dangers highlighted by Bediako, Sanneh, and Mugambi (1995) combined. ... It is the uncritical equation of human views on the Bible to the Word of God that has been used to legitimate the demonisation of African traditional culture and religions. The demonisers of African culture have not been as inane as to base their attacks on African culture upon their own biases and prejudices. It has never been them, but the Bible that said so! ... The point here is that the Bible is not merely (ab)used in this way, but more significantly, it is (ab)usable in oppressive ways. Black and African theologies must redraft and problematize their relationship with the Bible as well as its place in African Christianity.'

Mosala's answer to this ideological use of the Bible for oppressive purposes is to take the struggle for liberation into the hermeneutical arena. As mentioned above, he opts for a Marxist ideological interpretation of the Bible, believing that to be the most liberating ideology. This causes him to develop a 'materialist biblical hermeneutics of liberation' which consists of identifying the following (1986b:187):

- Material conditions of the biblical text – mode of production, class forces and dominant ideology.
- Ideological conditions of the text – class origins of the text and class interests of the text.
- Material conditions of the biblical reader – mode of production, classes, dominant ideology.
- Ideological conditions of the biblical reader - class origins of the reader and class commitments of the reader.
- Biblical hermeneutics and the class struggle – the bible as a site of class conflict.
- The historical-cultural specificity of the class struggle and biblical hermeneutics – towards a Black Theology of liberation.

Looking at Mosala's stance and methodology we have to give him credit for exposing the double fallacy that all the Scriptural texts are ideologically neutral and that there is an ideologically free way to appropriate it. Oppressors inculcated these fallacies and then exploited those same fallacies to make the underprivileged believe that their situation in life was part of the divine order. It is in order to counteract these fallacies that Mosala (1986b:181) insists that the 'social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point for a Black Theology of liberation'. To drive home the importance of the African context he proceeds to say:

Those, therefore, that are committed to the struggles of the black oppressed and exploited people cannot ignore the history, culture, and ideologies of the dominated black people as their primary hermeneutical starting point. There can be no Black Theology of liberation and no corresponding biblical hermeneutics of liberation outside of the black struggle for both survival and liberation. Such a struggle, however, requires being as clear about issues in the black community as possible.

(Mosala 1986b:196f)

By making the 'history, culture, and ideologies of the dominated black people' the 'primary hermeneutical starting point' Mosala is in effect elevating the identity of the dominated. We can deduce from this stance that there can be no positive sense of identity where the poor are politically and economically dominated and where they do not see themselves as agents of their own liberation. This is where the hermeneutics that takes the poor as interlocutors becomes a weapon for a positive identity.

Unfortunately Mosala undermines the very liberation purpose which he feels so passionately about by taking the 'hermeneutic of suspicion' to an extreme level. His rejection of the notion of the Bible as the Word of God leads him to the opposite extreme whereby the Bible is only the word of human beings in an interclassist ideological struggle. Mosala (1989a:6-7) sees struggle behind and beneath the text, in the text itself, and between text and reader. All the words attributed to God and to Jesus are therefore only ideological weapons which seek to justify class interests by associating them with the divine. Instead of there being a God who has really spoken through the pages of the Bible Mosala's stance amounts to there being many gods and many Jesuses who are all created in the image of the various, especially dominant, classes in the various struggles identified. Unfortunately once the reality of God is negated no one interpretation of the Bible can claim validity over another. Just as Mosala takes the struggle of the masses as his hermeneutical point of departure, oppressors can also, as some of them have done, take law and order or state security as their hermeneutical point of departure. This can lead to extreme relativism whereby each group can claim the validity of their interpretation over others on purely subjective grounds.

If disclaiming the role of ideology in hermeneutics (Boesak) is as dangerous as silencing God in favour of an unwinnable ideological struggle (Mosala), what, then, is the proper approach? I submit that the answer lies in identifying a hermeneutical key or keys that that can give epistemological validity to the liberating gospel and expose the ideological error of dominant forces, even when those dominant forces are built into some biblical texts. In chapter three two such hermeneutical keys were explored viz: *imago Dei* and *incarnation*. The crucial importance of the *imago Dei* concept in Black Theology is well summarised by Frostin (1988:101):

[B]lack self-affirmation is interpreted as a vocation; God calls the blacks to realize their dignity as human beings in spite of the contrary message from the South African ideology. In fact, this theme recurs in Black Theology writings. Genesis 1:26f. has rightly been described

as the *locus classicus* of the anthropology in Black Theology. The notion of men and women created in the image of God, *Imago Dei* – which has played a central role in Christian anthropology – is a cornerstone also in Black Theology.

On the crucial importance of incarnation for Black Theology, Maimela (1991:148) says:

God's advocacy for the powerless and oppressed was, according to black theologians, taken to new heights by the coming of Jesus, in and through whom God chose to be born by poor parents and to live as a poor and oppressed human being, who suffered and was crucified as a rejected outcast in order to give the oppressed poor and the downtrodden new life and hope. Therefore, for black theologians the *incarnation is the event that clearly demonstrates that God takes the side of the oppressed, the defenseless, the outcasts, the excluded, and the despised* (Emphasis added).

On the basis of these hermeneutical keys it is concluded that the false consciousness of both the superiority and the inferiority complex was a direct affront to God's will. It is this which gives epistemological validity to Black Theology over apartheid ideology. These hermeneutical keys, however, presuppose the existence of God. Kunnie (1986:165) is right in insisting that lack of faith in God would disempower Black Theology itself. On the contrary:

Our faith in the Divine, mediated through our perception of the Christian gospel, is the spiritual instrument of empowerment which informs our resolute courage to participate in the liberation struggle.

The second necessary presupposition is that this God who really exists has made his will known. In the Christian belief system the Bible is at least a record of interaction that took place in the past between God and human beings. It is through this interaction that the hermeneutical keys of *imago Dei* and incarnation which are necessary for empowering Black Theology can be derived. For these keys to hold universal rather than just relative validity, it must be presupposed that they are part of the Word of God, contrary to Mosala's protestations. Kunnie (1986:154) rightly argues that faith in God does not thereby become a substitute for historical involvement and vice versa. He goes further to explain that '[d]ivine freedom is the source and content of human freedom' (:158) Therefore '[t]o be content with servitude and oppression is to deny the very ground and intention of our created existence' (:158).

Mosala would do well to bring God as a reality in his theology instead of assuming that God is a product of materialistic forces of production, created in the image of human beings to support their ideological interests in these forces of production. However, he needs to be given credit for

advancing the cause of African identity in several ways through his hermeneutical approach. Firstly making the 'historical and cultural struggles of black people as a hermeneutical starting point for Black Theology' (1989a:67) has the effect of highlighting Africans as valid interlocutors for theology. No longer does theology privilege the western abstract theologising as a way of foregrounding as interlocutors the 'cultured critics of religion'. Black theologians like Mosala are showing that approaching theology from the point of view of the underprivileged is not only valid in its own right but is consonant with the God whose preferential option for the poor is amply demonstrated in several Scripture texts. Mosala, in particular, helpfully alerts us to the danger of ideological manipulation for hegemonic purposes not only by the dominant readers of the Bible today, but even by dominant forces within some biblical texts themselves. While the extent of Mosala's hermeneutic of suspicion may be open to justifiable criticism, there can be no doubt that there are many voices in the Bible, some of which are on the side of oppressors.

Related to the issue of choosing Africans as valid interlocutors of theology is Mosala's advancing of African identity by not only 'interpreting the black experience in the light of the Bible, but also the Bible in the light of the black experience' (1986b:178). This creates a genuine hermeneutical dialogue between the Bible and black experience and takes hermeneutics much further along the road towards an 'ideological and theoretical break from enslavement to dominant discourses' (1989a:3-4). The African people's reading of the Bible is then potentially informed and influenced by their history *and* culture.

5.3.4. Identity through foregrounding black experience

'Black Theology derives its name from the unique black experience in racist societies upon which it reflects, where one's human identity is determined by one's whiteness or blackness' (Maimela 1998:113). It is therefore a theology which is not practised with cold detachment. Black Theology 'starts with black people in the South African situation facing strangling problems of oppression, fear, hunger, insult and dehumanization' (Goba 1988:4). The focus on black experience helps to advance African identity by making Africans valid interlocutors for the theology of liberation. It is for this reason that Balcomb (1993:174) characterises Black Theology as 'an extraordinarily clear case of a theology arising out of the need to reconstitute an identity fractured by the violence of apartheid'.

Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1992) helpfully emphasises a recent shift in both historiography and theological conceptualisation – a shift that has been increasingly manifested in Black Theology. Previously history was written from the point of view of westerners. It is what westerners did, said or thought that formed the essence of history. '[E]xisting standard works (unconsciously) proceeded from an image of society in which the West was the centre of the world' (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992:68). Furthermore: 'Through the educational system of the colonial era whole generations of African pupils and students had been imprinted with a Eurocentric view of world history, a process which was not easily reversed' (:78). In the case of Africa, therefore, real history started with the coming of western explorers, traders, missionaries and colonisers. Africans were kept in the background except in so far as Europeans come into contact with them. They were therefore seen as more 'acted upon' people than actors in their own right. Significant events, even where Africans were involved, happened because westerners caused them to happen. What Africans thought, said or did was not historically significant. What was true for historiography became automatically true also in theology. What counted as theology, and the manner such theology was formulated, had to be western in orientation.

There has been a paradigm shift which has helped to foreground the African – his thoughts, words and deeds. By focusing on black experience as a theological category Black Theology has taken this paradigm into the theological arena. On a the negative level Black Theology refutes the claim that the way whites think and what they value should become the standard for all other people (Frostin 1988:22-23). On the positive level Black Theology seeks to focus on blacks

not as marginal people, but to bring into their lives a new understanding of their liberation in Jesus Christ. It seeks to transform their blackness from its peripheral existence to the centrality of joyous life in accordance with the gospel – precisely where Jesus has placed it. It seeks to bring the gospel as a relevant message to people who have lost their self-respect, who are denied human dignity, and who are trying to come to grips with a thousand dehumanizing facets of life.

(Boesak 1978:15)

We have already noted how Mosala (1986b:181) insists that the 'social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point for a Black Theology of liberation'. Similarly Boesak (1978:13) defines Black Theology in situational terms:

It is the black people's attempt to come to terms theologically with their black situation. It seeks to interpret the gospel in such a way that the situation of blacks will begin to make sense. It seeks to take seriously the biblical emphasis on the wholeness of life, which has always had its counterpart in the African heritage, trying to transform the departmentalised theology blacks have inherited from the western world into a biblical, holistic theology. It is part of the black struggle toward liberation from religious, economic, psychological, and cultural dependency.

This focus on black experience is not an arbitrary way of upholding black identity by making blacks interlocutors of theology. Frostin (1988) goes to great length in demonstrating the 'epistemological value of the black experience in view of the South African ideology'. Black experience as 'contrast experience (:93) 'is of crucial importance in the uncovering of truth' (:99) of what it was like to live under the apartheid system and the necessity of making liberation a valid theological goal. This truth could not be exposed by either the privileged 'state theology' or the non-committal 'church theology', to borrow the terminologies adopted by the *Kairos Document* (KD 1987:passim)

Focussing on black experience has far-reaching implications for black identity. It means, *inter alia*, affirmation of their uniqueness and their personhood and puts them in a self-affirming relationship with God that can potentially reverse the dehumanization of their treatment under the apartheid regime. They can then love and accept themselves (Frostin 1988:102).

Black Theology has, however, been criticised for not foregrounding the totality of African experience. Motlhabi (1986, 1994) makes a valid point that liberation theologies have, at least in the past, tended to neglect sources of specifically African origin. To Motlhabi

A present without a past is barren. From the study of sociology we know that human beings only become part of a society by being socialized into it. Without the traces of our socialization into the African past in some way, it is wishful thinking to imagine that we can reflect the traces of that past in our life and actions, even instinctively.

(Motlhabi 1986:48)

In this case Motlhabi is in agreement with Bediako (1995) who talks about the primal apprehension of Christianity (see chapter 4). In the past liberation theologies in Africa concentrated heavily on current socio-political realities while Inculturation Theology concentrated more on cultural issues. It has been good, however, to see Black Theology more consciously incorporating inculturation issues just as Inculturation Theology begins to be alive to socio-political realities – a development that caused Motlhabi (1994) to advocate that a time may have arrived for Black and African theologies

to operate as one unified African Theology. Attending to the one dimension without the other cannot adequately cater for African identity.

5.3.4. Identity through self-affirmation

The adoption of Africans as interlocutors in Black Theology has meant both focussing on their experience and invoking African self-affirmation to counteract negative perception in western and apartheid circles. In this respect Black Theology became the theological counterpart of the Black Consciousness Movement. 'Black Theology in many respects became the expression of black consciousness philosophy, furnishing it with a religious foundation and motivation' (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992: 26). Goba (1986: 63) describes the two as 'soul mates walking together in the ongoing struggle of black liberation'. This is confirmed by Mofokeng (1986:122) who says that Black Theology was in fact one of 'the projects which the black consciousness organizations launched to serve as instruments of conscientization' of the Africans. Until the coming of the Black Consciousness Movement, Mofokeng (:122) asserts, the 'dominant theological language in the churches, especially in the historic churches, functioned as an ideological instrument of oppression and exploitation. It was in response to that unacceptable situation that Black Theology was developed'.

In adopting black consciousness as the theoretical underpinning for Black Theology Boesak (1978:1) defines black consciousness as

the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people. It means that blacks are determined to be judged no longer by, and to adhere no longer to white values. It is an attitude, a way of life.

As in the case with the Black Consciousness Movement the term 'black' in Black Theology came to signify both a state of being oppressed and more importantly the will for 'self-affirmation':

For a long time blacks in South Africa were called ‘non-whites’, people who fail to meet the norm of humanness. But the moment blacks fully realize they are created in the image of God, blackness can no longer be viewed as a curse. According to Buthelezi, blackness remains a symbol of oppression as long as it is someone else who calls you black. But when you yourself say ‘I am black,’ it becomes a symbol of liberation and self-affirmation. In this connection Black Theology speaks of the necessity for blacks to love themselves.

(Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992:27)

Furthermore ‘[t]he concept of blackness used by black consciousness and Black Theology is directed towards liberation and, ultimately, freedom. Both internal and external liberation is needed. Buthelezi speaks of a liberation of the spirit in which the black person decides to become the creator of his or her own history’ (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992: 28).

All this requires *metanoia* on the part of the blacks – repentance from self-contempt. This repentance is required in order for blacks to ‘become reconciled with themselves’ and give up their ‘blasphemous non-beingness’ (Boesak 1978:30). It is when Africans have experienced *metanoia* that they can truly start loving themselves as they should. This love for self is a Christian imperative, quite apart from being a necessary part of psychological liberation. Thus

To ask blacks to love themselves is to ask them to hate oppression, dehumanization, and the cultivation of a slave mentality. It is to ask them to know that they are of infinite worth before God, that they have a precious human personality worthy of manifestation. It is to ask them to withstand any effort to make them believe the opposite.

(Boesak 1978:29)

5.3.5 Critical issues arising from the quest for African identity in Black Theology

From what we have discussed so far the concerns pursued by Black Theology, and by implication Liberation Theology generally, are tantamount to a quest for identity. We raise now several questions related to the effectiveness of the quest for African identity in Black Theology.

Methodological suitability

We begin by raising the crucial question on whether Black Theology has found and applied a method that enhances its quest for African identity. This is perhaps the most problematical critical issue that we need to address in this regard.

The adoption of oppressed Africans as its interlocutors with a view to theologically empowering their drive for liberation, we have found, is the cornerstone of the Black Theology methodology. The extent to which it achieves that focus would arguably become the measure of its success in its quest for African identity. Simply understood, interlocutors are dialogue partners, and true dialogue is an empowering process. Interlocutors are the ones whose concerns a particular brand of theology has been designed to address. They are the ones who ask the questions that that theology sets out to answer. The very fact of focussing on the context of Africans as the important dialogue partners gives the theoretical possibility that those interlocutors are affirmed. They are important to God, and therefore they are important to theology. We have found that Black Theology goes even further than merely affirming the importance of its interlocutors. Alongside other liberation theologies it asserts God's 'preferential option' for the poor and, indeed, their 'hermeneutical/epistemological privilege' in Black Theology itself.

The potential identity empowerment arising from this method cannot be disputed. Here are people whom 'state theology' had downgraded to the status of servants of, or at least inferior to, whites by divine order. Having been dispossessed of their land they were reduced 'units of labour' in the service of apartheid capitalism. Even though their labour drove the wheels of the economy they had to live under poor housing conditions and were assigned poor educational and health facilities. When they tried to rise to claim their human rights they were subjected to the severe brutality of the state security system. Their leaders were imprisoned and some of them, like Steve Biko, were tortured to death. Everything about the apartheid system proclaimed the inferiority and subjugation of the Africans. Then came Black Theology affirming the dignity of the Africans, and their preferential option before God. In this way Black Theology stood as a reversal of everything apartheid stood for.

We cannot, however, rest our case on the theoretical possibilities that lie in the adoption of Africans as Black Theology's interlocutors. We have to ask if in fact Black Theology functions in line with its commendable theoretical position. This is where we begin to uncover some contentious issues.

First of all there is the problem of Black Theology borrowing non-African tools to advance African identity. Some would argue that this is a contradiction which can only defeat the cause of African identity. The clearest example of this contentious issue is the borrowing of the tool of Marxist

historical materialism by black theologians like Mosala and Mofokeng. A typical expression of this borrowed tool is a declaration by Mofokeng (1990:170):

I personally think that the historical materialist approach offers a better analytical framework within which these issues can be adequately dealt with than the idealist one that attempts to deal with ideas and feelings as if they are independent entities that have a life of their own.

What Mofokeng says is demonstrated *par excellence* by Mosala (1989a) through his periodization approach to people's histories on the basis of analysis of the development of means of production. Mosala's rationale for this approach is to rescue Black Theology from what he saw as its enslavement to 'bourgeois biblical-hermeneutical assumptions' (:3) and thereby become socially engaged with the poor who are its interlocutors. Some critics see a contradiction in the very act of 'borrowing' non-African ideologies to achieve an African goal. Balcomb (1993:229), for example, raises a valid criticism when he says that 'the use of critical tools coming from a European enlightenment tradition tends sometimes to suggest that their interlocutors are secularised Europeans rather than oppressed Africans'. A bigger problem, however, is not in the borrowing of Marxist or other theories but in 'reducing everything to the economic and the material' (Maluleke 1995:12, Note 13). Indeed as Maluleke (:4) says, 'We do not just need jobs and houses, we must also recover our own selves', implying that this recovering of our 'selves' cannot be achieved by a materialistic approach alone.

Still on the subject of 'borrowing' it has been argued that the very concept of Black Theology, and its decided links with the related notion of black power, are importations from the American civil rights movement. The conclusion that some first world critics have drawn from Black Theology's utilisation of these foreign sources is that African identity cannot be achieved with non-African sources, or at least that Black Theology is contradicting itself by condemning western philosophical analytical tools while adopting other equally foreign tools.

This first world critique of Black Theology needs to be debunked, at least to a certain extent. The incorporation of cultural concepts and practices that do not originate from the society concerned is a normal part of cross-cultural fertilisation. The critical issue is whether what is so incorporated is owned by the people to the extent that it ceases to be 'foreign' to them. The universalism of Christianity certainly makes it adaptable to different cultural expressions. Christianity originated in the Middle East as a very Jewish phenomenon. When it spread to the Greco-Roman world, and

from there to the rest of the western world, it became thoroughly Hellenised. As far as the West is concerned, two processes are therefore seen to be at work. Firstly there is the adoption of what was originally a non-western religion. Secondly there is its contextualisation in a way that has now made it a western religion. On this basis we cannot deny the validity of Mosala's argument that a historical-materialistic approach, though originating from Marxism, can become an African approach. By concretising reality it is, in fact, a more African approach than the abstract philosophising approach of the West.

Similarly, there is no reason why the concepts of Black Theology and black power, appropriately modified, should not be borrowed from the American civil rights movement and become contextualised in South Africa. Motlhabi (1986 :48) has sufficiently rebutted the accusation that by sharing the experience of the American civil rights movement Black Theology thereby loses its African identity. He deserves to be quoted at length:

To say, therefore, that Black Theology in South Africa stands with one leg in Africa and the other in black America is to recognize our double advantage in the situation in which we find ourselves. As Africans, we share our background and experience of being what we are with the other sons and daughters of Africa. As an oppressed people, we share the experience of disinheritance and oppression with our brothers and sisters in America. We can learn from both as well as benefit both. To be truly African, Christianity 'must speak in tones that strike a responsive chord in the African breast and must convict the African of his peculiar African sinfulness.'

There is in fact evidence that South African Black Theology sufficiently modified what it borrowed from America to make it true and real to the South African black context. As Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1992:25) rightly says:

Although Afro-American influence was undeniable, there were also clear differences from it. Whereas American blacks generally accepted the existing political and socio-economic system and only demanded that they be fully integrated in it, black consciousness in South Africa was directed toward radically revolutionizing it. Its aim was not integration into a multi-racial society but into a non-racial society.

Mofokeng (1990:177) articulates similar sentiments regarding the essential goal of Black Theology.

Black Theology, however, faces more serious methodological accusations than that of borrowing from foreign sources. Firstly Black Theology has not sufficiently utilized local resources – those which are much more specifically African in origin. Given that 'context' means more than politics

and economics, Black Theology's focus on the African situation in South Africa may be said to be too limited. It is clearly missing a cultural dimension to its goal of liberation. The gist of Motlhabi's article (1986) is that Black Theology can better reflect an African identity if, in addition to its usual preoccupation with socio-economic liberation, it also utilized typically African sources such as those found in AICs and African Traditional Religions. But since AICs 'have often been accused of being fundamentalistic and other-worldly, a characteristic not conducive to involvement in this-worldly struggle for change and justice' (:40), how can they contribute to Black Theology's objective? Motlhabi does not provide an answer to this dilemma. Motlhabi's approach therefore needs to be supplemented by the reconstruction of resistance and kairós that Robin Petersen (1995) has undertaken, utilizing different concepts of resistance as advanced by the Comaroffs and James Scott. Such a reconstruction would help Black Theology to broaden its concept of liberation to include cultural resistance rather than just political and economic activism. Such a broadening of concerns would have been admittedly difficult for Black Theology to consider before the advent of majority rule in 1994, as it might have been exploited by the apartheid system with its concept of separate development based on concepts of race and culture. There are signs that in more recent times Black Theology has shown a willingness to achieve greater African authenticity by embracing cultural concerns as well. However, such developments raise the question of why it would be necessary for Black Theology to continue existing as a separate entity rather than just merge into a broader African Theology (Motlhabi 1994).

The second serious methodological accusation is that Black Theology, while theoretically adopting the oppressed Africans as interlocutors has largely not been socially engaged with them. It has remained in an academic ivory tower. 'The experience of the poorest of the poor in the villages and in the factories is not yet reflected in academic African theology' (Frostin 1988:81). This is particularly true of Black Theology. Its academic theologising has failed to practically interact with popular theology. It is as if Black Theology is only in conversation with the educated élite, both amongst the blacks themselves and with western theologians. In this way it has suffered from a praxiological deficiency.

Fortunately, some black theologians have themselves recognised this deficiency. Goba (1986:68-69) complains about Black Theology being an urban phenomenon when the majority of people it is supposed to serve are in the rural areas. For him 'this points to one of its central weaknesses.' To

Mosala (1989a:2) Black Theology had, after fifteen years of existence, failed to emerge as a 'useful weapon in the hands of the oppressed and exploited black people' because being a 'monopoly of the educated' middle-class black elite it did not manage to 'develop organic links with the popular struggles of especially the black working-class people, the most exploited segment of the black community'.

In an unpublished paper Moore (Cited in Maluleke 1995:19) lists a number of similar complaints and/or admissions to the effect that Black Theology is not socially engaged with its interlocutors. Among those making such complaints or admissions are black theologians like Tlhagale, Pityana and Motlhabi. Moore's conclusion from his survey was that Black Theology had 'a sound head and needy feet ... [with] nothing in the middle connecting the two' (Maluleke1995:21). Reflecting on such 'voices from within' Maluleke (:25) himself makes a qualified admission of Black Theology's inadequate social engagement:

The problem with the choosing of interlocutors is that they only remain interlocutors for as long as the incumbent theology remains organic to them. The identification of black workers as the interlocutors is a significant beginning, but the organic connections between Black Theology and the workers have been tenuous if they existed at all. One is not thereby dismissing the efforts of numerous black theologians in this regard. Ultimately, the real issue is not whether a given theology is connected to a constituency of interlocutors or not; but *how* and *to what end* such theology is organic.

It is doubtful whether the prioritisation that Maluleke suggests here is possible or desirable. The *whether*, the *how* and the *why* are of equal importance. Whether or not a theology is organically linked to its interlocutors matters ultimately, because without such an organic link there is no dialogue; and without dialogue those people are *not* in effect the interlocutors for the theology. Similarly how the theology is linked, and why it is linked are important considerations. A theology may be organically connected to a constituency, but for exploitative reasons, or in ways that do not enhance its declared purposes.

The liberation hermeneutics of Gerald West (1999b) supplies at least one possible model to Maluleke's question of 'how and to what end a theology is organic'. Though being by his own admission a white, male, middle-class Christian, West made a second 'conversion' by which he became at least 'partially constituted' (:36f) by his conscious choice to be 'socially-engaged' with the poor and marginalized Africans whom he classifies as 'ordinary readers'. West calls for an

approach which goes beyond theory and conversation to an actual collaboration with the interlocutors.

The relationship between socially engaged biblical scholars and ordinary poor and marginalised 'readers' of the Bible lies at the heart of liberation hermeneutics. Liberation theologians in their various forms all emerge from the interface between socially committed biblical scholars and theologians and ordinary Christians from poor and marginalised communities... My particular interest is in the part played by biblical scholars who have responded to the call to go beyond conversation and to collaborate with poor and marginalised readers of the Bible.

(West 1999:12)

West's hermeneutical approach poses a major challenge to black theologians. While Mosala laments the fact many black theologians are too influenced by their class positions so that their theologising is of the ivory tower kind which is not in touch with the 'masses', West has gone out of his way to become 'socially engaged' through the contextual Bible Studies that he directs within the Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB). If black theologians are going to succeed in their claim to make oppressed Africans their interlocutors they would need the sort of conversion that Gerald West is talking about.

In short what Black Theology needs is not just a theory about praxis but an actual praxiological involvement in the life of those for whom the theology was developed. Only in that way can its quest for African identity be meaningfully realized.

Anthropocentric and theocentric dimensions of the Christian faith

Is there a dimension of *being human* that claims priority over other dimensions? This question brings to the fore the problem of the anthropocentric versus the theocentric dimensions of the Christian faith as they relate to Black Theology. Is anthropocentrism a danger, and if so has Black Theology in fact fallen into that danger? Our interest in this question is not just a theoretical one. It takes us to the central issue of the driving force behind the quest for identity in Black Theology.

We begin by noting that Black Theology is, at least in part, a reaction against privatised, 'spiritual' concerns in the Christian faith that have neglected or minimised the social dimensions of life. As already noted Black Theology came to the conviction that this kind of Christianity is in fact driven by the ideological interests of the dominant classes in order to pacify the oppressed with the

promise of a 'pie in the sky by and by'. In reaction against this spiritualised, privatised faith Black Theology, in line with other liberation theologies has emphasised what Maimela (1986:107f) describes as 'salvation as historical social fact'. He explains this concept by saying that 'the gift of salvation which Christ offers' includes 'the material conditions of the poor and the oppressed', in fact 'the whole person in his/her physical and spiritual dimensions'.

Accordingly liberation theologians accuse traditional theology of a false, deliberate reductionism for limiting the understanding of the gospel to the 'spiritual sphere', to the personal life, implying thereby that Christ's work only touches social structures tangentially and not at their basic root where social and racial classes struggle to free themselves from political bondage to which they have been subjected by the dominant groups. In succumbing to this reductionist temptation, traditional theology is accused not only of refusing to acknowledge that Christ's salvation involves the all-comprehensive work of liberating human beings from all social misery but also for portraying salvation as if it were 'a pie in the sky', an eschatological reality and a flight from this world of tears. In doing this, it offered salvation as if it were a tranquilising instrument, an instrument which oppressors were ready to use to cover up social injustices so that the poor would not rise up to challenge the prevailing oppressive material relationships.

It is obvious from the above quotation that Maimela is very careful to hold the anthropocentric and theocentric dimensions of the Christian faith in dialectic tension rather than prioritise one over the other. He recognises that 'human beings exist in the totality of their body, and spirit in their social relationship with others' (Maimela 1986:108). Therefore they must exist in relationship with God, fellow human beings and nature.

Maimela is not alone in this approach to the wholeness of life. Frostin (1988:142) defends liberation theologians in South Africa against the first world critics who 'question its strong commitment to humanist concerns such as social welfare or economic justice and fear that the spiritual and theological aspects are diluted, if not completely eradicated ... a horizontalism that tends to neglect or even exclude the transcendent, "vertical" dimension of Christian faith.' He argues that African Liberation Theology is a rejection of western dualism so that 'theocentrism is interwoven with a humanist commitment to combat oppression and injustice' (:193). This is so, in part, because 'political and economic oppression is interpreted not only as a "temporal" concern but also in theological terms, as idolatry' (:193). Some black theologians like Frank Chikane therefore rightly reject the distinction between the horizontal and the vertical when doing theology (Frostin 1988:194).

If black theologians all spoke with a united voice and practically demonstrated the holism referred to above, there would have been no problematical issue to talk about. Unfortunately, however, in their (justifiable) reaction against the spiritualisation and privatisation of the Christian faith some black theologians have fallen into the opposite danger of horizontalism – the tendency to exclude God from their consideration of reality. Mosala (1986b, 1989a) is an outstanding example of this tendency. As explained above, Mosala believes that human ideas, including the Christian faith itself, are a product of dialectic materialism – a result of material factors of production. The bottom line of Mosala's stance therefore is that people create gods in their own images, as a means of legitimising their material interests. In that case mission becomes an anthropocentric rather than theocentric activity – what humans do, and not what God really does (Musasiwa 1996:195).

This anthropocentrism or horizontalism, whenever it is theoretically or practically manifested, has negative consequences for the quest for African identity in Black Theology. Without a conviction that the God who really exists is on the side of the oppressed Africans, there would be no ultimate way to debunk the white superiority complex. The ideological war is then reduced to the survival of the fittest. In that case dominant forces are likely to have the upper hand.

The theocentric dimension is also needed in order to energise Black Theology itself. Ngubane (1986:82) is right when he says:

With a strong vertical dimension firmly embedded in Christ and a Christ-guided horizontal dimension, Black Theology will become less propositional, speculative and principally for the educated and the sophisticated; but will become, like that of the Independents, existential at the grass roots level of the ordinary people, and will embrace the totality of human experience (religious, cultural, social, political and economic).

African Christian identity

The issue of African Christian identity raises the issue of exclusiveness versus inclusiveness that Black Theology has struggled to reconcile. The 'African' part of the identity issue suggests the exclusion of 'non-Africans'. The 'Christian' part of the identity suggests the inclusion of all people who genuinely identify themselves as Christians. This in turn raises related issues such as the appropriateness of weapons used in the struggle and the issue of forgiveness.

In chapter three it was pointed out that 'identity' has to do with a societal group being 'conscious of the uniqueness of their kind' leading to a distinction between those who are *in* the group and those

who are *out*. Therefore while some people are included as participants or members others are excluded. It was further pointed out in that chapter that related concepts of power relations and self-interest easily lead to conflict between one societal group and another. We see these realities strongly manifested in our consideration of Black Theology and the interests it represents, in its encounter with traditional theology and the interests it represents.

We have already noted above that one of the characteristics of Black Theology is *struggle* raised to a theological category. This is, for example, represented by Mosala (1989a) asserting that the 'key category in this process [of biblical hermeneutics] is *struggle*, because struggle is the motive force of human societies' (:8). Furthermore he believes that 'the Bible is the product and record of class, race, gender, and cultural struggles, but also that it is the site and weapon of such struggles' (:11). Now if struggle is the motive force of human societies the question that arises is who the struggle waged by Black Theology is against? Clearly it is against the white power structure and its ideological legitimation in both 'church theology' and 'state theology'. The adoption of black consciousness as an ideological weapon by Black Theology has also meant *exclusion* of white Christians as partners in this theology. This exclusion was necessary in order to elevate the identity of the oppressed. There was, after all, the danger that white liberals would continue to paternalistically regard themselves as spokespersons for the oppressed when they themselves continued to enjoy the protection and privileges designed for them by the apartheid system.

However, in protecting the agency and identity of blacks, Black Theology has been accused of racism in reverse. By emphasising African identity, is Black Theology in danger of losing its *Christian* identity? Is it, for example, racism when Boesak (1978:125), in agreement with Cone, says that

blackness signifies oppression in any given society, and in order to know what God is doing in the world, one must know what black power is doing. God's revelation is black and all talk about liberation must be black talk. The liberation of the oppressed is a revolutionary activity; it means a radical break with the existing political and societal structures, a redefinition of black life along the lines of black power and self-determination.

If the accusation of racism in reverse could be sustained it would reduce Black Theology to political activism devoid of Christian content. That would put into question the very identity and existence of

Black Theology as a theological concern. However, Black Theology is able to defend its double identity as *black* and *Christian* in two ways.

Firstly, true Christian reconciliation and love between the races must be based on equality, justice and authentic existence. In agreement with Cone in this regard, Boesak (1978:127) insists that

blacks cannot be reconciled on the terms of the very people who oppressed them and robbed them of their human dignity. It is impossible to talk about reconciliation until 'full emancipation has become a reality for all black people' so that white people will address black people as black people. ... Reconciliation is not only freedom from oppression; it is also freedom for God. That means being willing to do what God is doing: liberating the oppressed.

There is therefore a strong sense in Black Theology of the inseparability of liberation and reconciliation. Reconciliation presupposes liberation just as liberation must lead to reconciliation. True love can only exist between equals. Until this equality based on justice is achieved 'withdrawal of black people from the direct and dominant influence of whites is necessary to gain the independence of thought and solidarity needed to counter the divide and rule policy of the oppressor' (Boesak 1978:135f). This need for solidarity and independence of thought required a postponement of integration with whites. 'For black people who are politically powerless, economically exploited, and culturally deprived, the equitable distribution of decision-making power is of far more importance than physical proximity to white people' (Boesak 1978:136).

That introduces us to the second defence by Black Theology against the charge of reverse racism. The waging of the struggle for black identity separately from white Christians was conceived of as a temporary necessity. The eventual goal for Black Theology, as it was for the Black Consciousness Movement, was a non-racial society.

There is overall credibility in the arguments that Black Theology used to counteract the charge of unChristian antagonism towards white Christians. Yet still there is too much one-sidedness in Black Theology's social analysis of conflict. We have noted Mosala's stance which is presupposed by other black theologians that 'struggle is the motive force of human societies'. Is 'conflict' an accurate depiction of the overall thrust of human societies? Is 'struggle' the only way to achieve African identity?

There can be no doubt that in this world where self(ish) interests are so easily buttressed by oppressive power structures and legitimised by dominant ideologies conflict and struggle will remain a reality. To that extent Black Theology is right. But reconstruction theology in more recent times is suggesting that a 'construction' model of theologising must supplement and in fact take priority over the conflictual model. Both Mugambi (1995) and Villa-Vicencio (1992) recognize that Africa is a shattered continent, a shattering that has affected the very identity of the African Christians. For Mugambi, for example, the end of the Cold War and the consequent ushering in of the New World Order has left Africa in what he calls an 'ideological wilderness' (Mugambi 1995:207). Yet for both Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio the proposed solution is to move away from the old reactive theologies of liberation and inculturation and engage the proactive metaphor of 'reconstruction' as clearly suggested by the very titles of their respective books.

Maluleke (1996b) cautions the theologians of reconstruction against an uncritical acceptance of the New World Order and against the assumption that the first generation theologians were not 'constructive'. For Maluleke (:43) this 'blindness to the new, constructive and various impulses within African liberation theologies causes many proposals for theologies of reconstruction to try too hard or too artificially to find "newer" premises and "newer" methods'. Furthermore Maluleke (:44) cautions against 'attempting too clean a break with the past theologies' especially since the realities to which liberation theologies were reacting are still there. Maluleke's comments are valid, and they amount to the truth that the work of rebuilding Africa's shattered identity requires the Nehemiah model of simultaneously struggling against forces of destruction yet also positively engaging in the actual work of construction.

Does Black Theology still have a meaningful agenda in the post-apartheid South Africa?

It may be wondered whether the end of apartheid in 1994 did not necessitate the end of Black Theology itself. On the surface one may assume that the end of apartheid heralded the full realization of African identity and therefore rendered Black Theology obsolete. Setiloane (1980:49), for example, had anticipated that 'as soon as the black versus white scenario is over, there will be no need for Black Theology any more'. The rationale behind Setiloane's anticipation was his assessment that Black Theology was basically a reaction to white racism, and would only exist while the white racism remained. Without this white racism 'Black Theology will go out of business' (:49). Furthermore, according to Setiloane (:50) Black Theology is both unable and

unwilling to 'verbalise the black man's experience of Divinity outside his contact with the white man'. Two answers to this critical issue are possible.

Firstly, in contextual theologies, a theological formulation is never meant to be regarded as universally and permanently valid. Tutu (1997:41) is entirely correct in saying:

Theology is a human activity possessing the limitations and the particularities of those who are theologizing. It can speak relevantly only when it speaks to a particular historically and spatio-temporally conditioned Christian community: and it must have the humility to accept the scandal of its particularity as well as its transcendence. Theology is not eternal nor can it ever hope to be perfect.

On this basis, it is theoretically possible that the Black Theology of liberation might fulfil its purpose and thereby render its continued existence unnecessary. Like any other theology it might one day need to 'accept the scandal of its particularity as well as its transcendence'. That does not *ipso facto* render it invalid during the time it is still necessary and functional. It is therefore appropriate that voices have arisen, even within Black Theology circles, questioning either the agenda or the need for the continued existence of this theology in the changed context. One of the key questions has to do with Black Theology's relationship with African Theology generally. Before 1994 the reluctance of Black Theology to adopt an inculturational framework was entirely in order as it could easily serve the oppressor's divide-and-rule strategy of Bantustans. For the post-apartheid era Motlhabi's challenge (1994) for an all-embracing African Theology which must nevertheless contextually respond to all challenges Africa faces (hence which must also have a liberation dimension) needs to be taken more seriously.

But secondly, the end of statutory racism does not automatically render Black Theology itself unnecessary. Unequal political power relations continue to exist on the basis of unequal economic power relations. On the international scene, such unequal relations take the form of neocolonialism as discussed in chapter two. The reality is that 'economic domination spells political domination. The rich have power over the lives of the poor and, similarly, the rich nations have power over the policies of those which are not rich' (Frostin 1988:40).

Within South Africa, the end of the racist apartheid machinery did not destroy the unequal power relations in the nation. Most of the land is still in the hands of the minority white population. Racism continues to be a reality. Maluleke (1995:12, note 14) is right in saying:

Many socio-political issues remain unattended by theology. Of course the issue of culture, being itself a socio-political issue, is one such issue. Other issues would include the question of church/theology and state as well as related issues such as land and democracy. It would be convenient if the 27th of April 1994 had 'resolved' all these issues for us - and there are many who go about issues as if that is so - but no, these issues remain unattended. Unless we confront them, they will forever haunt us.

Maluleke (1995:17) further validly argues that 'it is ... inaccurate to see in South African Black Theology an exclusive pre-occupation with whites, Whiteness and even Apartheid. ... The agenda of Black Theology, even its "internal controversies" have mostly been first and foremost, issues of blackness and the black experience.' It is on these grounds that Maluleke (1995:27) concludes his article by insisting that Black Theology still has 'a full agenda to take us beyond the year 2000. So let us get on with the job'.

On the basis of this discussion we can conclude by saying that Black Theology faces a crisis of self-legitimation. Maluleke is right in saying that there are still many unresolved issues which Black Theology can expend useful energy on for many years to come. The critical issue, however, is why Black Theology would want to continue tackling these issues *as* Black Theology. To revert to Motlhabi's argument referred to several times in this chapter, would it not be better for Black Theology to simply reinforce one comprehensive African Theology? Is the drying up of Black Theology publications⁵⁵ not a sign of this crisis of self-legitimation? Only time will tell; if Black Theology opts to continue living it will indeed be on the basis of 'a permanent crisis', to borrow the vivid subtitle of Maluleke's (1995) article.

We come now to African Women Theology, the other manifestation of Liberation Theology in Africa.

5.4 AFRICAN WOMEN THEOLOGY AND THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

In this section we begin by considering the nature, purpose and agenda of African Women Theology⁵⁶. We then proceed to look at how this theology addresses areas where the identity of the African woman has suffered the most, viz: patriarchy in the general culture and economic and

⁵⁵ One example of this is the *Journal of Black Theology* which has not been published for several years.

⁵⁶ As the term implies African Women Theology is the theology practised by African women. It must be distinguished, but not rigidly separated, from Feminist theology that addresses the context of white women theologians in the western world and Womanist theology which is practised by and addresses the needs of black women in the USA.

spiritual marginalization. We then end with a critical look at the ideological and programmatic weapons African Women Theology seeks to use to reshape the identity of the African woman. We will discuss these issues using as our main lenses representative writings of three African women theologians: Mercy Oduyoye (1995a), Bernadette Mosala (1986) and Musa Dube (1997, 2000). There is a growing output of African women theological literature but the chosen sample is representative enough for the purpose of demonstrating the quest for a reshaping of the identity of African women in general, and African Christian women in particular. In interacting with these African women theologians we will bring in various other voices in order to enrich the dialogue.

5.4.1 Nature, purpose and agenda of African Women Theology

African women theologians have begun to add a very significant voice to the quest for identity and to the consequent fight for liberation. Zhangazha (2001) defines Feminism in general as ‘the struggle for political and social space by women on behalf of other women’. The goal is liberation from oppressive sexism, manifested as both patriarchy and androcentrism, and the attainment of the full humanity of women (Johnson 1997:51f).

African Women Theology is that same struggle for the liberation of women carried out in the African theological arena. Like other liberation theologies, African Women Theology utilizes the experience of the oppressed (in this case African women) as its point of departure. It recognizes that the experience of women is not uniform throughout the world. The experience of sexism by women in the western world may be called the experience of the ‘privileged underprivileged’ – that is the experience of those who, though oppressed by reason of gender, still retain the privileges they enjoy by virtue of being ‘white’ and western. Strictly speaking ‘Feminist Theology’ applies to this group. This theology fits into the western liberal, Enlightenment tradition. Moreover, ‘[t]he failure of western feminists to recognize and to subvert imperialist cultural strategies of subjugation means that their advocacy for women’s liberation has firmly retained the right of the West to dominate and exploit non-western nations’ (Dube 2000:26). That is why ‘poor women ... of colonizing nations assume massive power once they enter colonized spaces’ (:36). The experience of sexism by black women can therefore be called the experience of the ‘underprivileged underprivileged’. Among North American black women, this experience has given rise to Womanist Theology. In African this experience has given rise to African Women Theology. Phiri (1997) rightly explains that the context of black women in North America differs from that of African women, and that therefore

the resultant theologies should be kept distinct. 'The context of Womanist Theology is a history of oppression from slavery and sexism in the Americas. Therefore African women theologians do not see themselves in Womanist Theology' (:46).

In talking about African women theology of liberation our main focus is on how sexism both oppresses and marginalizes women – hence negatively impacting on the identity of the African women. This marginalization is felt in all spheres – cultural, economic, political and religious. Oduyoye (1995a) laments the fact that the full personhood of African women (the daughters of Anowa) has been denied by the oppressive patriarchal cultures of Africa, even predating colonialism. The coming of colonialism and Christianity made the lot of the African women even worse because of imported western patriarchy often propagated as 'Christian' values. 'Women in the colonized spaces not only suffer the yoke of colonial oppression but also endure the burden of two patriarchal systems imposed on them' (Dube 2000:20). Over and above patriarchy there is pervasive androcentrism, with women valued only for their childbearing and their (often unrewarded) labour.

The graphic summary of the effects of worldwide sexism that Johnson gives (1997:53) represents what is even more acutely experienced by African women:

In sexism, with its patriarchal structures and androcentric thinking, women experience systematic oppression. They are excluded, marginalised, and rendered invisible in language and public life. They are subordinated in theory and practice to men, making tea while men make the important decisions. Stereotyped as mindless, emotional, weak, they are denied leadership roles. ... To make a dark picture even bleaker, women are bodily and sexually exploited, used, battered, and raped. The fact is, men do this to women in a way that women do not do to men. Sexism is pervasive on a global scale.

With this picture in mind the agenda of African Women Theology is to find a new biblical and theological hermeneutic that will bring about the full humanity of women in equality with men. Oduyoye (1995:3f) summarises the agenda by saying 'All limitations to the fullness of life envisaged in the Christ event ought to be completely uprooted. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.' Along the same lines another African woman theologian says: 'I have no doubt in my mind that God abhors the subjugation of one person by another. It does not matter who it is. I am sure God is hurt when a German suppresses a Jew, when an English man suppresses an African, when a Canadian or American suppresses a Red Indian (Mosala 1986:131f).

This is therefore an agenda which, unlike radical feminism, does not reject the whole Christian tradition as being hopelessly irredeemable, but seeks liberation within that Christian tradition (Johnson 1997:50). At the same time it subjects the Bible, Christian tradition and African culture to a radical critique, exposing their oppressive elements and mobilising women to become agents of their own liberation.

Oduyoye (1995a) points out that the 'daughters of Anowa' (=women of Africa) have been silenced for too long (:10) and they are now demanding a hearing. They are frustrated and angry.

When I look at the mold in which religion has cast women, the psychological binds of socio-economic realities that hold us in place, our political powerlessness, and the daily diminution of our domestic influence by western-type patriarchal norms, I call what I see injustice. No other word fits. I do not wish to be pushed to the point where I must bare my breasts⁵⁷, throw off my clothes⁵⁸, or beat pots and pans in the streets⁵⁹, but as an African woman I do want to be given a hearing.

(Oduyoye 1995a:157)

We now seek to give the 'daughters of Anowa' the hearing they are demanding in terms of their experience of oppression in the fields of general culture, economics and the church.

5.4.2 African Women Theology and the African patriarchal culture

According to Oduyoye, the reality of an oppressive culture which African men generally want to deny, is strongly felt by the women:

In Africa, the very idea of a 'free woman' conjures up negative images. We have been brought up to believe that a woman should always have a suzerain, that she should be 'owned' by a man, be he father, uncle, or husband. A 'free woman' spells disaster... A single woman who manages her affairs successfully without a man is an affront to patriarchy and a direct challenge to the so-called masculinity of men who want to 'possess' her.

(Oduyoye 1995a:4)

Central to the cultural oppression of women is the African conception of family life. Oduyoye (1995a:72) sees the valorization of women's childbearing and domestic roles as a trap.

⁵⁷ Traditional sign of disgust which causes a curse to fall on a child.

⁵⁸ A reference to women's protest march in Nigeria in 1929

⁵⁹ A reference to women's protests in Ghana against introducing legal categories of 'registered' and 'unregistered' wives.

The woman who is a mother is put on a pedestal and showered with verbal adoration and deference... Yet, such an attitude can be a first step toward marginalization. Since a woman has no direct word in the public sphere, she is often ignored as a nonentity and forgotten. Political decisions are made behind her back, because she is busy keeping the lineage alive, both biologically and domestically.

The stereotyping and shaping of roles to promote patriarchy is then underpinned by androcentric ideas and knowledge production systems. Myths, folktales, and proverbs are sources of cultural norms that shape 'acceptable' social roles and practices (Oduyoye 1995a:4). For example through folktales 'women see and hear themselves as they are actually regarded in their culture' (Oduyoye 1995a:40). Their highest value is in child-bearing and child-minding and their most important work is house keeping. As discussed in chapter one, this is an example of what the Comaroffs (1991) refer to as the production of a hegemonic order of existence where domination of one group by another can be 'taken for granted'. The fact that Oduyoye and others are raising this to a level of awareness and discourse also slides the issue into an ideological battleground.

Oduyoye (1995a) also sees folktalk as carrying powerful but negative stereotyping power. 'Women, the proverbs say, cannot keep secrets and they are fickle, restless, and, thus, prone to unfaithfulness... The allusion, of course, is that women prefer to seek out wealthy men' (:59). All this constitutes what Oduyoye calls 'gendered socialization' a fact which already implies that the 'characteristics and roles of women as experienced in society are not necessarily related to their biological nature; rather, they are the dictates of society, and women learn to live with them.'(:62)

Oduyoye goes to great length in questioning other oppressive and dehumanising facts of culture, particularly in the area of marriage and family life. She sees the *lobola* (*aseda*)⁶⁰ as 'a transaction between men over a woman' and says that 'in the end, the marriage ceremony symbolizes the transfer of the control of a woman's sexuality from her father or maternal uncle to her husband' (Oduyoye 1995a:136f). Equally dehumanising is the custom of 'substituting another family member for a wife who has died. ... It is as if wives were cars that were being traded in for new models' (Oduyoye 1995a:137). Equally belittling to widows is the fact that they are 'inherited by the heir of the deceased husband as part of his estate' (:137).

Zhangazha (2001) observed that

⁶⁰ These are different words for bride price payable by a man to (mostly) the father of his bride.

The family disempowers a lot of women. It re-asserts the dominance of the male psyche over and above that of the woman in stating that the man is the head of the house and the mother is the depository of the family problems and the depository of the father's manhood. ... Moreover, the virgin Mary is depicted too often as the perfect epitome of motherhood yet there is still very little known about her life as a woman save for the fact that she was chosen by a male God to give birth to a male son and not even have any say in his destiny.

(Zimbabwe *Daily News* 14 August 2001)

How then should Christian women respond to this patriarchal structure and androcentric thinking? Oduyoye calls on the 'daughters of Anowa' to be critical even of what may have been long established cultural norms. So, for example, she says (Oduyoye 1995a:35):

For me, African myths are ideological constructions of a by-gone age that are used to validate and reinforce societal relations. For this reason, each time I hear 'in our culture' or 'the elders say' I cannot help asking, for whose benefit? Some person or group or structure must be reaping ease and plenty from whatever follows. So, if that harvest seems to be at my expense, then I shall require the proceedings to stop until I am convinced that there is good reason for me to die that others might live.

It is not enough, however, to just question the old. New life giving tales and myths that affirm mutuality and equality must be created to replace those that deny these values. As a simple example of this Oduyoye (:58) quotes a positive Yoruba proverb that relieves men of the 'burden of chauvinism': 'If a man sees a snake and a woman kills it, the desirable result is that the snake has not escaped'. Instead of reinforcing traditional roles this proverb is saying that there is no reason why women should not do what men do, and receive their due credit!

5.4.3 African Women Theology and the economic marginalization of women

The oppression of women that forms part of the general culture is manifested in their economic marginalization. Oduyoye (1995a) refers to this as 'feminization of poverty' (:101 and passim). This is evidenced by the various 'property and inheritance regulations [which] seem to become more and more intent on marginalizing women except the few who can "go to court."' The result is that a widow becomes disinherited, 'unable to have saved or acquired property because she was busy being a traditional wife spending on spouse, children, and extended family' (Oduyoye 1995a:152).

What Johnson (1997:53) says about the worldwide economic marginalization of women is even more pronounced in Africa:

Women are denied economic, legal, and educational rights, paid less money for the same work, and in many places, cannot buy land, etc. without the signature of a man. As UN statistics show, while forming one-half of the world's population, women do three-fourths of the world's work, receive one-tenth of the world's salary, and own one-hundredth of the world's land. Over three-fourths of starving people are women and their dependent children.

To complicate matters the 'Yoruba and Asante communities have no room for the single woman who is responsible for the creation and disbursement of her own wealth as well as the liquidation of her own debts and other liabilities. A woman is not expected to be autonomous' (Oduyoye 1995a:136). This goes back to what was discussed above concerning the value placed on women being child-minders and housewives rather than independent workers.

In these and other ways, women in Africa are being economically marginalized and African women theologians are rising up to protest this abuse of their personhood.

5.4.4 African Women Theology and male domination of women in and through the church

African women theologians point out the role of Christianity in reinforcing the already existing patriarchal structures and andocentric tendencies in Africa. As Oduyoye (1995:9) says such western Christianity

does little to challenge sexism, whether in church or in society. I believe that the experience of women in the church in Africa contradicts the Christian claim to promote the worth (equal value) of every person. Rather, it shows how Christianity reinforces the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission and leads to the depersonalization of women.'

Oduyoye (1995: 173) bitingly charges that 'As with class and race, on issues of gender discrimination, the church seems to align itself with forces that question the true humanity of "the other" and, at times, seems to actually find ways of justifying the oppression or marginalisation of "the other."' According to Mosala (1986:130) Jacquelyn Grant's phrase 'the invisibility of black Women in Black Theology' can be equally applied to the African church as a whole.

Much evidence is given on the marginalization of women in the church. On the organisational level women are generally denied leadership roles. Mosala (1986) talks of men playing dominant roles. Most Christian traditions have barred women from ordained ministry. She then says:

This subordination, while attributed to women's physiological role in procreation, extends to an inferiority of mind and soul as well. Women are categorized as less capable than men of moral self-control and reason. They can play only a passive role in the giving and receiving of ministry. They should keep silent.

(Mosala 1986:130f)

Oduyoye (1995a:130, 176-178, 192-195) adds the fact that women's participation in church is being curtailed by the application of Levitical laws whereby impurity (e.g. impurity as a result of menstruation and childbirth) is mainly attributed to women. An uncritical acceptance of these ritual laws must be challenged. After all child-birth and menstruation which are behind women's marginalization are in fact the life-giving experiences.

The marginalization of women, however, is not just an organisational reality. African women theologians point out the ideological legitimization of such marginalization beginning with the visualisation of God as male. Oduyoye, for example, argues that the gendered understanding of God is a Christian (western) concept which contradicts the non-gendered traditional view of God. Yet this gendered view of God has been co-opted by males to serve their androcentric interests (Oduyoye 1995a:178-180). Part of the effect of this is that

[h]ierarchical and oppressive terms like Omnipresent, Omniscient, Ruler, or All Mighty translate into race relations as racism and into gender relations as sexism. Being non-white or non-male imposes a penalty simply for not being born into the group that defines true humanity. Being 'non-anything' excludes a person from being fully human.

(Oduyoye 1995a:180)

That is why for Oduyoye the church must be called to account. She believes (Oduyoye 1995a:181) the church already has a valid theological basis for the equality of sexes before God:

Either women and men are of equal value before God, both created in the image of the one God, or else we declare Genesis 1:26 a lie. If we stand with the text, then the male alone cannot stand for God if the female cannot also do so. We cannot use scripture to legitimize the non-inclusion of femaleness in the norm of humanness. To be authentic, Christian theology must promote the interdependence of distinctive being and stand by the principles of inclusiveness and interdependence.

It is on the basis of this theology that '[t]he African church needs to empower women not only to speak for themselves and manage their "women's affairs", but to be fully present in decisions and

operations that affect the whole church, including the forming of its theology' (Oduyoye 1995a:181).

African women theologians are assisting us to see how knowledge production systems, the beliefs people hold and the symbols they use have an impact on behaviour. The example of how God is visualised and theologically constructed, for example, has had a negative impact in terms of the marginalization of women in church structures and functions. If images of God that suggest masculine power and domination are valorized over other possible images the result is the marginalization of women that is so common in many African churches. Searching for, and highlighting other images of God is therefore rightly part of the agenda of African Women Theology as well as other theologies that seek to elevate the status of women in church. This brings us to the critical issues facing African Women Theology.

5.4.5 Theological and programmatic reshaping of the identity of the African woman – some critical issues

Looking at the way African women theologians have sought to refashion a more liberated and life-giving identity for themselves, and for the benefit of the wider African society, we see three weapons which they have invoked and continue to invoke for the task. These are a critique of androcentric ideology from a theological point of view, biblical hermeneutics and mobilisation for praxis. We now proceed to take a critical look at each of these.

Theological critique of androcentric ideology

African women theologians have realised that behind oppressive patriarchal structures lies an androcentric ideology that privileges maleness as a standard of humanity. The battle for achieving the full humanity of women therefore has to be fought at an ideological level. This has led the theologians to target all sacred cows, including culture, the Bible and the church. This has required a lot of courage. Maluleke (1996b:48-48) salutes this courage which is a departure from the previous reticence in criticising culture and the Christian tradition. Thus Oduyoye's *Daughters of Anowa*, for example, is hailed as 'one of the most radical statements of a peculiarly African womanist agenda' (:48).

It is a 'radical' statement in the sense that it goes to the roots of ideological legitimation of patriarchy. We have already seen how African women theologians have gone to the extent of

questioning the male image of God which by extension lends legitimacy to male domination. We have pointed out above how for Oduyoye (1995) the gendered understanding of God is a Christian (western) concept which contradicts the non-gendered traditional view of God. She also questions the very use of the Bible in ways that are oppressive to women. ‘Throughout Africa, the Bible has been and continues to be absolutised: it is one of our oracles that we consult for instant solutions’ (1995:174). Similarly Mosala (1986:130) questions the traditional assumption that what is in the Bible is the culture-free Word of God. She argues that Scripture is a ‘codified collective human experience’ and that most Scriptural texts are in fact ‘based on male experience rather than on universal human experience’.

The uncovering of the male bias of the Bible is potentially a very liberating weapon for women. The reason is that without an awareness of this ideological bias the Bible can be (ab)used for the oppression of women. Ministry opportunities will be denied them and they will be told to remain silent ‘because that’s what the Bible says’ – and of course the Word of God cannot be questioned (cf Maluleke 1996a:12). Having discovered the (ab)usable nature of the Bible African women theologians proceed to look for new liberative theological keys. Oduyoye (1995:181), for example, emphasises the creation of both male and female equally in the image of God and seeks to use it as a key to override other oppressive texts.

Through the searching light of African women theology androcentric thoughts in the African culture are also revealed and counteractive measures put in place. For Oduyoye (1995:15), for example,

[a]t the core of the culture is an ideology that has absolute priority: the corporate personality of the family, clan, or nation is always chosen over the personhood of the individual, especially when that individual is a woman... I maintain that the communal ideology becomes counter-productive and, in the end, detrimental to the very welfare of the community it seeks to engender.

Having noticed these oppressive ideologies, the women are then encouraged to be conscious about the role of ‘self-affirming language’ (Oduyoye 1995a:202). ‘The task of evolving a new language, positive myths, and dynamic icons that will project the humanity of women as partners in creation and in community is gigantic and exciting’ (:202f). Mosala (1986: 130) takes this process further by saying:

The uniqueness of African Women Theology lies rather in its use of women's experience. The use of women's experience in African Women Theology explodes as a critical force — exposing classical theology — including its codified traditions, based on male experience rather than on universal human experience. African Women Theology makes the sociology of theological knowledge visible, no longer hidden behind mystifications of objectified divine and universal authority.

The critique of ideology therefore adds up to the use of women's experience as a theological key for the fashioning of a new theology of feminine wholeness which rejects oppression. Oduyoye's use of the *imago Dei* as a hermeneutical principle against which to read other biblical texts is commendable. However, Oduyoye does not adequately develop this key. This opens her to the charge of arbitrary selectiveness of Scripture (cf Mosala 1989a). On what basis should some parts of the Bible be accepted as Word of God and others rejected as products of androcentrism and patriarchy? Oduyoye and Mosala do not address this crucial question. The possibility exists therefore that without an adequate and comprehensive hermeneutic the Bible can still be abused in the interest of male domination. This is where Musa's Dube's contribution to hermeneutics can potentially fill the gap. To this we now turn.

Hermeneutics

While Oduyoye contributes her passionate mobilization of women to the struggle for women's liberation, Dube (1997, 2000) supplies a complementary feminist approach whose essence, as the titles of her article and her book suggest, is the 'postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible'. This approach supplies the hermeneutical depth that is lacking in Oduyoye (1995a) and Mosala (1986) whose approaches are more broadly theological. Dube helps to confirm the stance taken by West (1999) and Mosala (1989a) that without engaging in serious hermeneutics the Bible, which remains a very significant text in Africa, will continue to be used by dominant forces in very oppressive ways, including the destruction of others' identity on account of race, class or gender. While Oduyoye is convinced that the *imago Dei* principle should be liberative for women others can counteract that by pointing to a hierarchical God of law and order who, according to some parts of the Bible, puts men in authority over women and commands women to be silent in church.⁶¹

⁶¹ Some writings attributed to Paul are particularly noteworthy in this regard. See for example 1 Corinthians 14:34-36; 1 Timothy 2:11-14. According to these passages women may not lead men or teach them. Rather, they are to learn from men in quiet submission.

To counteract oppressive uses of Scripture Dube advocates a comprehensive biblical 'decolonising' hermeneutic which uses a postcolonial critical framework which can simultaneously address the issue of women's liberation. In summary:

Decolonizing feminist biblical practices describes the commitment and the methods of reading the Bible that resist both patriarchal and imperial Oppression in order to cultivate a space of liberating interdependence between nations, genders, races, ethnicities, the environment, and development.

(Dube 2000:111)

The decolonising part of the hermeneutic consists of two objectives (1997:22). The first is that of exposing 'the imperialist construction embedded in [biblical] narrative' with the second, and more important, being liberation which makes it possible to 'encounter and to dialogue with the different Other on a level of different and equal subjects' (1997:22). But how does Dube's decolonising hermeneutic achieve these objectives? Three hermeneutical processes are discernible in her article. They are processes that concentrate mainly on reading 'in front of the text' (1997:13 cf West 1995:154-162). This is an approach that foregrounds the context of the 'reader-actor' and is based on the conviction that 'the biblical story is an unfinished story: it invites its own continuation in history; it resists the covers of our Bibles and writes itself on the pages of the earth. On these grounds, it is legitimate to hold that various biblical reader-actors from different moments in history, should illumine the meaning and implications of the text for us' (:12). The approach is therefore not frozen into the context of production of the text. Rather it emphasizes 'the continuing character of the story' (:13). This reading in front of the text method then generates the following three processes:

The first process is to establish an ideological standpoint based on the situation of the 'reader-actor'. She adopts the stance of other feminist readers which insists on 'women's experience as a valid interpretive framework' (1997:13). Therefore she foregrounds her context as a 'black Motswana woman from the region of Southern Africa, a student of religion, a survivor of colonialism, who lives in *aluta continua* (a continuous struggle) against neo-colonialism'. (:14). It is a context of experiencing double oppression: the oppression of imperialism/colonialism and the oppression arising from patriarchy within her own culture. 'As the national patriarchal system resists the intrusion of a foreign power, the call for protection of tradition intensifies gender constructions'

(:19). It is out of this experience that Dube comes up with a clearly foregrounded ideology of liberation that seeks to counteract the 'ideology of subjugation' (:19) both within colonialism and within traditional patriarchy. That is why her biblical analysis is 'both feminist and postcolonial' (:14).

The second process is to 'read for decolonisation' utilising a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' (1997:18). The Bible, according to Dube (:15f) should be seen as belonging to 'literary constructions of colonising texts' which seek to 'justify imperialism', that is 'texts designed to take possession of the minds and lands of those who are different'. Therefore the way different people are characterised, differences in geographical areas and the role of travellers (:16f) should all be suspected of being designed to legitimate the subjugation of one group by another. She asserts that the 'imperialist setting of the New Testament literature' makes it 'imperative for feminist inclusive readings to be more suspicious of imperialism legitimation' (:18). The missionary's favourite text, Matthew 28:18-20, is not spared from the hermeneutic of suspicion either. To Dube (:19) this text is 'consistent with the imperial ideology of disavowing boundaries and claiming cultural authority over foreign people and lands', which explains 'why Christian missions ... have functioned compatibly with imperialist agendas of their countries'.

Dube also suspects the collusion of the imperialist and the sexist agendas in biblical texts. She says, for example, 'the gendered construction of imperialist narratives is evident in the featuring of female characters of questionable morality and status in stories representing the penetration of other lands' (1997:19). As examples she quotes Rahab the prostitute in the Old Testament and the Samaritan and Canaanite women in the gospels of John and Matthew. This accords well with the 'gendered perspective' of other colonising texts whereby 'colonized lands are to be "entered", "penetrated," and subjugated' (:17 cf 2000:76-80). Commenting on how imperialist and sexist agendas in colonising texts result in a negative construction of the identity of the colonized Dube (2000:77) has this to say:

As a script about the domestication of the promised land, the characterization of Rahab is loaded with colonizing ideologies. First, as a representative of her land, she is characterized as a prostitute. It denotes her inadequacy, her wildness, and her need to be tamed by those with superior morals, those who must save her. Second, Rahab's deeds and words reflect colonizing ideologies of subjugation. She wants her life and those of her family to be safe, but she does not believe her safety is in the hands of her people.

Such and many more examples show the extent to which Dube is prepared to take the hermeneutic of suspicion. She takes the Exodus-Joshua story as an ‘imperialising rhetoric’ which ‘should be recognized as a literary type-scene of land possession in the rhetoric of God, gold, glory, and gender’ (2000:76). Being an imperialising literary device means that the story should not be assumed to have actual historical validity. Even the ‘actions’ of God in the story only serve as a literary justification of imperialism in the guise of the ‘promised land’. ‘The Exodus anti-conquest⁶² ideology maintains its innocence by appealing to the highest, unquestionable authority of God. If God gives the land, then, regardless of whether it is inhabited, the whole act is just’ (2000:64).

The third process is to create a new ‘postcolonial open space of women of the world as equal subjects’ (1997:23). With biblical texts relativized through the hermeneutic of suspicion as outlined above, space is opened for a ‘liberating interdependence between races, genders, cultures, and nations’ (:21). In this process ‘two different and equal subjects meet, and their word to each other is, “What treasures do you have to share?”. . . . Such an invitation does not encounter the Other as a blank slate to be filled’ (:21). This process encourages ‘solidarity in multiplicity’ – a situation of give-and-take whereby one group and its stories does not dominate the other group and its stories (:22).

Dube’s book (2000) is an expansion of the ideas in the article (1997) as summarized above.

Looking at the above analysis of Dube’s hermeneutical approach three observations are necessary. Firstly, Dube’s approach is very affirming of both indigenous and female identities. It is an approach that clearly rejects dominant impositions, whether they be from the metropolis or from indigenous patriarchy. By critically scrutinising colonising texts, including texts contained in the Bible, she relativizes those texts in order to create a new space in which the equality of peoples may be affirmed. This hermeneutical approach is a positive advance on a theological stance which does not provide a way for a liberative reading of the whole Bible. This is the danger that Oduyoye’s approach poses. It picks a liberative motif from the Bible (e.g. *imago Dei*) but does not have a way of relativizing other dominant motifs which may equally be quoted as the ‘Word of God’.

⁶² According to Dube (2000:60) ‘anti-conquest ideology describes the literary strategies that allow colonizers to claim foreign lands while securing their innocence. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this ideology was expressed in the Anglo-Saxon moral claim of the “duty to the native,” which sugar-coated the violence of colonialism’.

The second observation is that unfortunately Dube's approach suffers from the same shortcomings that we saw in Mosala's (1986a, 1989a) theology. The extent of the suspicion is such that all biblical texts are said to be human constructions for legitimating the domination of one group by another. There is no acknowledgement of God's voice in any biblical texts. She makes the rather strong assertion that 'the Bible is a western book and the West is an imperial center' (2000:38). Ultimately this becomes self-defeating because if it is not God who is speaking through the biblical texts then the texts themselves become devoid of ultimate authority. The Bible becomes nothing but an ideological battleground where one human ideology clashes with another with nothing to ultimately legitimate one view over another. If the Bible is nothing but an instrument of legitimating western imperialism, as Musa Dube strongly implies, then there may be no way of turning the same book into an instrument of liberation for colonized peoples. A way forward is therefore to combine Oduyoye's theological approach with Dube's hermeneutical one. An acknowledgement that the God who is really there is on the side of the poor and the oppressed and is at work in human history to effect their liberation is necessary. That motif can then become the guiding principle in the reading of all biblical texts, with the ones which legitimate oppression being relativised as representing the intrusion of human desires. After all the Bible can legitimately be regarded as both the Word of God and the words of humans.

The third observation is that Dube has probably carried her 'suspicions' too far. She equates mission texts in the Bible with other imperial texts (2000:3-20). She says, for example, that the Bible will 'always be linked to and remembered for its role in facilitating European imperialism (:3), and that 'the western colonialist construction of the African subject and the participation of western Bible readers and their institutions in colonizing structures reflect an interpretation of their master charter, the New Testament' (:10). She finds the evidence of the connection between biblical texts and western imperialism to be 'overwhelming' (:15). Yet she fails to make the necessary distinction between the crossing of geographical boundaries by imperial powers and the crossing of those boundaries by those from the periphery. The 'Great Commission' was not originally given to the Roman metropolis for the extension of the Roman empire. Contrary to Dube's claim (2000:137) that the Great Commission is couched in 'absolute terms' and that it makes the disciples too powerful in comparison to those to whom they were sent, it was given to Galileans who Jewish authorities recognised to be 'unlearned' (Acts 4:13). They were to carry out their mission as the persecuted ones, not as powerful imperialists who would seek to impose themselves on others. The

great missionary, Paul, resisted the ideas of those in the early church who wished to turn gentiles into Jews before they could be considered Christians. This is what led to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. However, utilising the ‘in front of the text’ method of reading, we should also acknowledge that Dube is right in saying that regardless of the original context it is the way the Bible has been used in colonial times, and the way it continues to be used today that makes it a continuing story. From this angle it can *become* a colonising text even if it might not have been that originally. Therefore it is entirely appropriate and necessary that a way of reading the Bible be found ‘in which imperialistic strategies are confronted, exposed, and arrested by postcolonial subjects’ (Dube 2000:23).

Praxis

The third critical consideration in looking at African Women Theology of liberation in Africa is the question of praxis. Here feminism shares the same conviction with other types of Liberation Theology in insisting on *doing theology* as opposed to a concentration on abstract theologising. It is the contextual nature of such theologies that necessitates praxis. Perhaps African Women Theology may be more praxis orientated than Black Theology.

These theologians insist on women being agents of their own liberation. For Oduyoye (1995:88) ‘instead of simply talking against sexism, African women are *acting* against it. Although lacking treatises or theories criticising their received teaching on African womanhood, African women make relentless efforts to recall, practice, and enhance the dignity found in their traditions’. Furthermore, ‘We want to decide for ourselves, for our day and situation, what constitutes a liberating and liberative life’ (:5) Mosala (1986:132) makes a similar point:

Liberation does not fall into one’s lap. It must be claimed and protected. You cannot give me my liberty and I cannot give you yours. Unless we are willing to exercise our right to claim power and to do something about bringing about the changes we believe are necessary we will remain the invisible creatures who are always on the outside looking in.

‘The lesson is very clear for black women: the liberation of black women is the responsibility of black women. Neither the church, nor black male theologians, nor white women can be expected to be sensitive to the human needs of black women (Mosala:129).

Dube's hermeneutics also arises out of women thinking and acting for themselves. Liberation from oppressive traditions, according to these theologians, is therefore not a matter of merely articulating the correct theological ideas but of actual praxis.

Oduyoye in particular, advocates for actual women's programmes that would effect their liberation. These programmes must include contextual reading of the Bible in order to counteract the negative ways the Bible has been interpreted contrary to women's emancipation. Women's experience is a legitimate starting point for such reading (Oduyoye 1995a:191). They must demand to be part of the overall theological processes in the church and to participate in church programmes 'according to our God-given talents rather than according to the dictates of men' (Oduyoye 1995a:189). Outside the church women must be involved in the actual law-making process, because their absence from such processes will easily lead to laws being passed that are detrimental to their interests. Indeed women must seek to gain political power which 'requires the voices of all women: mothers, widows, divorced women, wives, single women. The framework of patriarchy is constructed on many pillars. Each requires scrutiny, but patriarchy itself is defective and must be torn down' (Oduyoye 1995a:153). The rationale for such a programmatic approach is that 'never in history has a privileged group decided of its own accord to give up power and prestige in order to bring about collegiality. If we stand by proverbs that imply that slaves cannot free themselves, then we might as well forget all visions of full participation' (Oduyoye 1995a:73f).

Should men who seek to liberate women be allowed to join the women in their fight for liberation? This is a difficult question to which the theologians we have considered do not supply an answer. However, the answer can be suggested by analogy to Black Theology and black consciousness. We have already noted a safeguarding of space against the invasion of well-meaning but privileged white liberals who can only serve to rob blacks of their own initiative in the process of liberation. Since liberation theologies emphasise experience as a starting point for theology whites had to be excluded from black consciousness programmes as they did not share the same experience of oppression. The same could be said of men who cannot share the experience of patriarchy and androcentrism as the women do.

This thought finds support in a recent Zimbabwe *Daily News* editorial (26th February, 2001) entitled 'Women should focus on feminism not gender'. It defines gender in the political sense to

mean that ‘men and women ought to come together and work toward the equality of the sexes in society.’ Feminism by contrast deals ‘with separate solutions from women for their own struggle.’ It then goes on to argue that through a gendered approach women will always remain dominated by men, even those who ‘accord themselves a position of benevolence towards women’. Because of their powerful influence men even control the ‘knowledge production systems.’ This gives men

undaunted influence over definitive concepts of who women are and can be. In terms of society’s fundamentals, they have defined, much to the disadvantage of women what democracy, God, love, marriage, wives, daughters must mean if they are to be progressive. They have even gone as far as assisting women in defining who they are and ought to be if they are to be respectable women in society.

Therefore feminists should define and control the agenda if they wish to attain true liberation from male dominance. To revert to the analogy of Black Theology, the hope should remain that once equality is achieved and the playing field is level men and women can then work together as equals. However, given the ingrained nature of patriarchy and androcentrism, will such a day ever come?

5.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have looked at Liberation Theology in general, and at two of its particular manifestations in Africa – Black Theology and African Women Theology. These theologies, in spite of their seemingly disparate agendas, are various manifestations of the quest for identity which arises out of experiences of oppression. For Black Theology the quest for identity arose out of the racially based political and economic oppression of apartheid. For African Women Theology the quest for identity arose out of sexist oppression manifested in androcentric thinking and patriarchal structures. Oppression has the effect of robbing and destroying that which essentially belongs to the oppressed with consequent psychological and other forms of devastation. We have seen how, for example, the loss of land meant the loss of autonomy as people then had to rely on apartheid capitalism as migrant workers. Sexist oppression created in women the experience of inferiority – the loss of dignity and respect which is intrinsically theirs. From this starting point several observations about the quest for identity in the various liberation theologies we have examined become possible.

Firstly, the quest for identity is fundamentally a search for restoration of what essentially belongs to the oppressed. It is a process of claiming something as one’s own. It is also a process of moving

from dependence to autonomy. This process of autonomisation then creates a common thread linking the socio-political processes in Africa and the theological process.

Liberation Theology in general is about restoring power, governance and the economy to the people to whom these realities essentially belong. When Liberation Theology is expressed as Black Theology we have the added dimension of putting a positive value on self, enabling the black people of South Africa to interpret themselves rather than being interpreted by someone else. Thus while oppressors chose to put a negative value on blackness, Black Theology claimed a positive value for that very blackness (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992:27).

Similarly African Women Theology is about women in Africa determining their own future and having their dignity fully recognised both by themselves and the wider society. In short, claiming 'what belongs to me' is the essence of the quest for identity.

If claiming 'what is mine' is the crucial element in the quest for identity it follows that the usual criticism that these theologies have borrowed 'foreign' perspectives is generally misplaced. African Women Theology may have been inspired by the feminist movement which started in the West. Black Theology may have been similarly inspired by the black American Civil Rights Movement and the Latin American Liberation Theology. We have similarly seen their utilization of Marxist tools of social analysis. These borrowings do not necessarily render the quest for African identity illegitimate. The crucial question is whether what is 'borrowed' has become truly 'ours'. Maluleke (1995:24f) makes a valid point when he says, 'In and of itself ... borrowing [of non-African ideological frameworks] is innocuous, necessary and perhaps unavoidable, unless one borrows "oppressive tools"'. Christianity itself did not originate from Africa. Yet because of its indigenization it has in many circles become an African religion (Bediako 1995).

Secondly, liberation is seen as needing both psychological and structural dimensions. While the liberation theologies we have considered have focussed on advocating for the destruction of the structures of oppression they have not neglected the psychological side. With reference to Black Theology Goba (1988:34), for example, calls on black people to throw off both psychological and structural chains that 'hold us in self-denying conformity and bondage to others'. Blacks must then affirm their humanity and their uniqueness

This same double focus on the structures and the psychology of liberation pervades African Women Theology. We noticed, for example, the way Oduyoye called for the creation of new images, metaphors and language that affirm the full humanity of women, and their equality with men. For Nasimiyu-Wasike (2000:192), 'The basic question that African women need to ask is whether their consciousness has been so attacked and co-opted by the dominant male consciousness that they are robbed of the courage and the ability to think an alternative thought as women'. That is the question, indeed the challenge, that other liberation theologies in Africa pose to all the oppressed peoples of the continent.

This comprehensive focus on liberation must be reckoned as a very important strategy in the quest for identity. It springs from a recognition that structural freedom without psychological freedom, and vice versa, cannot fully build up a positive identity among the oppressed. 'Political independence alone does not bring self-confidence to a people to whom human dignity and self-respect have been denied for almost a century. More important is psychological independence and it takes a cultural evolution or revolution to make a people psychologically free' (Magesa 1978:507).

Our third observation has to do with the ambiguous role played by Christianity in general and the Bible in particular in the process of liberation. Liberation theologians in Africa have been aware of the massive Christianization of the continent South of the Sahara. They have been aware of how the Bible has become a very significant book on the continent. Yet they have also been aware of how the Bible has been (ab)used for the subjugation of the blacks and the women. The answer of liberation theologians therefore was not to run away from Christianity and the Bible but to use the same as sites of struggle. This is well expressed by Maluleke (1996a:14) when he says that because the Bible continues to be a 'haven of the black masses' we cannot run away from the need to find tools to deal with it and with 'all other sources and interlocutors of theological discourse precisely at a hermeneutical level'. Articulating a similar idea West (2001:184) regards contextual Bible study in South Africa as 'a resource for reclaiming and regaining land, dignity and identity' through 'creating a sacred (and safe) space for social transformation' (1999a 51-63).

The liberation theologies we have considered have pointed out the critical role of ideology in making Christianity and the Bible either oppressive or liberative. As Maluleke (1996a:9) says:

The search for an unideological Christianity must be abandoned, for Christianity has never been appropriated unideologically. Not only has Christianity been always appropriated in concrete ideological terms, but some ideologies canonised and froze it into a solid and dominant orthodoxy.

It is because of this fact that oppressive agendas can easily be hidden under the facile assumptions of what 'the Word of God' says. Yet it is rather unfortunate that black theologians, having come to the crucial recognition of how human ideologies have been equated to the Word of God have in turn thrown God out of the picture and reduced the Bible to a mere cite of human struggles. We saw this tendency in Mosala and Maluleke. We have already argued that if God is ignored, except in so far as God is a human creation, then the Bible a weapon of struggle for liberation loses much of its potency. I would put it to Mosala and Maluleke that the answer to the abuse of Christianity and the Bible through oppressive ideologies is a liberative ideology which sees God as being on the side of the oppressed. Behind the words and actions of man, the Bible testifies to the hand of God moving history in a redemptive direction. In that sense the Bible is a testimony to the Word and actions of God – and the words and actions of human beings in relation to God and to one another.

In this particular debate Kunnie (1986:154) strikes the right balance. He argues that 'Christianity, generally, is indeed a religion of liberation of humankind, both on a psychic and systemic level, empowering us to engage in decisive revolutionary struggle in Azania.' At the same time he recognises that 'it is a particular hermeneutic of Christianity which has been responsible for the legitimisation of racist oppression and peaceful coping with colonialist oppression' (:154).

The fourth observation is that liberation theologies seek to advance the identity of the disadvantaged communities by focussing on them as both interlocutors and agents of their own liberation. Both their context and their experience are made into theological categories. We have seen a consistent rejection of classical theology's insistence on neutrality in the way the Bible and Christianity are approached. Both Black Theology and African Women Theology are designed to answer questions and problems arising out of the existential experience of oppression and the desire for freedom. Furthermore there is a conscious desire to portray the disadvantaged as agents – actors rather than merely as victims. Thus Maluleke (1996a:8) in talking about the search for alternative histories in black and African theologies says that '[w]hile oppression and imperialism have been real and ruthless, Africans have at a deeper level negotiated and survived the scourge – by relativising it, resisting it, and modifying it with uncanny creativity.' This kind of new reading of history advances

the identity of the oppressed by adopting their point of view. The old historiography focused on dominant forces, concentrating on what the colonizers or the missionaries did or said.

While we give credit to liberation theologies for making the poor their interlocutors we have also had to observe the real shortcoming of some of those theologies not being socially engaged enough. The danger remains real that these theologies concentrate on the lofty heights of the academia while the people for whom the theology was designed continue unaided with their struggle for survival.

The next chapter discusses the extent to which the theologies we have discussed so far fit into the concept of mission.

CHAPTER SIX

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN AFRICAN THEOLOGY AS AN ASPECT OF MISSION

'To say that the church is essentially missionary does not mean that mission is church-centred. It is missio Dei' (Bosch 1991:493).

6.1 ORIENTATION

The previous two chapters have demonstrated the centrality of the quest for identity in the inculturation and the liberation theologies of Africa. The next chapter will seek to demonstrate that this quest for identity is a mission of *empowerment*. But what is the Christian theological understanding of *mission*, and in what sense is the quest for identity a missiological activity? These are the two questions at the heart of this chapter. If the quest for identity is to be seen as a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission, as will be argued in the next chapter, it is obviously important to understand what mission is. This chapter, therefore, forms a pivot, linking the already discussed quest for identity on the one hand, and the notion of empowerment to be discussed in the next chapter on the other.

At the heart of this chapter is an understanding of mission as *missio Dei*. This key concept will be defined and its conceptual development in the history of mission explained. The chapter will then proceed to discuss four critical aspects of *missio Dei* which have implications for the quest for identity. These aspects of *missio Dei* will then be used to determine the extent to which the quest for identity in the inculturation and liberation theologies of Africa is serving as an agent of *missio Dei*. The conclusion will then sum up the findings and make some observations on the unfinished task facing African Theology.

6.2 DEFINITION AND CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF MISSION

The word 'mission' is nowadays used in many contexts and with a wide variety of meanings. It is not a preserve of the Christian faith. Companies in commerce and industry, for example, regularly talk of their 'mission statements', by which they generally mean the *raison d'être* of their existence. Within Christianity the word 'mission' is also used with a wide variety of meanings. Glasser and McGavran (1983) have identified different theologies of mission in the different segments of the

worldwide church, namely, the conciliar, the liberationist, the evangelical and the Roman Catholic theologies of mission. It is therefore important to begin by identifying the sense in which the word 'mission' is to be employed in this thesis. Fundamentally mission is God's activity in the world for the establishment of his kingdom and the salvation and liberation of humanity (Musasiwa 1996:195). It is an activity in which human beings in general, and the church in particular, are privileged to participate as God's agents. It is in this context that we can agree with Walls (2001:46) when he says:

Mission involves moving out of one's self and one's accustomed terrain, and taking the risk of entering another world. It means living on someone else's terms, as the gospel itself is about God living on someone else's terms, the Word becoming flesh, Divinity being expressed in terms of humanity. And the transmission of the gospel requires a process analogous, however distantly, to that great act on which Christian faith depends.

This chapter sets out to explicate this understanding of mission and to relate it to the quest for identity in African Theology.

We begin by noting that in the history of mission, and of Missiology as a discipline, *missio Dei* has come to signify the theocentric nature of mission. As implied by our definition of mission, and more fully explained below, the origin, nature and purpose of mission is Trinitarian. There is also an anthropological dimension of mission in the sense that it is directed primarily at meeting the human need for salvation and liberation, and also in the sense that it employs human agents to achieve the purpose. Yet the anthropological element is subsumed in the divine; human salvation and liberation constitute *God's* purposes, and even where human beings are involved in achieving that purpose they do so as *God's* agents, whether or not they are conscious of that very agency. In this way mission becomes essentially *missio Dei*. This chapter will, *inter alia*, demonstrate that the quest for identity can be justifiably located in God's purpose of restoring the *imago Dei* in human beings and of effecting their salvation and liberation.

Before looking more closely at what is involved in *missio Dei*, it is useful to stand back and look at the historical development of the concept. This will give us a better perspective on the employment of this concept in this thesis. David Bosch (1991:389) makes it very clear that mission has not always been understood as *missio Dei*. He writes:

During the past half a century or so there has been a subtle but nevertheless decisive shift toward understanding mission as God's mission. During preceding centuries mission was understood in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was interpreted primarily in soteriological terms: as saving individuals from eternal damnation. Or it was understood in cultural terms: as introducing people from the East and the South to the blessings and privileges of the Christian West. Often it was perceived in ecclesiastical categories: as the expansion of the church (or a specific denomination). Sometimes it was defined salvation-historically: as the process by which the world – evolutionary or by means of a cataclysmic event – would be transformed into the kingdom of God.

Bosch also helps us to understand how these various notions of mission gradually gave way to an understanding of mission as *missio Dei*. He goes back to Voetius⁶³ who 'regarded the foundation of mission to be primarily theological - flowing from the very heart of God.' He then notes the more recent influence of Karl Barth. 'It was Karl Barth in particular who based mission not only on the doctrine of the Trinity, but much more specifically on Christology. ... The Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection compel us to take *history* seriously and thus also mission as historical involvement in this world' (Bosch 1991:240f). The influence of Karl Barth

reached its peak at the Willingen Conference of the IMC⁶⁴ (1952). It was here that the idea (not the exact term) *missio Dei* first surfaced clearly. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation. Willingen's image of mission was mission as participating in the sending of God. Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission, not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone.

(Bosch 1991:390)

Since Willingen a general consensus of mission as *missio Dei* began to arise among missiologists. As Bosch (1991:390) says this notion has been 'embraced by virtually all Christian persuasions'. Bediako (1996:181), for example, commences an article in which he reflects theologically on

⁶³ According to Bosch (1991:257) Voetius (1588-1676) may 'rightly be considered one of the first exponents of what in our own time became known as *missio Dei*' because of his emphasis on the theocentric nature of mission. He is also acknowledged as the first theologian to develop a comprehensive theology of mission. He further says of him: Today his views on mission appear, on the one hand, hopelessly outdated; on the other, surprisingly modern. His formulation of the threefold goal of mission has become widely known and is still unparalleled.

⁶⁴ The International Missionary Council was formed in 1921 as a follow-up to the World Missionary Conference of 1910. Willingen was its third major conference after Jerusalem (1928), and Tambaram (1938).

holistic ministries in Africa by saying, 'Behind every instance of authentic Christian ministry there lie divine impulses ...'. Later in the same articles Bediako (:187) argues that 'in biblical perspective the church is the primary agent of God's activity in the world ...'. This clearly implies that authentic Christian ministry is an expression of *missio Dei* utilizing human beings as the visible agents. Another missiologist, Herbert Kane (1981), starts his book with a chapter entitled 'Jehovah: A missionary God.' In this chapter he demonstrates that 'it is in the very being and character of God that the deepest ground of the missionary enterprise is to be found'(:15). He illustrates this point with reference to the missionary work of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – a truly Trinitarian foundation for the missionary enterprise.

Unfortunately, however, the milestone achieved at Willingen in the understanding of mission as *missio Dei* did not achieve long-lasting semantic stability, and this formulation was sometimes utilised by theologians holding mutually contradictory meanings (Bosch 1991:392f). Do we then jettison the concept? Not at all. We retain the concept for reasons greater than the fact that any other term would equally, if not even more so, be contested. We retain the concept of mission as *missio Dei* because it helps us to articulate the conviction that 'God is the fountain of sending love' (Bosch 1991:392). In other words we employ the concept in the sense which it originally acquired at, and soon after, the Willingen IMC conference of 1952. This, as will be made clear below, has great implications for our thesis on the quest for identity in African Theology.

6.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF *MISSIO DEI*

The depth of the notion of *missio Dei* becomes clearer with the explication of the following implications of the term – implications that have a crucial bearing on the theme of the quest for identity in African theology:

- *Missio Dei* for the restoration of *imago Dei*.
- *Missio Dei* for the salvation and liberation of humankind.
- *Missio Dei* effected through *missiones ecclesiae*.
- *Missio Dei* effected through *missio hominum*.

It needs to be pointed out straight away that these implications are intricately interrelated, and therefore it is impossible to discuss one without involving the others. It is therefore inevitable that

some ideas will appear to be repetitive, but this is a necessary *risk* in the interest of a fuller examination of this concept from different perspectives, each of which reinforces the place of the quest for identity in African theology as an aspect of *missio Dei*.

6.3.1 *Missio Dei* for the restoration of *imago Dei*

The Trinitarian basis of mission, already alluded to, is well summarized by Bosch (1980:239) when he says:

God is a missionary God, a God who crosses frontiers towards the world. In creation God was already the God of mission, with his Word and Spirit as ‘missionaries’ (cf Gen. 1.2-3). God likewise sent his incarnate Word, his Son, into the world. And he sent his Spirit at Pentecost. Mission is God giving up himself, his becoming man, his laying aside of his divine prerogatives and taking our humanity, his moving into the world, in his Son and Spirit.

Bosch appropriately sees the *missio Dei* beginning with creation, and human beings as being at the centre of that *missio Dei*. The Genesis story sees human beings as the crown of God’s creative activity. This already affirms that human identity *originates* from the creative intent of God. Unlike other creatures, human beings were created in the image of God. One of the implications of this, as explained more fully in the previous chapter, is that human beings are the bearers of the dignity and worth that originates from God himself. Sin, including the structural sin of oppression, mars the image of God in humans, and is an affront to God. God’s missionary activity continued after the Fall of human beings through sin, in order to restore the *imago Dei*⁶⁵. This missionary activity found its culmination in the Incarnation when the Word became flesh. The ultimate frontier from Godness to humanness was crossed in that Incarnation.

Why, we may ask, did God make that ultimate sacrifice of becoming human? We can legitimately say that at least part of the answer lies in God’s concern for the restoration and protection of the *imago Dei* invested in human beings at creation. God is glorified to the extent that human beings continue to reflect that image. The *New Dictionary of Theology* (Ferguson & Wright 1988:271) explains God’s ‘glory’ as God’s ‘excellence and praiseworthiness set forth in display (glory *shown*)’. Glorifying God, then, is giving God ‘honour and adoration ... in response to this display

⁶⁵ Christian theology conceives God’s worth and dignity to be without measure. The creation of human beings ‘in the image of God’, must at least imply that human beings are bearers of worth and dignity because of which they must be respected. Dehumanization is the robbing of human beings of the worth and dignity that intrinsically belongs to them by virtue of their creation in the image of God.

(glory *given*)'. Furthermore (:272) 'glorifying God is at once man's divine calling and his highest joy, both here and hereafter'. Various missiological writers (*inter alia*, Bavinck 1960:155; Bosch 1991:258, Kritzinger et al 1994:1-4) have pointed out that the glory of God is the most fundamental goal of mission.

In the light of the above it is logical to conclude that it is God who has made the desire for self-worth and a dignified identity a very part of the human constitution. The quest for identity, therefore, becomes an expression of the *imago Dei* and a means to glorify God. This has fundamental implications for our social involvement. Kritzinger et al (1994:3) convincingly argue that the motif of the glory of God

renders any response from our side based merely on charity completely inadequate. Charity, valuable as it may be as a response to need, implies that we are giving out of a surplus, out of what we have left over after we have made provision for our own needs (Luke 21:1-4). If we give in such a way, we could remain aloof from the needy, and avoid becoming personally involved. The glory and manifestation of God's grace as our missionary goal, however, requires nothing less than *our solidarity with the poor, the destitute and the oppressed* in seeking first the Kingdom of God and his justice-righteousness (Mt.6:33) (Emphasis added).

Transposing this to our theme, we could say that solidarity with those whose identity has been trampled upon is an expression of seeking the kingdom of God and His glory. When that identity is threatened a quest for its protection or restoration becomes part of *missio Dei*. Even when it might appear as a mere anthropocentric quest for human rights, this quest is part of *missio Dei* to the extent that it corresponds to the creative intent of God. 'Our socio-political involvement, motivated by the glory and manifestation of God's grace, has as its ideal the establishment of God's Kingdom and his justice-righteousness' (Kritzinger et al 1994:3). The glory and manifestation of God's grace must surely involve salvation and liberation of human beings, a theme to which we now turn.

6.3.2 *Missio Dei* for the salvation and liberation of humankind

The above discussion has already shown that the glory of God as a motivation for mission cannot be separated from his grace. The glory of God points equally to the excellence of God's majesty and the excellence of God's grace. That grace has to do with compassion, which in turn has to do with the meeting of human needs. As Nürnberger (1990:206) correctly argues, '[T]he act of salvation must be defined as a divine response to specific human needs, that is to the experienced deficiencies in human wellbeing.' So, for example, when people are robbed of their material means of

livelihood, God is roused to compassion on their behalf. Therefore when Mosala (1989a) bases his theology on the need for economic justice, as discussed in the previous chapter, he is participating in *missio Dei*, even though he shows no appreciation for the transcendental dimension. Similarly when the Kairos theologians (1987) privilege the politically disempowered, they are participating in *missio Dei*. In the same way *missio Dei* privileges those who have been robbed of their personal worth and dignity through loss of their identity. It is a way of revealing the compassionate nature of God.

It is this compassion that gives rise to salvation and liberation as the interrelated goals of mission. *Missio Dei* has to do with the Trinitarian involvement in meeting the human need for salvation and liberation. It proclaims a God who is not detached from human history and human need. Most theologians would agree that an important, if not the all important, goal of mission is mediating salvation (see for example Bosch 1991:393-400; Stott 1975:82-108; Padilla 1985:73-79; Nürnberger 1990:205-219). What is heavily contested is the meaning of such salvation. In particular it is the semantic breadth of this notion that is contested. Is it limited to the individual's spiritual relationship with God or does it include humanization, liberation in particular? Are the terms salvation and liberation separate realities? Are they different but related? Or are they synonymous so that it does not really make sense to talk about salvation *and* liberation? We need to discuss theologians (or theological schools of thought) representing different understandings of salvation and its relationship to liberation in order to determine how these terms relate to the quest for identity in African Theology.

Firstly, there is the position commonly known as the conservative evangelical position which emphasises the personal/spiritual aspect of this concept. This position is typified by John Stott (1975), a leading evangelical theologian of the western world. He begins his discussion of this concept by categorically stating that salvation 'does not mean psycho-physical health' (:84), nor is it 'socio-political liberation' (:88). Rather salvation, according to Stott (:101) is 'freedom from sin in all its ugly manifestations'. Yet apparently structural sin is excluded from these 'ugly manifestations' from which people need to be saved. Rather 'the salvation offered in the gospel of Christ concerns persons rather than structures' (:95).

A beginning of the widening of the understanding of salvation by evangelicals is achieved by the Lausanne covenant (1974). Relating salvation to liberation, Section 5 of the Covenant reads in part:

Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. ... The message of salvation implies also a message of judgement upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination... The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities.

It is clear from the above quotation that the message of salvation is regarded as having serious implications for socio-political liberation. One cannot meaningfully have the one without the other. This understanding of salvation is taken further still by Padilla (1985) who defines salvation (σωτηρια) from the New Testament perspective as 'deliverance from *all that interferes with the accomplishment of God's purpose for man*' (:75, emphasis added). More positively deliverance includes 'a complete restoration of man as the image of God, made for communion with God, for fellowship with his fellow man and for ruling over God's creation' (:78f).

A position that makes liberation and salvation synonymous, hence going much further than the positions considered above, is that articulated by Nürnberger (1990). According to his understanding of soteriology (:205f) salvation is a broad concept that already includes within it the notion of liberation. Any suggestion of a choice between the two concepts therefore becomes a false choice:

The goal of 'salvation' is comprehensive wellbeing in peace with God, who is the Source and Criterion of the whole reality, and therefore also in peace with a pacified natural and human reality. The Old Testament calls this envisaged situation *shalom*, the New Testament calls it *sōtēria*, or the Kingdom of God.

Nürnberger (:107f) finds justification for this approach from the Bible itself. When Abraham's lineage was threatened with extinction salvation took the form of a son. When the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians salvation took the form of the exodus. When they starved in the desert salvation took the form of manna and quail. When they were roaming nomads salvation took the form of the successful conquest of Canaan. When they were oppressed by their neighbours salvation took the form of a charismatic military leader, later a king. During the exile salvation meant the return to Jerusalem. Whatever situation of suffering people encountered required God's salvific

intervention to 'restore their wholeness, their wellbeing'. In the New Testament Jesus is experienced as Saviour

because he picks up the needs of the people precisely in the form in which they present themselves: he heals the sick, he restores the crippled, he liberates the possessed, he grants fellowship to the outcast, he opens up horizons of hope for the despondent, he offers leadership to people who are like sheep without a pastor, he discloses meaning to the confused, he forgives guilt where a sense of guilt is the problem.

(Nürnberger (1990:108))

The above survey shows a development in the theological understanding of 'salvation' which can no longer justify limiting its meaning to the notion of the justification of the sinner in the way Stott (1975) does. Rather we can agree with Bosch (1991:400) who states: 'Salvation is as coherent, broad, and deep as the needs and exigencies of human existence'.

From this literature survey, several conclusions are appropriate. *Firstly* it may be concluded that salvation has two interrelated senses which, if not distinguished, lead to the controversies explored above. There is the general sense applicable to any situation of rescue whereby a victim of danger could not have survived without outside intervention. This is the sense articulated, for example, by Nürnberger. As we have already seen, that general sense is amply reflected in various passages of the Bible. *Missio Dei* must include this general sense since anything that threatens the wellbeing of humanity is a concern to God. There is, however, according to Stott and Padilla, a special religious sense of salvation involving a deliverance from the power and the consequences of sin through the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, a deliverance that becomes effectual to those who have put their faith in him (Eph 2:8-9). This sense of salvation in Christianity is special in the sense that it could only have been achieved by Jesus Christ through his death on the cross. It is also special in the sense that it requires a response of faith in order to be effectual whereas the other senses discussed by Nürnberger do not need similar conditions.

The *second* broad conclusion is that even the special theological sense of salvation has crucial implications for the general sense. This is so because the sin for which Jesus died manifests itself in both personal and structural ways. Therefore genuine repentance must include a new desire to fight against sin in all these manifestations. As Bosch (1991:519) says, 'mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus'.

Thirdly there is a sense in which external agency is accentuated over internal agency as far as the concept of salvation is concerned⁶⁶. Here we are presupposing a situation where someone becomes a *victim* of circumstances in a way that requires the intervention of a redeemer who constitutes the external agent for the attainment of the victim's salvation. In the special sense of salvation described above the agent to effect salvation from sin is Jesus Christ, especially through his death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection. But since salvation from other evils and injustices in all their manifestations is required in the more generalized sense, God uses human agents to effect such salvation. In terms of this thesis it will be argued below that God is using various African theologies to effect salvation from an identity crisis on behalf of the marginalized Africans.

The idea of fighting injustice in all its manifestations has been a thorny issue for many Christians. South Africa during the years of apartheid is a good case in point. The Kairos Document (KD 1987) identifies three different categories of responses by South African Christians when faced with the evils of apartheid. The first response is typified as 'State Theology' (:3-8), a theology that gave theological legitimacy to the system. This was a politically engaged theology, albeit on the side of an evil system. An opposite response, one that actively joined the forces that fought to dismantle the apartheid system, is typified as 'prophetic theology' (:17-30). This, too, was a politically engaged theology, on the opposite side of the state theology. But that still leaves many Christians who advocated for neutrality, mildly criticising 'the excesses on both sides' of the political spectrum or simply remaining silent in the conviction that Christians should not 'meddle' in politics as the job of the church is to preach the 'gospel' and not to change social structures. This response is described as 'church theology' in the Kairos Document (:9-16) and as 'third way theology' by Balcomb (1993). Two kinds of challenges have been directed at this so-called neutral theology:

The first kind of response comes from the Kairos Document (1987) and Balcomb (1993). It says that neutrality in the circumstances that obtained under apartheid was an impossibility. Neutrality was in fact a way of supporting the status quo. As the Kairos Document (:28) says:

We are a divided Church precisely because not all the members of our Churches have taken sides against oppression. In other words not all Christians have united themselves with God 'who is always on the side of the oppressed' (Ps 103:6). As far as the present crisis is

⁶⁶ External agency in this context simply means the person(s) who accomplishes for the victims the deliverance which the victims cannot accomplish by themselves. By contrast internal agency is the work that victims perform for their own deliverance.

concerned, there is only one way forward to Church unity and that is for those Christians who find themselves on the side of the oppressor or sitting on the fence, to cross over to the other side to be united in faith and action with those who are oppressed. Unity and reconciliation within the Church itself is only possible around God and Jesus Christ who are to be found on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

Balcomb (1993:22) makes the same point as the Kairos Document, but in a perhaps more subtle way. He wrestles with the question of whose interests were being served by the ‘third way theology’⁶⁷ and observes that

Although third way theologians ostensibly refused to make political choices in the decade of the eighties, their theology nevertheless clearly implied that certain choices were made, and these choices were clearly in favour of the liberalisation of politics. ... What is more serious, however, is the fact that, on careful analysis of the forces involved in the process of this (so-called) liberalisation, it becomes apparent that the third way had become part of an overall political process that involved some very questionable dynamics. ... What it should not only imply but also demonstrate is that when political theology is done with a pretence of political neutrality it heads directly for the side that has the most political power.

All this is one type of (valid) challenge to this theology of neutrality. But this challenge on its own does not adequately answer the question of what distinguishes (or should distinguish) political involvement by Christians, and political involvement by other political parties and pressure groups. Does mere political activism not in fact threaten the distinctiveness of the church? This is where we bring in the voice of Bosch (himself reluctantly classified by Balcomb (1993:16) as one of the voices of third way theology) as a second challenge to the politics of neutrality. Bosch (1991:402) makes the point that Christians should be involved, but out of the religious ethic of love and not merely a rational ethic of justice. The end result is that justice is still done but out of the motivation of love:

In order to appreciate the issues involved, it may help to highlight an observation made by Reinhold Niebuhr (1960). A *rational* ethic, Niebuhr suggests, aims at *justice*, whereas a *religious* ethic makes *love* the ideal. The latter ideal is supported by viewing the soul of one’s fellow human being ‘from the absolute and transcendent perspective’. This leads to the presence – in every vital religion – of a millennial hope for a society in which the ideal of love and equity will be fully realized. However, this is complicated by the fact that, *within* the religious ideal, the ‘mystical’ emphasis exists side by side with a ‘prophetic’ emphasis. The mystical dimension tends to make an individual or group withdraw from the world, devalue history, claim that one’s true home is not here but in heaven, and seek communion with God

⁶⁷ Balcomb’s thesis on the third way theology will be the subject of extensive discussion in chapter seven.

without attending to one's neighbor. The prophetic dimension prompts the believer to get involved in society for the sake of the neighbor (*italics in the original*).

It is this prophetic involvement 'for the sake of the neighbor' that Bosch supports as opposed to mystical withdrawal or involvement motivated merely by the rational ethic of justice. He concludes (:403) by saying:

The religious ethic of love, says Niebuhr, will always aim at leavening the idea of justice with the ideal of love; it will prevent it from becoming purely political, with the ethical element washed out. Love demands more than justice.'

The above voices (KD, Balcomb & Bosch) present a formidable challenge to the theology of neutrality and make a clear case for *Christian* involvement on the side of the poor and the oppressed. They reinforce the conclusion arrived at above that salvation itself has a socio-political dimension which must result in intentional involvement in fighting injustice and promoting justice out of love.

The *fourth* conclusion is that from the angle of *liberation* the agency of the sufferers must be accentuated over the agency of the external liberators. This is a factor in Missiology that has received very little emphasis before. The age of western missions (18th and 19th Centuries) has been characterized by feelings of superiority and paternalism – feelings of what the haves can do for the have-nots. Such cultural imperialism, Scott comments (1980:34f), resulted from serious ethnocentrism on the part of the missionaries – a problem of '*spiritual attitudes*':

We missionaries from the West frequently exhibit an ambition to lead rather than serve; a drive to dominate rather than develop; a need to control rather than contribute; to talk rather than listen. An ambiance of arrogance, the smell of superiority envelops us. No wonder then that Latin Americans cry, 'Missionary, go home' and an evangelical leader in Kenya calls for a five-year moratorium on western missionaries, and the principal of a theological seminary in India asserts: 'Relief agencies and mission boards control the younger churches through purse strings. Foreign finances, ideas and personnel still dominate the younger churches and stifle their spontaneous growth. ... So now I say, "The mission of the Church is the greatest enemy of the Gospel".'

The Moratorium call was in effect a call on the part of African Christians to be regarded as agents – not just receivers of external assistance from external agents. Unfortunately even liberation theology has placed too great an emphasis on what needs to be done FOR the poor and the oppressed. As discussed in previous chapters, activating the self-liberatory powers of the oppressed, hence turning

them into agents of self-liberation, gives a truer mode of liberation than the traditional understanding does. Frostin (1988) articulates this point by talking about the poor and the oppressed as the proper 'interlocutors' for the theology of liberation, as more fully explained in the previous chapter. In terms of liberation from the domination of borrowed identity what this means is that theologians should recognize what the poor and the oppressed are already doing to defend their own identity, and to affirm them in that regard. This is in line with the views of James Scott and John and Jean Comaroff discussed in chapter one.

The *fifth* conclusion links the above discussion more directly with the theme of identity. Salvation is not just the 'saving of souls' but also the process of restoration of God's creative intent. An important part of God's creative intent is the special form of identity only possible in relationship with him. In the Bible this is signified, for example, by Cephas becoming Peter and Saul becoming Paul because of the relationship of faith they had established with Jesus. But the impartation of a new identity is not limited to a few individual Christians such as those already quoted. Peter addressed Christians of the dispersion concerning their identity in Christ:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

It must, however, be realized that Christian identity exists in two dimensions - the *vertical* and the *horizontal*. The words of Peter, quoted above, point to what may be called the vertical dimension, what Christians are in their relationship to God. Vertical identity gives Christians their uniqueness and unity as Christians (Bavinck 1960:59). In chapter four it was argued that western value setting, and the historical circumstances that went with it, led to a sense of diminished worth among the Africans. Taking away a people's self-worth is a form of dehumanization which, as we saw in chapter five, comes about through other forms of oppression such as land dispossession. Salvation in the special sense identified above seeks to redress a part of this identity crisis. Jesus' death and resurrection have enabled the establishment of a special relationship between God and those who put their trust in Christ – a relationship that restores God's creative intent for them. According to the words of Peter, quoted above, this is the highest form of identity possible, and the highest form of affirmation of personal worth. This also implies that African theology will only partially succeed in

its quest for identity if it ignores the transcendent dimension. The next chapter will therefore make this one of the criteria for evaluating the various African theologies in their quest for identity.

But because Christians are in the world, they also exist in relationship to their socio-cultural environment. Horizontal identity has to do with the culture and the socio-political context Christians share with others in their nations. Being a Christian should not lead to a denial of this horizontal identity. Denying the horizontal means we are not really *in* the world. Oduyoye (2001:20) complains that Africans ‘are willing to be westernised ... We have not upheld Africanness. A theological critique would be to ask whether African humanity is in the image of God or not’. What Oduyoye is lamenting is in effect a form of dehumanization – a condition of being cut off from the cultural roots that give the African people their *ubuntu*⁶⁸ (Samkange & Samkange 1980). The mission of God, *missio Dei*, must therefore include a restoration of human worth in this area.

But how does God effect his mission? Apart from the direct action of the Godhead⁶⁹ that we have already examined, God uses the church as one of the agents of *missio Dei*.

6.3.3 *Missio Dei* effected through *missiones ecclesiae*

Missio Dei presupposed that God has the whole world at heart – particularly the world in the anthropological sense which this thesis is focussing on. This has implications on the church’s relationship to the world. If God has the world at heart, it follows that the church which claims to worship God must be concerned about the world and not stand aloof from it. The anthropological world in view here consists of the entire humanity, not just those who profess to be Christians.

Stott (1984) opens his book with a series of chapters on ‘Christians in a non-Christian society’. After giving a historical background, showing how social concern was part of the western evangelical heritage, he proceeds to give reasons for what he calls ‘the great reversal’ (:6-10) – the phenomenon whereby evangelicals retreated from social concern to concentrate on so-called spiritual issues. One of the reasons (:8), which is important for our analysis, is how Christianity became a middle-class religion and how this had negative implications for the holistic understanding of mission. The middle-class people diluted the Christian faith by ‘identifying it with

⁶⁸ Mayson (2001:342) described *ubuntu* as ‘a crucial experience and insight which takes the concept of care and community to a depth that the West has not known for centuries ...’. See chapter three for a fuller exposition of this concept.

⁶⁹ Christian theology refers to the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as the Godhead.

their own culture'. Because such people were already materially and socially well-off, Christianity for them became a privatised faith which sought to maintain the status quo, with no concern for the oppressed. The church of the middle-class has often 'acquiesced in oppression and exploitation, and has taken no action against these evils, nor even protested against them'.

Stott's findings help to explain the rebellion in African Christianity against a tradition, received from western missionaries, of over-spiritualizing the Christian faith. A super-spirituality which is not socially engaged would have answered the felt needs of western middle-class Christianity, but certainly not that of Africa with its massive problems of poverty, disease and the various forms of socio-political exploitation that have been explored in chapter two of this thesis.

Stott (1984:18) went a long way in reversing the dualisms he had displayed a decade earlier, thereby giving a more integrated view of human beings and supplying a more adequate anthropological rationale for the church's social involvement:

For these human but godlike creatures are not just souls (that we should be concerned exclusively for their eternal salvation), nor just bodies (that we should care only for their food, clothing, shelter and health), nor just social beings (that we should become entirely preoccupied with their community problems). They are all three. A human being might be defined from a biblical perspective as 'a body-soul-in-community'. For that is how God has made us. So if we truly love our neighbors, and because of their worth desire to serve them, we shall be concerned for their total welfare, the wellbeing of their soul, body and community.

He then tells the story (:19) of a pastor who was approached by a homeless woman for help. The only help the pastor gave was a promise to pray for her. The feelings of this destitute woman was later captured in the following poem (:19):

I was hungry, and you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger.
I was imprisoned, and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release.
I was naked, and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.
I was sick, and you knelt and thanked God for your health.
I was homeless, and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.
I was lonely, and you left me alone to pray for me.
You seem so holy, so close to God
But I am still very hungry – and lonely – and cold.

This story presents a sharp critique against the inactivity of the church in the face of human suffering. Such inactivity represents a failure on the part of the church to be agents of *missio Dei* –

a failure more specifically to follow the principle of the incarnation (Stott 1984:21f). That principle of the incarnation requires that while the church remains distinctive from the world, it must also identify and be involved with the world (:24). Unfortunately the church has never found it easy to maintain this creative tension between distinctiveness and involvement. The KUN⁷⁰ faculty of theology (1999:10) have called this dynamic a ‘fundamental paradox’:

the more emphasis is placed on identity, the less weight relevance seems to have. Conversely, when the accent is more on relevance, there is apparently a greater loss of identity. This phenomenon becomes even more paradoxical when one considers that the loss of identity may eventually lead to loss of relevance. In this sense the identity-of-religion theme takes precedence over the relevance theme, even though identity cannot be entirely disassociated from relevance.

What is in view here is that the church can be so occupied with its own *Christian* distinctiveness that it fails to be involved in the world. Identity must always have a purpose attached to it. The question ‘Who am I?’ must immediately be followed by the question ‘What is my purpose for being in the world?’ When the church asks only the first question and fails to ask the second it has fallen into the trap of a purposeless identity, which is in fact a contradiction in terms. Conversely the church can be so involved in the world that there is little that distinguishes it from the world. In this case Bosch (1980:222) is right when he says: ‘Without a faithful and sustained contact with God the Church loses her transcendence. Without a true solidarity with the world she loses her relevance.’ From the perspective of African Christian theology a crucial agenda for the church is not only a preservation of its own identity in Christ but the restoration of the shattered identity of the Africans generally who constitute that theology’s interlocutors. In this way ‘the *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*’ (Bosch 1991:370) – the one mission of God giving birth to the many missions of the church. Yet the church cannot be the sole bearer of *missio Dei* – which brings us to the need to consider the importance of *missio hominum*.

6.3.4 *Missio Dei* embraces *missio hominum*

The recurring theme in Bosch’s writings of ‘the missionary nature of the church’ begs the question of whether God’s mission can be contained solely in the mission of the church. The answer must clearly be in the negative because the kingdom of God existed before the church, and is far bigger than the church. A more balanced perspective is offered to us by Verkuyl (1978:4) who identifies

⁷⁰ Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen.

the agents of *missio Dei* as both the church and human beings generally. Concerning the latter in particular Verkuyl explains (:4):

Putting the expressions *missio ecclesiarum* and *missio hominum* next to each other could suggest that the missions of the churches are not human missions and that 'church work' is something completely set off from the work of men and women in society. But the intent of the expression is clear. Its purpose is to show that even the non-ecclesiastical activity of people in society, as long as it counters any type of evil and is purposefully performed in ways that help and heal, is connected either knowingly or unknowingly with the *missio Dei* in the world.

This thinking by Verkuyl has recently found strong support from Smith (2002) whose own missiological thinking has developed 'from *missio Dei* to *missio hominum*' (:4). Smith is in fact concerned about the use of the *missio Dei* concept because for too long 'Christians have believed that mission is God's mission and God will take care of bringing about a change to the world' (:19). It is for this reason that Smith makes 'a plea for a *missio hominum*' (:17) which means 'believers going out into the world to be involved in the affairs of people in their contexts, identifying with them and demonstrating to them God's concern and love for people' (:18). For Smith (:21) *missio hominum* frees mission from being a prerogative of Christians. Rather, *missio hominum*

emphasises the fact that *all* people from *all* religions and even *without* religion have the responsibility to participate in God's creative dynamic in creation. The purpose of religions and religious institutions, including the Christian church, can only be to sensitise people to the incarnated dynamic of God's presence in creation and to guide them into participation in the actions of God's creative dynamic (emphasis in the original).

Two major concerns therefore dominate Smith's thinking. The first is that Christians must not hide behind the *missio Dei* concept and abdicate their responsibility for changing the world. The second concern is that 'Christianity and the church' must not 'continue domesticating mission as *their* prerogative' (:21, emphasis in the original). These concerns are valid. If the evils of oppression, hunger and poverty are to be eliminated, human beings must be actively involved in fighting them. Such human beings are not necessarily only Christians. To this extent Smith's plea for a '*missio hominum*' is justified. What seems problematic is the implication in Smith's thought that *missio hominum* should now supersede *missio Dei*. There are dangers that *missio hominum* could be seen as an operation independent of God. In that case such *missio hominum* would have no criteria for measuring its validity or normativity. Apartheid in South Africa, and its equivalence in Zimbabwe, were practised by those who sincerely believed, *inter alia*, that they were fighting in order to

preserve the 'western Christian civilization'. This was a form of *missio hominum*. Yet the resulting dehumanisation of the black populations of those countries were contrary to what Christians believe to be God's intention when He created humanity in His image, and contrary to the humanising intention behind the incarnation of His son. Smith himself has not really been able to progress from *missio Dei* to *missio hominum* as he intended to. For example he rightly says that the agendas of human mission have to be 'prescribed to them by God made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth' (:18). Smith is indeed back to *missio Dei*.

We can conclude that *missio hominum* should rightly be seen as an instrument of *missio Dei*. This gives us justification in regarding all the forces in Africa which contribute towards the defence or recovery of African identity as agents of *missio Dei*. For example Steve Biko (1978) and the Black Consciousness Movement were not operating from a Christian perspective, and yet their contribution to the fight for African identity is considerable. Some Black Theologians like Mosala (1989) completely lack what Bosch (1991:passim) calls the 'transcendent perspective' and yet it cannot be denied that God has used them to defend black rights and black consciousness. To the extent that all these forces contribute to the liberation of African identity, they are agents of *missio Dei*. At the same time Christians can claim that *missiones ecclesiae* is qualitatively more significant for *missio Dei* for it can potentially participate in the salvific acts of *missio Dei* in a more conscious way and with the right motivation. Wasimiyu-Wasike and Waruta (2000:2) are right when they say, 'Knowledge that it is God's mission is the source of our boldness, strength and joy as we participate in the *missio Dei*. It is also the basis of our hope – not in human work but in God's work unfolding through human involvement.' The fact that the church was guilty of many abuses during the nineteenth century western missionary era is a measure of its lack of consciousness that what it was doing was supposed to be an expression of *missio Dei*, God acting through the church.

In the next section the above exposition on *missio Dei*, with its expression through both *missiones ecclesiae* and *missio hominum* will be more explicitly related to the quest for identity in African theologies.

6.4 THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN AFRICAN THEOLOGY AS PART OF MISSIO DEI

We have explored the theological meaning of mission and have concluded that mission should be understood as *missio Dei*, and that *missio Dei* finds its agents in *missiones ecclesiae* and *missio hominum*. In this section we answer the question of whether, and to what extent, the quest for identity in African theology is part of *missio Dei*. We look first at the various inculturation theologies and then at the liberation theologies of Africa.

6.4.1 The quest for identity in inculturation theologies as a part of *missio Dei*

This sub-section presupposes the whole discussion contained in chapter four of this thesis. The overall conclusion of that chapter was that the quest for identity underlies the various inculturation theologies of Africa, from the early indigenization theology of Idowu to the translation theology of Sanneh and Bediako. To find out the extent to which such a quest for identity is part of *missio Dei* we have to compare its purposes and methods with the purposes and methods of *missio Dei* as articulated above.

Firstly we compare them on the level of purposes. *Missio Dei* as directed at the anthropological world⁷¹, we concluded, has two major aims. The first is to enhance and protect the *imago Dei*. God is glorified to the extent to which human beings reflect his image on earth. The second aim is for God to manifest his grace for humankind through the achievement of their salvation and liberation – these, we discovered, being so interrelated that they are like two sides of one coin.

So, does the quest for identity in the inculturation theologies of Africa seek to enhance and protect the *imago Dei*? This is undoubtedly so, even though the term *imago Dei* does not feature prominently in the literature examined. We saw in chapter four that the European value setting was accompanied by a severe denigration of the religions and cultures of Africa. Terms such as ‘uncivilized’, ‘primitive’, ‘heathen’ etc overlooked the Christian theological truth that all human beings are created in God’s image. As such all their cultures and religions reflect something of the truth and beauty of that image. By seeking to overturn the negative perceptions of the African religions and cultures, inculturation theologies were fulfilling at least one of the purposes of *missio*

⁷¹ The ‘anthropological world’ as used here means the world of human beings in contrast to the world of things like animals and vegetation.

Dei. Chapter four revealed how very successfully these theologies in fact did this. They succeeded in showing that there is much in African cultures and religions which makes them even closer to the Bible than the so-called 'European Christian civilisation'. For example, western missionaries were reluctantly compelled to adopt African names for God in a way that various European names for God could not have been adopted because of how closely such African names reflected biblical teaching (Mbiti 1970a). Various inculturation theologians also point out how the African sense of community more closely reflects Christian teaching than western individualism. Bediako (1995) further points out how the African primal approach to religion can help overcome the destructive dualisms imported into western Christianity by the Enlightenment. These are just some of the many examples already discussed in chapter four of the way inculturation theologies overcame the unnecessary western negative perceptions of Africa, and thereby sought to protect Africans as God's image bearers along with the rest of humanity.

There is, however, more to upholding the image of God than the highlighting of positive values in the religion and culture of any people. There must also be a critiquing of ungodly aspects of any culture. Here it can be said that in their quest for identity, inculturation theologians have, in the main, been so anxious to overcome European negative evaluations of Africa that they have been reluctant to criticise African religions and cultures. We must not be quick to condemn African theologians for this. It is natural to react to one form of overemphasis (European ethnocentric condemnation of Africa) with its opposite (affirming what is positive about Africa). Yet theologically the doctrine of *imago Dei* finds its qualification in the doctrine of the Fall of humanity. Therefore, even though all cultures bear the imprint of God's image, they also bear marks of the Fall. Thus African cultures have, thankfully to a decreasing extent, shown some elements of dangerous superstitions which led to the killing of twins who were considered signs of bad omens. Male domination and oppression of women received no attention from these inculturation theologians, a factor that at least partly explains the recent rise of African Women Theology. These examples show that while we should affirm the desire of inculturation theologies to restore the image of God in Africa, we should also recognise the incompleteness of that attempt and therefore the need for other theologies to fill the gaps.

We come now to the second purpose of *missio Dei*, that of effecting salvation and liberation. Here we are presented with a picture of mixed success in our evaluation of the quest for identity in inculturation theologies.

On the positive side the quest for identity in inculturation theologies is one of the best ways of ensuring that Africans turn to Christ and remain in the Christian fold. It helps in ensuring that kind of special salvation that, as we saw above, is only possible through the agency of Jesus Christ. Quite clearly if Christianity is not seen to be an African religion its survival in Africa would remain a doubtful prospect. Waruta (2000) gives a helpful historical perspective to this issue. He points out how in two previous epochs Christianity was planted in Africa, only to disappear without trace afterwards. The first epoch was the North African Christianity during the first six centuries of the Christian era. This Christianity disappeared under the tide of the Islamic advance. The second wave of Christianity came with the Portuguese explorers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet 'by the end of the 18th century, nothing remained of it except some ruins such as the famous "Fort Jesus" built in 1639 by the Portuguese at the Kenyan coastal town of Mombasa' (:127).

Waruta's view is that these first two waves of Christianity disappeared from Africa because they did not succeed in becoming indigenous to Africa and therefore were doomed to die in spite of lasting for a long time and being apparently successful (:125). The first wave of Christianity 'failed to become a way of life for the Berbers and other indigenous peoples on the African shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Instead it remained tied to the Greek and Roman cultural and religious heritage' (:126). The exception is Christianity in Ethiopia and Egypt 'where this Christianity has had some significant success in becoming rooted' (:126) in the culture of the peoples concerned. The second wave, like the first 'never really became African, it remained Portuguese and foreign, and hence died with the demise of the Portuguese influence' (:127). The lesson for Christianity in its current third wave is very clear. Unless it becomes truly an indigenous faith it is bound to die like the first two waves did.

Much thanks is therefore due to the inculturation theologians considered in chapter four. Their work is ensuring that African Christians desire the salvation that Christ brings and that they would want to remain Christians without feeling that they are living on borrowed religion and borrowed culture. Thus Mbiti (1970c) pleads for Christianity to Christianise the Africans, while Africans Africanise

the Christian faith. We similarly saw how Sanneh and Bediako insist on the translatability of the Christian faith so that that faith should be seen as being as much an African religion as it has been a western one in previous centuries. In short, for its survival '[t]he Christian faith will have to be given not only an African interpretation but also African forms of transmission' (Waruta 2000:125).

So much for seeking to restore the image of God in the religio-cultural spheres of African life. But have inculturation theologies espoused salvation in the full measure demanded by the *missio Dei* principle discussed above? Until recently, the socio-political considerations have been out of the purview of inculturation theologies. It is only in recent times (Motlhabi 1994) that inculturation theologies have been awakened by Black Theology to this reality. Progress is very slow. There is still reluctance by this branch of African Theology to critique oppressive black governments in Africa, and to address global economic and political imbalance that continue to play havoc with African identity. To this extent, therefore, inculturation theologies are falling short of the agentic role required by the *missio Dei*.

So much for the *purposes* of the quest for identity in inculturation theologies. What about the *methods*? To what extent do these correspond to the above exposition of *missio Dei*, especially when measured against the criterion of the incarnation? This is a fruitful area of discussion. The first area of methodology is the demonstration of continuity between Africa's religio-cultural heritage and the Christian faith. Christian theology affirms the principle of the incarnation – of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among human beings. That very principle of the incarnation is a strong affirmation to inculturation theologies in their quest for identity. There was so much about Jesus that affirmed the Jewish past. If Jesus had been born an African, there is no doubt that he would also have affirmed what in Africans conforms to the will of God. Establishing continuity with the past is indispensable to the affirmation of human identity. Walls (2001:47) expresses this view well:

We cannot ignore our past; we are made by our past and our past gives us our identity. To lose our past is to lose our memory; and to lose our memory means to be unable to recognise things and people for what they are; it permanently inhibits confident, assured relationships. The past that gives us identity cannot be abandoned, neither can it be suppressed. Nor can it be left as it is, untouched by Christ's hand, any more than our present can be left without his touch. The past has to be converted, turned to face Christ, opened up to him.

In their quest for African Christian identity inculturation theologians are following the example of Jesus Christ. Instead of throwing away the African past they seek both its affirmation and its conversion to Christ. They have fought hard for the right of Africans to come to Christ as Africans and not as Europeans in African skin, just as Paul fought for the right of gentile Christians to come to Christ without first becoming Jews.

When Christianity is appropriated in a way that resonates with the African religio-cultural tradition, as we have seen, it becomes rooted in Africa and has a greater survival chance. That is why, for example, Bediako's plea (1996) for the primal appropriation of Christianity must be welcomed. At the same time while the church (theologians included) must identify with the people among whom it exists, it must 'remain identifiably different from the world, else it will cease to be able to minister to it' (Bosch 1991:388). That is equally part of the principle of incarnational mission. It is what Walls (1996:8) calls the 'pilgrim principle'. Chapter four identified this as one of the weaknesses of inculturation theologies in Africa.

The second methodological area suggested by the principle of the incarnation is that of being socially engaged with the interlocutors. Incarnation is not primarily about good ideas but about involvement in the life of the people among whom one is ministering. Here we have reason to question the success of the inculturation theologies in their quest for identity. Inculturation theology exists in books and journal articles which are not generally accessible to the many Christians in Africa who may have a low literacy level, or who feel that theology is for 'theologians' and not for them. It is perhaps for this reason that even though inculturation theology has been with us since the 1960s, there is still a high level of western domination among Christians in Africa. This is demonstrated by the fact that as late as 2001 Oduyoye (2001:20) can still lament the wholesale abandonment of positive aspects of African culture in the following terms:

Young Christians are being encouraged to leave Ur of the Chaldeans, their ancestral homes and, like Abram, to follow God into a land yet to be designated, and also to receive a new name in place of their ancestral name. The parallelism has been devastating when applied, without reflection, to the contemporary situation in Africa. Burning one's bridges behind one, ignoring even biological parents in marriage plans, have been deemed the mark of being truly born again. Personal choices become the focus of all action: even family names are demonised and discarded. The new Christian community becomes one's community of accountability. The care needing to be extended to parents is put on hold or abandoned

because the first duty is to pay church tithes. The *corban*⁷² excuse that Jesus criticised operates today. ...A Christian reappraisal of the teaching on what is family, and what constitutes a life-enhancing community can no longer be put off.

Surely, to the extent that Oduyoye is right in the observations she makes above we should acknowledge that forty years of inculturation theology has not yet significantly produced the desired results in the ordinary Christians while it has made a significant impact in the academic world. Ordinary African Christians continue to live on a borrowed, western identity. We are suggesting here that a possible reason for this is that this theology is not as socially engaged as the incarnational principle of *missio Dei* would suggest. In this light inculturation theologies should accept the challenge from Wasimiyu-Wasike and Waruta (2000:1-2):

Mission is founded in the self-giving and self-emptying model of the Trinity. Those who are called to engage in missionary activity share in God's mission and travel the same road taken by Jesus Christ – the road of poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice.

With this we now turn to the quest for identity in the liberation theologies of Africa to make a similar evaluation of whether, and to what extent, they act as agents of *missio Dei*.

6.4.2 The quest for identity in liberation Theologies as a part of *missio Dei*

In chapter five we discussed the quest for identity in Black Theology and African Women Theology – the two outstanding exemplars of Liberation Theology in Africa. We concluded that even though these theologies are not normally associated with the quest for identity, as the inculturation theologies are, they are in fact engaged in that very quest using socio-political liberation as the hermeneutical key. The question now is whether such a quest for identity is in fact an aspect of *missio Dei*. To answer this question we again, as we did for inculturation theologies, compare the purposes and methods of these theologies with the purposes and methods of *missio Dei* articulated above.

Concerning purposes we consider first the *imago Dei* motif. It was pointed out in chapter five that liberation and self-realization – two sides of a single coin – are the most commonly stated purposes

⁷² The reference here is Matthew 15:3-6 where Jesus was rebuking Scribes and Pharisees for transgressing God's commandments in order to uphold their own traditions. They would, for example, declare their possessions to be *corban*, which means 'given to God'. In that way they absolved themselves from the responsibility of loving, honouring and materially supporting their parents.

of the theologians who fall into this category. Do these purposes coincide with *imago Dei* principle which is central to *missio Dei*?

To begin with we take note that the image of God is consciously one of the theological driving forces of a number of these theologians (Frostin 1988:101). They argue that African identity is important because Africans, like the rest of humanity, were created in the image of God. For this reason blackness is not a curse but a blessing to be accepted and appreciated. To dehumanise Africans through political, economic or gender oppression is therefore to insult the God who created them in His image. Tutu (1999:11) expresses this idea in a most articulate way:

The Bible... is quite categorical in saying what endows human beings, every single human being without exception, with infinite worth is not this or that biological or any other external attribute. No, it is the fact that each one of us has been created in the image of God. This is something intrinsic. It comes as it were with the package. It means that each one of us is a God carrier, God's viceroy, God's representative. This is why treating anybody as if they were less than this is veritably blasphemous. It is like spitting in the face of God. That is what filled some of us with such a passionate commitment to fight for justice and freedom. We were inspired not by political motives but by our biblical faith. The Bible turned out to be the most subversive book imaginable in a situation of injustice and oppression.

In chapter five we saw how Oduyoye also employs the same concept in the fight against sexist oppression in Africa. For her men and women are of equal value precisely because both are created in the image of God.

Admittedly not all black or African women theologians consciously employ this concept. They all nevertheless seek to liberate their interlocutors from oppression and to cultivate their self-worth. Therefore even those liberation theologians in Africa who do not employ the *imago Dei* concept are effectively, even if unconsciously, working towards its realization. Our exposition of the *missio Dei* allowed for agents who may not even be Christians but whose work is in line with divine purposes for humankind. The purposes of these theologies – ‘liberation, self-realization and fuller humanization’ (Maimela 1991:158) – undoubtedly fall into the *missio Dei* category.

Missio Dei, however, goes beyond socio-political liberation. Our explication of the concept ‘salvation’ revealed a special dimension of relationship with God which can only be effected through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is this relationship with God that creates a special *Christian* identity of being ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special

people', so that such people 'may proclaim the praises of Him who called [them] out of darkness into His marvellous light' (1 Peter 2:9). In chapter five we pointed out the need for Christian theology to maintain a holistic view of identity which embraces the vertical and the horizontal dimensions. We had reason to feel concerned that some of the liberation theologians had fallen into the danger of horizontalism so that their legitimate social concern for African identity was not adequately powered by the conviction of God's presence. Talking about the importance of 'context' Draper (2001:153f) correctly observes: 'The context in question is not simply our faith context, but also our cultural, socio-economic and our class interests'. Addressing liberation theologians like Itumeleng Mosala and Musa Dube we could rearrange the order of Draper's words and say that the context in question is not simply our cultural, socio-economic and our class interests but also our faith context. We have given examples in chapter five to illustrate that a theocentric dimension to mission does not necessarily dilute social concern. Our quest for identity must therefore be rooted in God, the source of that identity.

Our second evaluative area lies in question of the methods employed by liberation theologies in Africa in their quest for identity. Here we examine the focus on African experience, the struggle, praxis and the agency of the oppressed. The methods themselves were discussed in detail in chapter five. The intention here is to evaluate the extent to which these liberation methods, in their quest for Africa identity, measure up to the *missio Dei*.

First, liberation theologies foreground the experience of the oppressed. They are 'committed to the context of the poor and marginalized' (West 2001:169), and hence are also called 'contextual theologies'. Not only that, they take these poor and marginalized as their 'chief interlocutors' (Frostin 1988:11) or dialogue partners. Theology is done *with* them and not just *for* them – or so the theory goes. This methodological commitment is in line with *missio Dei*. We have seen the way God is context-specific. In the Exodus story God tells Moses how God had *seen* the suffering of Hebrews, *heard* their cries and *knew* their sorrows (Ex 3:7). Their experience of suffering mattered to God. Jesus' ministry was concentrated on the poor, marginalized peasants of Galilee. Liberation Theology's idea of the 'preferential option for the poor' derives from this conviction. Black Theology focused on the experience of politically oppressed and economically marginalized blacks under apartheid South Africa. African Women Theology continues to focus on gender oppression and the marginalization of the 'daughters of Anowa' (Oduyoye 1995a). Such context specificity is

not only affirming of the identity of the interlocutors; it is in line with the *missio Dei* as supremely demonstrated not only by the Exodus story, but also by the Incarnation.

The second methodological area is *struggle* as a theological tool for liberation. Conflict analysis and struggle are an integral part of the methodology of Liberation Theology (Frostin 1988). Liberation theologians in Africa came to the conclusion that the humanization of themselves and their interlocutors was not possible without struggle. Identity and self-worth have to be fought for and claimed. They are not willingly given by the oppressors. Historically this has proved to be true again and again. In South Africa and other colonized countries of Africa there had to be liberation wars before blacks could be recognised as political equals with the whites. Women have to struggle in ideological and programmatic ways to have their dignity affirmed. But does this struggle measure up to the *missio Dei* discussed above?

The Exodus story already referred to would suggest an affirmative answer to that question. Because Pharaoh's heart was 'hardened', God had to visit him with plagues before he would let God's people go. In chapter five we discussed Nolan's analysis of how Jesus had to struggle against the socio-religious system of the day in order to liberate its victims. Jesus' life was a life of struggle. This comes out very clearly in Hebrews 12:4 where the writer tells readers that they had not yet, like Jesus, struggled against sin to the point of shedding their blood. In the case of the quest for African identity some heroes like Steve Biko did struggle against structural sin to the point of shedding their blood.

Struggle, therefore, can be seen as an aspect of *missio Dei*. The question, however, is whether it is also compatible with divine love which is the greatest motivating factor for *missio Dei*. This of course begs the question: love for whom? There are two aspects to this question. There is first of all the issue of love for the oppressed themselves for whom, as we have seen, God has a special concern. Liberation theologians have determined that they must not only love these people; they must also help them to love themselves. Here we reiterate the words of Boesak (1978:29):

To ask blacks to love themselves is to ask them to hate oppression, dehumanization, and the cultivation of a slave mentality. It is to ask them to know that they are of infinite worth before God, that they have a precious human personality worthy of manifestation. It is to ask them to withstand any effort to make them believe the opposite.

These words clearly imply that love for the oppressed, and a quest for their identity is not inconsistent with struggle. But what about love for the oppressors? Is struggle not inconsistent with the Christian value of reconciliation? This issue was fully addressed in chapter five where it was concluded that love and reconciliation between the races and sexes must be based on equality, justice and authentic existence. Because oppression is dehumanising for the oppressors, as much as it is for the oppressed, struggle is seen as an expression of love even for those oppressors. This, however, cannot be the whole story. We pointed out in chapter five that some theologians like Mugambi (1995) and Villa-Vicencio (1992) are proposing solutions to Africa's identity crisis that move away from the reactive theologies of liberation and engage the proactive metaphor of 'reconstruction'. While these reconstruction theologies cannot *replace* liberation theologies, they can at least *supplement* them.

The third evaluative area is that of *praxis*. Contrary to western theologies which concentrate on reflection, liberation theologies in Africa have insisted on an equal emphasis being placed on action. The most popular biblical verse in some segments of the church is John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ...' This points to God's love not as an idea, nor just a sentiment. It was a self-giving love. That is the essence of *missio Dei*. On a theoretical level, therefore, the liberation theologies of Africa are right in insisting on theological praxis – action leading to reflection and vice versa. We saw in chapter five how African women theologians have taken a number of steps to be socially engaged with their interlocutors. We also expressed concern that black theologians did not show an equal practical demonstration of their theological commitment to praxis. For *missio Dei* praxis is not a theory. It is a lived commitment as the incarnation demonstrates.

The last methodological area for evaluation is that of activating the *agency* of the oppressed. Liberation, we concluded, is a part of *missio Dei*; it is also an important dimension in the quest for identity in African theology. But who carries out the work of liberating the oppressed? Chapter five highlighted the importance theoretically attached by liberation theologies to the agency of the poor. The next chapter will also highlight an educational model of empowerment that makes the agency of the oppressed in their own liberation indispensable if such liberation is to be genuine and credible. Is such activation of the agency of the oppressed compatible with *missio Dei*?

Biblical history recognises that God has mostly chosen to act *with* the oppressed for their liberation. To revert to the Exodus story (a favourite text with liberation theologians), God did not choose to ‘airlift’ the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt and drop them in Palestine, preferring rather to empower Moses to lead them out of Egypt. The simple stick in Moses’ hand would become a divine tool for ‘signs and wonders’ that God would perform through Moses to effect this liberation. In the New Testament we see Jesus performing various acts of salvation, including the feeding of the multitudes. In all these acts the active involvement of those to be saved was elicited. For example some among those to be fed donated their lunch which Jesus then multiplied to feed the multitudes. Even the paralysed man had to stand and walk as part of the process of his healing.

Some might argue, however, that the greatest act of salvation, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, should be treated as the exception – that there can be no contribution by the sinner to his/her salvation. This argument cannot be accepted in its entirety, however. True, the dead, as in the case of Lazarus, cannot raise themselves. That would be true of the spiritually dead as well. At the same time the New Testament is full of imperatives calling on such people to respond to the salvific acts of Jesus Christ. They are to ‘believe in Jesus’ name’, and ‘receive him’ (John 1:12); they are to ‘confess with their mouths’ and ‘believe in their hearts’ (Rom 10:9). The sinner therefore still has to play an active role in his/her salvation.

It is therefore clear that *missio Dei* involves the agency of the poor. Moreover, as concluded in chapter five, the stance by liberation theologians that the oppressed people must take responsibility for liberating themselves is a booster for the positive identity of the oppressed. They are encouraged not to see themselves as helpless victims of an oppressive system. Nor should they see themselves as helpless recipients of ‘liberation’ coming from other people working on behalf of the oppressed. Magesa (2000:156) is therefore out of touch with recent research by writers like the Comaroffs (1989, 1991) and with our exposition of the *missio Dei* when he writes:

The point is that in all of this ‘Christian’ movement, it is difficult to portray honestly Africa and its inhabitants as actors, as agents in the development of their own life and history. They were but passive objects, so to speak, providing substance and space for someone else’s game. But for all practical purposes, the passive, slave substructure and status of the continent, event in the Christian religious arena, have not been eliminated.

The passivity observed by Magesa is only part of the ‘public transcript’ by the oppressed in the sight of the oppressors – passivity calculated to ensure survival. Beneath that passivity were all sorts of ‘hidden transcripts’ which made up the ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985, 1990). Activating the agency of the oppressed is creating an environment to enable them to express their resistance to oppression more openly.

It needs to be said, however, that activating the agency of the oppressed presupposes being socially engaged with them. As observed in chapter five, and also above, some of the liberation theologians have not shown a practical commitment in this area. They have remained too confined to the comfort zones of their academic arena; whereas mission as defined above requires moving out of one’s accustomed zone and living on someone else’s terms. To this extent these theologians fall short of a truly liberating *missio Dei*.

6.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that there is a link between the quest for identity in African Theology and the concept of mission. In order to do this it became necessary to define mission in the light of its conceptual development. This led to the conclusion that mission should be understood as *missio Dei*, effected through *missiones ecclesiae* and *missio hominum*.

The explication of the *missio Dei* concept helped us to examine those of its purposes that link it with the quest for identity in African Theology. Firstly we saw that when *missio Dei* is directed to the anthropological world its first aim is to restore and protect the image of God in humankind. The second purpose of *missio Dei*, we discovered, is to express God’s grace through salvation and liberation for human beings. In this light the quest for identity becomes a theo-logical imperative, even when effected by those who may not consciously acknowledge God.

When these ideas around the *missio Dei* concept were applied to the inculturation theologies of Africa, we concluded that their purpose of restoring the religio-cultural identity of the Africans, shattered European value-setting of the 19th and early 20th century colonialists and the missionaries who accompanied them is consistent with the *missio Dei* purpose of restoring the *imago Dei*. When we applied the *missio Dei* methodology to that of the inculturation theologies we found that they

score highly in the area of seeking continuity with the past, but not so highly in the area of being socially engaged.

In a similar way we applied the *missio Dei* concept to the liberation theologies of Africa – Black Theology and African Women Theology. Their goal of liberation, self-realisation and humanisation is consonant with the pursuit of *imago Dei* on the horizontal plain. We critiqued some of the liberation theologians for limiting the context of their quest for identity to the socio-political area and pleaded for the widening of the context to include the faith context. On methodology we compared the liberation theologies' focus on the experience of the interlocutors, and their focus on struggle, praxis and the activation of the agency of the oppressed with the *missio Dei*. On all these fronts we made a positive evaluation of the quest for identity in the theologies, at least as far as their theoretical commitment is concerned. The greatest shortcoming of some of these theologians, especially those who fall in the Black Theology category, has been identified as their limited social engagement. As long as their theology remains a conversation between academicians sitting in the ivory tower, their impact on the ordinary Africans remains limited.

Putting the two theological streams together in the light of *missio Dei*, we need to conclude with a few overall observations. Firstly, the quest for identity in African Theology helps to make God real to the Africans. This is because such a quest demonstrates that the gospel is commensurate with achievement of black humanity, both culturally and in the socio-political realm. On the cultural level we agreed with Waruta (2000) that unless the Christian faith is seen to be truly African, it might suffer the same fate as the first two Christian epochs in Africa. On the socio-political level we saw in chapter five that young Africans during the apartheid era were disillusioned with a faith that was silent on the situation of their oppression, or was in collusion with oppressors. Without the rise of Black Theology and other forms of Liberation Theology, Christianity could conceivably have been doomed to failure in those contexts where liberation was a strongly felt need. In the same way African Women Theology is making God more real to the women who have for so long suffered under gender oppression.

The second observation is that the quest for identity in African Theology is an uncompleted agenda on the African continent. In the socio-political area many and newer forms of oppression continue. Political independence has not necessarily generated freedoms for millions of people on the

continent. Power hunger and economic greed by ruling cliques continue to expose many to oppression and economic marginalisation. Women's emancipation remains an ongoing issue despite significant gains achieved in many areas. It is a stance of this thesis that any form of oppression must negatively impact the identity of the oppressed. In the cultural area the double task of Christianising African tradition and Africanising Christianity remains unfinished. Waruta (2000:124) is quite categorical in saying that 'Africans have not succeeded in Africanising the Christian faith'. That may be an overstatement, considering all the work of translation theologians examined in chapter four. Nevertheless, we have pointed out that there is still a high level of identity crisis within the African church. Therefore for the sake of faithfulness to the *missio Dei* principles discussed, the various branches of African Theology cannot rest on their laurels.

The third observation is that to be true to *missio Dei*, the quest for identity in African Theology must combine local (contextual) relevance with a worldwide significance. In other words the significance of this quest for identity must go beyond Africa if African Christianity is to fulfil its missionary responsibilities for the rest of the world. This recognition is beginning to dawn on some theologians who are either African, or have a special heart for African Christianity. Bediako (2001:31) rightly says that 'African questions have a global significance while also being highly contextual' and that 'without a mind for mission and transformation, we shall not even discern the signs of the times'. There is recognition that the African apprehension of the Christian faith could have a significant impact on the church in other parts of the world. Walls (2001:50), for example, is right in saying:

Other things that African theology must do for the sake of African Christianity would equally be of wider ecumenical benefit. Enlightenment soteriology was necessarily focused on the salvation of the individual, because the intellectual matrix was the Cartesian autonomy of the self. ... But the African intellectual matrix is likely to call for a *theology of relationships*, a theology of belonging.

There can be no doubt, for example, that the *ubuntu* theology espoused by people like Tutu (1999) has a relevance that can impact the rest of the world. Tutu explains that *ubuntu* points to human interconnectedness and its practical implications for human behaviour. 'A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good ...' (:34). On the other hand a person with *ubuntu* is 'diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they

are' (:34). This kind of theology which arises from the fundamental values of Africanness would be beneficial to a world torn apart by conflict and oppression. For African Christianity to play a role in shaping worldwide Christianity it needs, *inter alia*, an empowering identity – but that, of course, is the subject of the next chapter.

One last observation is in order before we open up another chapter. One of the aspects of *missio Dei* discussed above is that it is also effected through *missio hominum*. This has two implications for the quest for identity in African Theology. Firstly, African Theology is right in utilizing resources from non-Christian sources in its quest for identity. After all truth is indeed God's truth. So we found in chapter four how inculturation theologies use insights from the primal religions of Africa, and in chapter five how Black Theology utilizes insights from, *inter alia*, the Black Consciousness Movement. Nevertheless for Christian theologians these insights find their integration in a critical reading and appropriation of the Bible which remains the basis of the Christian faith and religious experience (Grenholm & Patte 2000:6). The second implication, arising from the first, should be a humble recognition by Christian theologians that the quest for identity is not a preserve of the Christian faith and therefore to recognise the efforts of others who are engaged in the same quest, again to the extent that these other efforts do not conflict with basic Christian convictions. The next chapter, focussing on empowerment, will provide some concrete examples of how theoretical frameworks from non-Christian sources can be recognised by, and integrated into Christian thinking.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The quest for identity in African theology as a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission

Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength to bring about social, political and economic changes. In this sense, power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice (Martin Luther King Jr).

7.1 ORIENTATION

So far in this thesis we have problematized the concept of identity and then established that both inculturation and liberation theologies in Africa have their basis in a quest for African Christian identity. We have also problematized the concept of mission and established that *missio Dei* has to do with God establishing his rule in the world – the church being one of the agents for such mission.

We now bring this thesis to its culmination by focussing on the concept of empowerment and linking this concept with what has gone on before. The second section will establish what we mean by empowerment. This will result in the establishment of a theoretical framework of empowerment consisting of four interrelated concepts of power. The third section will, in a general way, establish that the quest for identity considered in previous chapters has a double link to the concept of empowerment. Firstly, it will be argued that the quest for identity is in itself a mission of empowerment. Secondly it will be argued that the quest for identity is also an empowerment for mission. In other words those who are empowered through the quest for identity themselves become, or can potentially become, agents of *missio Dei*. The fourth section will revisit the inculturation and the liberation theologies considered in previous chapters and assess the extent to which they qualify to be designated as both a mission of empowerment as well as an empowerment for mission. We then conclude with section five giving a summary and some conclusions to the chapter as a whole.

7.2 WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

Empowerment is the enabling of a person or a group of people *to be* or *to do* whatever is considered necessary or desirable. The assumption is that physical, emotional, psychological, legal or other forms of power or energy are needed for the required purposes. Love and justice predominate God's

purposes for which power is required.⁷³ Furthermore, just as there are forces that disempower people there are also forces that do empower them. Our fundamental assumption is therefore that power can be given or claimed just as it can be forcibly taken away, or lost through negligence or natural dissipation.

In this thesis our focus is on positive identity as a form of power, and by implication lack of positive identity as a source of disempowerment. Yet there are different ways of looking at power and its source. In order to appreciate the significance of the quest for identity in African theology in empowering Africans to be and to do what is necessary or desirable we begin by looking at four theoretical frameworks of power. One of these, the ontological power of being itself has already been considered in chapter three as it was particularly relevant also for the very definition of identity. Salient features of that form of power will be recalled as this chapter proceeds. The other three frameworks to be specifically considered in this chapter are the power of God, the power of critical consciousness and socio-political power.

7.2.1 In touch with the power of God: the theocentric model of empowerment

Any theological consideration of power and empowerment must start with God as the source of all power. In this section we consider the theocentric model of empowerment, drawing on concepts developed in the history of Christian thought, the Bible and traditional African religiosity.

Power of the Triune God in Christian theology and in the Bible

The idea of God as Trinity in Christian theology is a long established one. Our interest here is not to discuss the mysteries and the intricacies of the Trinity but to show how God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are seen as sources of power within Christian theology in general and in the Bible in particular.

The fatherhood of God is balanced by his almightiness. Three Creeds – the Apostles', the Nicene and the Jerusalem creeds – all begin by acknowledging 'God the Father almighty'. The linking of God's omnipotence with his fatherhood would suggest that God uses his power not just for its own

⁷³ In matthew 22:34-40 Jesus responds to a question from one of the Scribes (teachers of the Jewish law) by saying that the greatest commandment is to love God, followed by the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. He concludes by saying, 'On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'. This is in line with Micah 6:8 which stipulates justice and mercy as being among the LORD's requirements.

sake but for the wellbeing of humankind. Lochman (1980) thus sees the key to the omnipotence of God in the prophetic tradition as lying in the Exodus event. 'The basis of Israel's faith in the divine omnipotence is ... a coherent and connected event of liberation' (:54). Similarly Lochman (:54) says that the almightiness of God in apostolic tradition 'is experienced in the cross and resurrection and proclaimed by reference to these Easter events'. What this means, in short, is that God's omnipotence is characterized 'not by the love of power but by the power of love' (:55).

Karl Barth (1966:46f) gives a very exalted picture of what the almightiness of God means.

God is almighty' means in the first instance that He is might. And might means ability, possibility in view of a reality. Where reality is created, determined and preserved, there exists a possibility, lying at its basis. And now it is stated of God that He Himself has possibility, He has this ability which is the foundation of reality, its determinant and its support: he has almightiness, that is, He has everything, He is the basic measure of everything real and everything possible. There is no reality which does not rest upon Him as its possibility, no possibility, no basis of reality, which would limit Him or be a hindrance to Him. He is able to do what He wills. Thus God's power might also be described as God's freedom. God is simply free. The concepts of eternity, omnipresence, infinity are included in it. He is mighty over everything that is possible in space and in time; He is the measure and the basis of time and space; He has no limit.

Yet even Barth, for all his exalted view of the almightiness of God goes on to oppose the idea that God is simply 'power in itself' (:47-49). In other words God's power is not power for the sake of power; neither is it power for the sake of tyranny. 'God's omnipotence ... is thus the power of the God who is in Himself *love*. ... God's power is holy, righteous, merciful, patient, kindly power. What distinguishes God's power from impotence is that He is the triune God' (:49, emphasis in the original). Barth's view is therefore compatible with Lochman idea of the power of love which is opposed to the love of power. Anderson (1996:9) gives an admirable characterization of God's power:

According to the story that unfolds in the Pentateuch ... God's power is not experienced as brute force that terrifies and devastates but is revealed as redemptive concern and ethical demand. ... One would think that human beings, standing before the earthquake, wind, and fire of God's holy power, would be overwhelmed with terror and paralysed with fear. Yet just the opposite happens, according to the Exodus-Sinai story. God's power does not crush human freedom but 'addresses' it; it does not prompt despair over human weakness but summons to action and covenant relationship.

The emphasis above on God's omnipotence accompanied by his power of love brings assurance that God's power brings about what God's love desires. Some testimonies from the Bible will be given below to show that part of what God's love desires for his people is an assured identity. That includes their liberation in the face of otherwise overwhelming odds. That also includes giving them a sense of purpose – that of being agents for the effecting of his rule.

What follows now are three testimonies or affirmations from the Bible of the Triune God as a source of empowerment for his people. These have been chosen in order to put the spotlight successively on the power that derives from God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. On the basis of the generally accepted Trinitarian teaching the whole Godhead is involved in the actions of each member of the Trinity even though one or the other member is foregrounded in terms of particular manifestations of God's work. A detailed exegesis of the following passages, and the critical biblical issues involved, is not warranted by the nature and purpose of this thesis. What is in focus is how the Triune God is the source of empowering identity.

The first testimony is the song of triumph as recorded in Exodus 15:1-18 which verse 1 attributes to 'Moses and the Israelites'. The background to the song or poem is that through a series of miracles God, through Moses, had led a band of Israelite slaves out of Egypt and towards the 'Promised land'. Chapter 14 depicts Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, deciding to pursue these people with a large army and more than six hundred chariots. Naturally, when the Israelites saw this hot pursuit they were terrified. Moses tried to calm them: 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today' (14:13). When Moses stretched out his hand over the Red sea the waters divided, and the Israelites crossed on dry ground. When Pharaoh and the Egyptian army tried to cross through the same passage they got stuck and the waters, which were banked up on either side, then just covered them up.

In the song of deliverance that follows, Yahweh's power of deliverance is highlighted throughout. He is said to be 'highly exalted' because 'the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea' (ver. 1). God's right hand is 'majestic in power' as was shown by the way he had 'shattered the enemy' (ver. 6). All other enemies who might stand in the way of the establishment of this band as a nation will be rendered powerless in the face of God's power (ver. 14-16). It was power utilized in the service of love: 'In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In our strength you

guide them to your holy dwelling' (ver 13). God's people are able to participate in his power: 'Yahweh is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation' (ver 2). There are, of course, some problematic elements in this song. For a start African Women Theology would question its exclusive male imaging of God. The second Part of the song (ver. 13-18) also bears marks of the ideological legitimation of the ruthless process of settlement which displaced some local residents of Palestine. But as a song by freed slaves, it bears testimony to the power of God to deliver the poor and marginalized. The song testifies to both the supremacy of God and the fact that God's people are allowed to participate in his power. The song also has a strong message on empowering identity of which God is the source. It shows God to be on the side of the poor and the oppressed. It also shows God leading them to their own land where they were to be established as a nation.

We focus now on the second Person of the Trinity as a source of empowering identity. John 1:12-13 reads:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The word Greek word translated here as 'right' is *ἐξουσία*, which according to Lightfoot (1960:83), also carries the meaning of 'authority' or legal 'power' deriving from divine birth. Knowling (1900:56f) explains the Greek word *δύναμις* as 'power, natural ability, inherent power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature or which a person or thing exerts or puts forth'. He distinguishes this from *ἐξουσία* meaning 'authority either as delegated or unrestrained, the liberty of doing as one pleases'. Using this distinction we can say that to God belongs all *δύναμις* and all *ἐξουσία* but that human beings can share in these by virtue of 'vital participation' (see below) in the power of God. In the case of the John 1:12 text is the *ἐξουσία* that human beings can participate in. We will see how the same is true of *δύναμις* when we consider the Acts 1:8 text.

John 1:12f carries profound implications for empowering identity. It means that Africans, by virtue of 'receiving Jesus' and exercising faith in him, have the authority to become children of God. It means they can fully accept themselves because God, through Christ, has accepted them. They do not have to be technologically sophisticated or have the western style military power to be worthwhile human beings. There can be no higher sense of belonging, nor a higher status than being

children of God. Earlier in this chapter we defined empowerment as ‘the enabling of a person or a group of people *to be* or *to do* whatever is considered necessary or desirable’. In terms of this definition being or doing requires *δυναμῖς* and/or *ἐξουσία*. John 1:12 identifies Christ as the source of empowering identity in terms of *ἐξουσία*.

We go now to the third Person of the Trinity as a source of empowering identity. Our text this time is Acts 1:8: ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’. What is noteworthy about this text is that the disciples were promised the *δυναμῖς* when the Holy Spirit came upon them. That means that the power of the Holy Spirit would reside in them, enabling them to do what they would have been unable to do by their own human power. They would be able to be witnesses to Jesus. Knowling (1900:57) points out that the witnessing being referred to here was more than that of telling facts about Jesus, but somehow exhibiting the fruit of their ‘direct personal relationship’ with him. In other words, what they were to say and do would in effect be a continuation of Jesus’ own work. The book of Acts shows what this was to entail, at least on the part of people like Peter and John, and Paul whose conversion is reported in chapter nine. Among other things they were to courageously proclaim the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and thereby win a following for Jesus (Acts 2). They would perform miracles, such as the healing of the crippled beggar (Acts 3). They would defy the Sanhedrin when the latter ordered them to stop preaching and performing miracles (Acts 4). Paul was to undertake three major missionary journeys (Acts 13-20) during which more miracles would take place and Christianity increasingly become a gentile faith. All this was made possible by the *δυναμῖς* of the Holy Spirit which the infant church received on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). One more example of the work of the Holy Spirit in the infant church is recorded in Acts 13:2-3:

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

It can then be presumed that the ‘signs and wonders’ that accompanied the ministry of Paul during these journeys were a result of the Spirit given *δυναμῖς* at work in him. This text further shows that the release of the power of the Holy Spirit was made possible through worshipping, fasting and prayer. These are activities which we will later associate with ‘vital participation’.

It is possible to associate this work of the Holy Spirit with empowering identity. For a start the very fact of the Holy Spirit enabling them to be Jesus' witnesses would give them a lot of significance. This would fill them with a sense of purpose, or what Tillich called 'vocational consciousness' (see below). They would fulfil their purpose in the *δυναμεις* of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts shows that the witness of the infant church was unstoppable, even by persecution from the Sanhedrin.

Looking over the ground covered in this chapter so far, we see that the Triune God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, is the source of an empowering identity which gives rise to a 'vocational consciousness'. The question is how this power can be appropriated. The clue may lie in what Bediako (1995:103-106) calls 'vital participation' in divine power.

Vital participation in divine power

According to Bediako vital participation in the power of God is the central aspect of the 'primal imagination' which is synonymous with 'primal worldview' (1995:106 note 5). The use of the word 'imagination' is perhaps unfortunate as it tends to suggest an activity that is restricted to the mind. The more established concept of 'worldview' seems to serve better in this case. Primal worldview is a way of viewing the Transcendent as permeating and powerfully influencing the whole of the visible reality, including the human beings' entire culture. It is a view that takes all of life as a 'spiritual existence' (:93) and makes religion not a compartment of culture but the motivating force of the whole culture.

To clarify this point Bediako (:93-96) utilizes Harold Turner's six-feature analysis of the 'nature of the primal world-view'. The first feature is a 'sense of kinship with nature' (:93), affirming the interdependence of human life with the rest of nature. The second is the sense of human weakness, vulnerability and finitude leading to a quest for power – power that does not naturally reside in humans but is available from the Transcendent powers with which humans are in constant contact. Thirdly, there is the conviction that the universe is saturated with living spiritual powers or beings more powerful than human beings. These are the powers that ultimately determine what happens in the visible world. Fourthly, there is a belief that humans can enter into a relationship with the benevolent spirit powers – to receive from them power, blessings, protection etc. Fifthly, there is an 'acute sense of the reality of the after-life' (:94) which then leads to the belief in the importance and power of the ancestral spirits. Lastly, there is a belief in the wholeness of the universe 'a

sacramental universe where there is no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual' (:95). Therefore 'the "physical" acts as a vehicle for "spiritual" power whilst the physical realm is held to be patterned on the model of the spiritual world beyond' (:95). According to Bediako (:96) it is this last feature 'conveying the primal conception of the universe as a unified cosmic system, essentially spiritual, which provides the real key to the entire structure'.

As we look at the six-feature analysis given above we can say that it is the fact of the universe being a unified spiritual whole with the power of the Transcendent permeating the whole universe that represents the central characteristic of the primal worldview. It is 'vital participation' in the Transcendent that made prophet William Wade Harris of Liberia ⁷⁴ 'a paradigm both of a non-western and essentially *primal* apprehension of the Gospel and also of a settled self-consciousness as African Christian, which is uncluttered by western missionary controls' (:91f, italics in the original). For prophet Harris it was the vital participation in the power of the Transcendent manifested in trance-visitations by angel Gabriel, Moses, Elijah and Jesus which gave him his prophetic mission (:92). His religion was therefore a 'system of power' rather than a 'system of ideas' (:106). Healings, exorcisms and other supernatural manifestations arise from such a vital participation in the Transcendent. This is because vital participation enables human beings to 'experience and share in divine life and nature' (:103). Indeed 'the community that is open to the manifestations of the Transcendent comes to participate in the Transcendent' (:103).

The concept of human beings participating in the power of the Transcendent had already been anticipated by the concept of 'vital force' explicated by Placide Tempels in his *Bantu philosophy* (1959). In chapter three we explained in detail Tempels' view that to the Bantu, the whole reality is an interaction of forces arranged in a hierarchy with God the Creator as the highest and the source of all forces. We noted how God 'gives existence, power of survival and of increase, to other forces' (:41). We concluded our survey of Tempels by saying that the pursuit of the vital force is the basis of African religion and ethics.

This recollection of Tempels' concept of 'vital force' in Bantu philosophy adds weight to Bediako's analysis of 'vital participation' in the power of the Transcendent. Therefore when looking for a

⁷⁴ William Wade Harris of Liberia was 'a trail blazer and new kind of religious personage on the African scene, the first independent African Christian prophet' (Bediako 2000:85).

source of empowerment for African identity the area of the Transcendent should become a primary searching ground.

However, this does not necessarily mean that African theologians must subscribe to the total ontology of the African traditional worldview as explicated by Tempels (see chapter three) and Mbiti (see chapter four). Bediako (1995:107 note 5) makes a clear distinction between a primal 'religious system' and a primal 'religious culture'. A primal religious system like African Traditional Religion would involve, *inter alia*, the mediation of the 'living-dead' who maintain an active relationship with the living (see chapter four). However, such a primal religion 'may decline, disappear from public view, or even vanish altogether, while much of the religious culture with which they have been associated may continue' (:107, note 5). The primal worldview may continue in a religion like Christianity even when the African Traditional Religion itself has been superseded. Prophet Harris is in fact an illustration of the principle of holding on to the primal worldview without necessarily subscribing to his former primal religion. His radical conversion to Christianity involved consciously throwing away the primal religious system itself while retaining the primal religious culture. His teachings were based on the Bible which he was convinced was the Word of God (:92). Furthermore,

He taught that God was One and good, and that people were to repent of their sins, that the cult objects of the old religion – amulets and charms – were to be destroyed, that people were to believe in Jesus, to be baptised and to join churches ... and that those baptised were to live a new life and to prepare for the return of Christ.

(Bediako 1995:92)

According to Bediako (:93) this demonstrates 'how the primal imagination can transcend primal religions as distinctive religious systems. This therefore provides a paradigm for those who value the primal worldview but are uncomfortable with the actual primal religions. The important thing for our purposes here is that by operating in a primal mode one participates in the power of the divine, which in turn can uplift the identity of those who are in such a vital participation.

Bediako draws attention to the close affinity between Christianity and the primal worldview. Historically the affinity is evidenced by the fact that the major extensions of Christianity were 'solely into the societies with primal religious systems' (:95), with Africa being a prime example in recent history. Bediako (:96) suggests that the relationship between Christianity and primal

religions is 'not only historical but may also be phenomenological'. What westerners had thought was furthest removed from Christianity turned out to be closer than other religious systems (:95), which means those from primal religions only need a minimal paradigm shift in order to become Christians (:96).

The implication of the above analysis is that vital participation in the Transcendent which characterises African traditional religions is also the central feature of the Christian faith in its original Judaic setting as attested by the biblical texts we have considered above. Many other biblical texts point to the activity of the Spirit of God coming upon God's people in power. This is a far cry from the western form of Christianity which 'has hitherto been moulded by a worldview from which the living forces of the primal imagination seem to have been expelled' (:96). It is therefore appropriate and necessary that African Theology, in its search for empowerment, seeks a recovery of vital participation in the Transcendent and thus also a restoration of 'the ancient unity of theology and spirituality' (:105). Among other things worship, prayer and the exercise of 'Spiritual gifts' (1 Cor 12) should become part of the lived theology putting us in touch with the power of the Triune God.

Theocentric model of empowerment: an evaluation

It may perhaps be argued that the inclusion of the concept of 'vital participation' from African religiosity is inappropriate in a section dealing with the theocentric model of empowerment. Harold Turner's six feature analysis as well as Tempels' analysis of 'vital force' suggest power from other spiritual forces including the divinities, the living-dead and others besides. It may be argued that such powers are not 'theocentric'. This argument can, however, be countered by saying that in traditional African religiosity all power ultimately derives from God even if such power may be diffused down to the least powerful form of existence. This point was made in the analysis of Tempels' views in chapter three. From that point of view it is appropriate to include concepts from African religiosity here.

The combination of concepts on God's power arising from historical Christian theology, the Bible and the African concept of vital participation in the Transcendent is useful to our search for empowering identity. It brings us to the concept of God and transcendent power as always known by Africans. It also provides for holism, the fact that under God as known in the primal worldview

the whole of life participates in a spiritual existence with God as the greatest spiritual power. The concept of vital participation means that God's power is available for all human needs, including the need for restoring the sense of African dignity devastated by the negative effects of Africa's contact with the West.

Bediako (1995) is right in emphasizing the sixth of Harold Turner's analytical features of the primal worldview – the one that sees the universe a unified, sacramental whole 'with no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual' (:95). For Bediako it is this feature 'which provides the real key to the entire structure' (:96). Unfortunately, however, Bediako does not use this wholeness to its maximum effect. He limits his application of this feature to religio-cultural issues and fails to make similar applications to socio-political ones. If God's power is available for the whole of life so that religion, properly understood, should not be a compartment of life but should permeate the whole of it, it becomes both appropriate and necessary to tap into God's power even for socio-political needs.

In order to make this theocentric model of empowerment more effective we enrich it with the thoughts of Buthelezi (1997)⁷⁵ whose article is appropriately entitled 'Salvation as wholeness'. Like Bediako Buthelezi also talks of the sacramental universe both in African traditional religions and in Christianity – a universe where 'religion and life belong together' (:85). In the African religiosity 'the whole rhythm of daily life was a continuous liturgy that permeated such commonplace things as eating, drinking, love-making etc' (:85). Bediako's concept of 'vital participation' is also represented in Buthelezi's idea of the 'existential experience' of God (:86), meaning that God's presence in traditional religion was a matter of practical experience not just intellectual conceptualisation. Buthelezi may of course be overstating his case here, for it is a well acknowledged fact that in many traditional societies God's presence was mediated through divinities and ancestral spirits – God himself being considered to be too exalted to be involved in day to day affairs of humans. Yet Buthelezi is right in another respect – that the spiritual power and presence of the transcendent spiritual powers was a matter of immediate experience for the Africans.

Buthelezi draws parallels between traditional spirituality and Christianity. Within Christianity, too, the whole of creation is sacramental, i.e. a means of mediating God's grace to humans. Buthelezi then applies this concept of holism to socio-political realities. To him holism must include the

⁷⁵ This article comes from a paper that Buthelezi first presented in 1972 at the University of Heidelberg. At that time Tutu was a leading spokesman of the South African Black Theology (Parratt 1997:85).

considerations of the 'politics of self' which opposes 'the colonization of the human self' (:87). This is another way of saying that because of the special relationship human beings have with God the 'right to selfhood' becomes 'elementary to man's humanity' (:87). Dehumanization is the opposite of what God intended for humans, and such dehumanization includes manipulation and poverty. Indeed any form of dehumanization gives rise to a quest for identity, for 'true or authentic humanity, a cry for human liberation in the face of the colonisation of the self by outside factors' (:87f). Dehumanization gives rise to the question 'How can I so live as to overcome what militates against the realization of my destiny as a human being?' (:87). The answer to such a quest for identity in the face of dehumanization brings us back to God who is concerned for all aspects of life. 'Empirical life (i.e. life as we experience it), in its social, economic and political setting, is our only place of rendezvous with God' (:89). Therefore

To live means to be at a point in the realm of created things wherein one receives and shares with others the life-sustaining gifts of God. To be cut off from these gifts is an aspect of alienation from the wholeness of life. As a social phenomenon that is the state of poverty (:89).

What is noteworthy in this summary of Buthelezi's views is that while Bediako (1995) embraces the concept of wholeness but applies it only to religio-cultural issues, Buthelezi takes the same concept and applies it to socio-political ones. Since Bediako is writing from an inculturational point of view and Buthelezi from a liberational one, their different applications of the concept of wholeness is entirely understandable. For our purposes, however, we need to affirm that the theocentric model of empowerment – being in touch with the power of the Triune God – has ramifications for the whole of human existence. We are therefore able to say that God is the ultimate source of our identity, and that through vital participation in his being we can defeat the dehumanizing forces of colonialism, imperialism and the western value-setting for what it means to be a human being. We will therefore correlate this model to our re-evaluation of the different theologies in Africa in their quest for empowering identity.

7.2.2 Critical consciousness as a source of empowerment for humanization: the educational model of empowerment

For critical consciousness as a source of empowerment for humanization we turn to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1993⁷⁶). Several reasons account for this choice. Firstly, Freire's work is set in Latin America (Brazil and Chile), a Third World context that forms a useful analogy with, while also making valuable lessons available to, Sub-Saharan Africa. Secondly, Freire's approach is educational, and this helps us achieve an interdisciplinary perspective which also serves to remind African theologians that they should see the educational dimension of their work. Thirdly, Freire takes an empowering grassroots approach to education and this correlates with the need, already articulated at various points in this thesis, for African theologians to be socially engaged. Fourthly, as will become clearer after the exposition below, Freire's dialogical model for the development of critical consciousness is highly compatible with the traditional African models of decision-making. Most African societies were not based on dictatorial leadership styles. In Zimbabwe the Shona culture heavily depended on the *padare* (decision-making gathering) whenever any important decisions needed to be made. A problem would be introduced to the people gathered and as many people as possible contributed to the discussion. Only when consensus emerged would the chief make his summing up pronouncement. The Ndebeles (the second-largest indigenous tribe in Zimbabwe) have a similar concept called *Indaba*. This concept is replicated in other African societies and going by different names. The Freire model extends this concept to the grassroots educational process of empowerment without limiting it to important decision-making occasions.

How does Freire look at empowerment?

Empowered people are those who exercise their critical consciousness to achieve their humanization, which is their historical vocation. According to Freire (1993:80) people with critical consciousness are those who are aware of the configuration of historical circumstances that limit their ability to express their full humanness (what Freire calls 'limit-situations') and direct their intentionality towards overcoming the limit-situations (what he calls 'limit-acts'). The critical thinker therefore 'perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity' and works for 'the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men' (:73).

⁷⁶ This book was first published in 1970.

Humanisation, the goal of critical consciousness, is Freire's way of affirming that human beings are subjects rather than objects. To be human means to be a 'subject of decision' (:25, note 1), that is to say a human being 'acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively' (:14). Becoming a subject in this way becomes for a human being an 'ontological vocation' (:56 and passim). Human beings are always seeking to humanize their world in order to humanize themselves in a way that animals cannot 'animalize' their world in order to 'animalize themselves' (:79). In fact 'Animals do not consider the world; they are immersed in it. In contrast, human beings emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand it and transform it with their labor' (:106).

Concern for humanization becomes especially pressing in view of the existence of dehumanization 'not only as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality' (:25). Oppression and domination have the effect of turning the oppressed into objects, hence dehumanizing them. In situations of economic, social, and political domination the oppressed become 'submerged in a situation in which ... critical awareness and response' is not possible (:12). Yet because humanization is an inescapable vocation even in the middle of submersion humans will continue to yearn for freedom and justice and 'struggle to recover their lost humanity' (:25f). Furthermore Freire (:26) asserts that:

Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human. This distortion occurs within history; but it is not an historical vocation. Indeed, to admit of dehumanization as an historical vocation would lead either to cynicism or total despair. ... [D]ehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed (Italics in the original).

In sum, then, Freire sees power as the critical consciousness necessary to fulfil the vocation of humanization in the face of all that 'dehumanizes the oppressed'.

'Pedagogy of the oppressed' – the essence

Liberative education consists of critical dialogue, mediated by the world, aimed at the development of such a critical consciousness. The dialogical process whereby the educator (who may be a politician, theologian or whatever other profession) stimulates such a critical consciousness is called *conscientização*, defined as 'learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and

to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (:17). In this thesis we will use the word 'conscientization' in the same sense that Freire uses the word *conscientização*.

Conscientization empowers people with critical consciousness in several ways. Firstly, conscientization creates an awareness of the unfinished and historical nature of being human. Conscientization, which Freire also calls 'problem posing education' (:passim)

affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness. In this incompleteness and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity.

(Freire 1993:65)

It is this awareness that human beings are not determined by fate that creates the 'vocation' to humanize themselves through critical intervention in reality. They do not have to passively adapt to whatever circumstances happen to obtain in their contexts.

Secondly, conscientization opens their eyes to the contradictions that exist between oppressors and the oppressed. Contradiction 'denotes the dialectical conflict between opposing social forces' (:28 note 2). Through conscientization they become aware not only of the dehumanizing power of this contradiction but also of their power to liberate both themselves and the oppressors who are themselves dehumanized by the very act of oppressing others (:26). They get to know that 'prescription' represents the imposition of the oppressor's choice upon the oppressed, 'transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness' (:28f). Even the 'attempt to "soften" the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed' gets recognised by the oppressed as representing 'false generosity' which can only be demonstrated as long as the oppressor also perpetuates injustice as well (:26). By contrast the oppressed appreciate that 'true generosity' consists in 'fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity' so that the hands of the oppressed 'need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world' (:27).

Thirdly, conscientization makes the oppressed aware that the world is the material out of which they as subjects can fashion their own history. They become aware that the world is ‘not a static and closed order, a *given* reality which man must accept and to which he must adjust; rather, it is a problem to be worked on and solved’ (:14). Without conscientization the oppressed are in danger of interpreting their suffering fatalistically, and therefore to become docile with regard to their suffering. Freire (:43f) aptly expresses this danger of fatalism as follows:

Fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of an historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people’s behavior. It almost always is related to the power of destiny or fate or fortune – inevitable forces – or to a distorted view of God. Under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed (especially the peasants, who are almost submerged in nature) see their suffering, the fruit of exploitation, as the will of God – as if God were the creator of this ‘organized disorder’.

Fourthly, conscientization helps the oppressed to be aware of their own false consciousness as a source of disempowerment. Freire (:27f) explains this false consciousness as follows:

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors’. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of ‘adhesion’ to the oppressor. Under these circumstances they cannot ‘consider’ him sufficiently clearly to objectivize him – to discover him ‘outside’ themselves.

It is because of this ‘adhesion to the oppressor’ that ‘at a certain point in their existential experience the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards the oppressors and their way of life’ even while also showing contempt towards the same oppressors (:44).

This ‘subordination to the consciousness of the master’ (:31), not only leads to the oppressed oppressing other oppressed people but also internalising ‘the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness’ (:45). They therefore look down on themselves and distrust their own ability to shape their future through their historical actions. They begin to acquire ‘a diffuse, magical belief in the invulnerability and power of the oppressor’ and to feel like “‘things” owned by the oppressor’ (:46). Such false consciousness therefore leads to a fear of freedom ‘which may equally well lead

them to desire the role of oppressor or bind them to the role of oppressed' (:28). It takes conscientization to reverse such false consciousness. Freire (:46) illustrates the development of critical consciousness which overcomes false consciousness in the words of a peasant who spoke out in a meeting and said

They used to say we were unproductive because we were lazy and drunkards. All lies. Now that we are respected as men, we're going to show everyone that we were never drunkards or lazy. We were exploited!

Fifthly, conscientization leads to praxis which Freire (:33) defines as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it'. Praxis is a way of talking about 'critical intervention in reality' (:34 and passim). This requires a dialectic interplay between critically recognising causes of oppression on the one hand and engaging in transforming action on the other. It requires a recognition that oppression is not a closed reality 'from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform' (:31) – a realization which must then lead the oppressed to engage in the struggle to free themselves.

Throughout the book Freire insists on the unity of action and reflection. Without action words constitute mere 'verbalism', while without reflection action becomes mere 'activism' (:69). Thus

The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection – true reflection – leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. In this sense, the praxis is the new *raison d'être* of the oppressed; and the revolution, which inaugurates the historical moment of this *raison d'être*, is not viable apart from their concomitant conscious involvement. Otherwise, action is pure activism (:48).

Sixthly, conscientization activates the agency of the oppressed. Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* recognises the catalytic role of the educator, in our case the African theologian. But no true liberation can come as a gift either from the oppressor or the educator. Because liberation (synonymous with humanization to Freire) is an ontological human vocation it must be based on the struggle of the oppressed themselves. As Freire (:27) says:

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it.

And this fight, because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence, lovelessness even when clothed in false generosity.

The alternative to activating the agency of the oppressed is to objectivize them either by making them passive receivers of continued oppression or by making them passive receivers of 'liberation'. Since being 'subjects' is the essence of humanisation either of the objectivizing alternatives is tantamount to dehumanizing the oppressed. Conscientization turns the oppressed into agents of their own liberation.

'Pedagogy of the oppressed' – the method

Liberative education, which Freire continually refers to as 'pedagogy of the oppressed', consists of an interaction of three realities – revolutionary leaders, the oppressed and the world. These realities cannot be isolated from each other. However, for analytical purposes we will briefly describe them separately and then see the role of dialogue in bringing them together.

Freire sees a clear role for revolutionary leaders (educators) in liberative education. Essentially it is the role of empowering the oppressed to achieve their own liberation. In order for this empowering to succeed revolutionary leaders must enter into a relationship of solidarity with the oppressed. Such a relationship must fulfil certain conditions in the revolutionary leaders. Firstly, the leader must exhibit 'profound love for the world and for people', i.e. a commitment to other people and the project of transforming (humanising) the world' (:70). Since 'Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself' it 'cannot exist in a relation of domination' (:70). The revolutionary leader must accept that the oppressed are as much subjects as s/he is. Secondly, the revolutionary leader needs the humility which recognises that 'At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know' (:71). Thirdly, revolutionary leaders need 'faith in humankind' (:71). This includes 'faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human' (:71). Such faith is not naïve, however. It recognises that 'although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power' (:72). Yet even this recognition will not allow the revolutionary leader to 'degenerate into paternalistic manipulation' of the oppressed (:72). The fourth quality required of revolutionary leaders is 'trust' – a quality that develops as

logical consequence of dialogue with the oppressed in an atmosphere of love, humility and faith (:72). Finally the revolutionary leader needs hope. This quality is necessary because ‘As the encounter of women and men seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious’ (:73).

If Freire sees a role for revolutionary leaders, he sees an even bigger role for the oppressed themselves. ‘Pedagogy of the oppressed’ already implies liberative education

forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade (:30, italics in the original).

Because of the agentic role of the oppressed as already articulated above, Freire’s model provides for their active participation even in determining the very content of education, which Freire regards as part of the very process of education itself (:74f). The education must proceed on the basis of the oppressed developing and acting on their own convictions rather than the convictions of the educators. As Freire says (:49), ‘The revolutionary leaders must realize that their own conviction of the necessity for struggle ... was not given to them by anyone else – if it is authentic. This conviction cannot be packaged and sold; it is reached, rather, by means of a totality of reflection and action’. Freire, however, recognises the interdependence of the leaders and the people. ‘The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity’ (:110).

Apart from the revolutionary leader and the oppressed there is the world or the oppressive context which forms the third component of the educational event. The world mediates the dialogue between the leader and the oppressed. It ‘impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes on the basis of which the program content of education can be built’ (:74). The fundamental presupposition is that the world is not a static reality to which people must adapt but rather a reality awaiting transformative praxis by human agents.

Having looked at the components required for empowering education to take place we now look at Freire's view of the dynamic educative event itself. To make it liberative (and therefore empowering) Freire developed a dialogical, 'problem-posing' approach which radically differs from the traditional 'banking concept' to education (:passim). In the banking concept of education the learners are regarded as passive receptacles of information that is banked in them by the teacher. This banking relationship 'involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified' (:52). The teacher's 'task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow alienated, and alienating verbosity' (:52). It is in fact a method that encourages rote learning, meekness and passivity in learners and that treats them as objects. It degrades the learners by assuming that they know nothing, and have to depend on the teacher who knows everything (:53). It is therefore a method of oppressors, or at least that uses oppressive tools designed to suppress the development of creativity and critical consciousness. As Freire (:47) rightly says, 'to substitute monologue, slogans, and communiqués for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication'. Elaborating on this harsh assessment of the 'banking' concept of education Freire (:53) asserts:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system.

Freire equates oppression and banking education and calls both 'necrophilic', meaning that they are 'nourished by love of death, not life' (:58). Furthermore, banking education 'anaesthetizes and inhibits creative power' while also maintaining 'the *submersion* of consciousness' (:62, italics in the original).

In contrast to the 'banking' system of education the problem-posing concept of education is an instrument of liberation (empowerment). It views reality as an unfolding history in the making in

which the student is a subject and not an object. It empowers the student to alter reality through a critical consciousness – a consciousness that perceives reality as ‘a *process*, undergoing constant transformation’ in which they can pursue their ‘ontological vocation’ of humanization by engaging ‘in the struggle for their liberation’ (:56). In this way they become history makers transcending the immobilizing effect of a belief in fate.

Such a critical consciousness, necessary for empowerment, happens through dialogue with other subjects (:58). For Freire (:69f) dialogue means ‘the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized’.

Therefore this dialogue

cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind (:69f).

It follows, then, that for this dialogue to be genuine the normal vertical teacher-student contradiction is overcome and a new relationship is established. As Freire says ‘Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach’ (:61). Furthermore (:64f)

Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation.

What this means is that the students are no longer, as in the banking system of education, docile listeners but are now ‘critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher’ (:62). From the

people's 'thematic universe' with its complex of 'generative themes' (:77f) the teacher-student poses problems which stimulate the dialogue which in turn creates the desired critical consciousness. 'The thematics which have come from the people return to them – not as contents to be deposited, but as problems to be solved' (:104). This is what Freire (:51) refers to as 'co-intentional education' whereby

Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement.

Educational model: A preliminary evaluation

This educational model is highly commendable because, as Freire himself says (:49) 'When people are already dehumanized, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanization'. Only as people are helped, through conscientization, to perceive their power to liberate themselves do they become truly humanized. Such humanization does not therefore consist in simply having more to eat but in regaining their humanity as subjects (:50).

In particular the Freire model correlates with the overall tasks of African Theology in three ways. Firstly, it demonstrates the need for a high level of social engagement with interlocutors. Secondly the model makes critical consciousness in itself a form of internal power. This creates a healthy balance with the theocentric model which locates power in an external source – God. Thirdly, this model provides a detailed practical methodology for the development of such critical consciousness. This correlates with the contextual nature of African theologies which eschews philosophical approaches to theology that are not grounded in the practical needs of the marginalized. These points will be elaborated on when we consider the mission of empowerment in African Theology.

A word of caution needs to be given at this point. Our use of the Freire model of empowerment does not mean that it is faultless. One of its glaring omissions is the power of the Transcendent. It puts undue emphasis on humanistic considerations, as though humans do not also have an important spiritual dimension linked to God and other transcendent powers. The theocentric model of empowerment considered above becomes a necessary corrective for this lack. The model may also

have idealistic elements in its emphasis that no amount of liberation can be achieved *for* the oppressed but only *with* them. Historical experience shows that there are some dimensions of liberation that depend on what some heroes do on behalf of the oppressed. The political liberation action model that we now turn to is a needed corrective here. In short, the Freire model must be taken together with all the other models being considered in this section so that a more balanced perspective can be achieved.

7.2.3 Liberation: The Socio-political model of empowerment

In situations of political, social and economic oppression what role can theology play in empowering the oppressed? Freire, we have noted, opts for an educational model of empowering the oppressed through conscientization. We could call this a micro-level empowerment of the oppressed. It aims to give inner strength to the oppressed through small group work. We now examine what we may call a macro-level model of empowerment as suggested by political theologians Anthony Balcomb (1993) and Albert Nolan (1988). According to these theologians empowerment for the oppressed takes the form of ideological legitimization of liberation forces in society from a theological point of view with the aim of transforming the larger socio-political structures of society.

Several advantages accrue from examining the socio-political model of empowerment of Balcomb and Nolan. Firstly, their context is apartheid South Africa where the level of oppression impacted very severely on the identity of the Black majority population of the country. It is a context that gave rise to the Black Theology that formed the subject of chapter five of this thesis. It is therefore a relevant context for this thesis. Secondly, their macro-level model of empowerment usefully complements the micro-level model provided by Freire. Thirdly, Balcomb and Nolan, being White theologians, fell into the category of the privileged – the ones whom the apartheid system was designed to benefit. The fact that they should have theologised in favour of the revolutionary struggle to dismantle the apartheid system draws our attention to the possibility that the gospel message can be apprehended in a way that transcends personal interests. This has considerable ramifications for legitimising, while also expanding the horizon of, the Black Theology of Liberation. Fourthly, as will be elucidated below, both Nolan and Balcomb consciously

acknowledge God as the source of all power. This gives us a way of critically looking at the extent to which Black theologians are being theo-logical⁷⁷ in their quest for African identity.

Nolan and Balcomb both adopt a contextual, critical approach to the apartheid situation and the role that the church played in legitimising either the struggle for liberation or the apartheid system. It is therefore advantageous to consider them together in this section. The fact that they also have some differences in emphasis⁷⁸ only serves to enrich the contribution that they jointly bring to our consideration of the socio-political model of empowerment.

At least four themes of empowerment arise from Nolan and Balcomb. These are: empowering social transformation, empowering gospel of salvation, empowering solidarity with the oppressed and empowering struggle. We will discuss each of these and then assess their usefulness as criteria for evaluating the quest for identity in African theology as a mission of empowerment.

Empowering social transformation

According to Nolan and Balcomb power has a positive, socially transformative sense which is compatible with the gospel. Power is the strength required to bring about social, economic and political transformation in order that the demands of love and justice might be met (Balcomb 1993: 178). To Nolan (1988:111) 'Salvation is a question of power and the use of power. The process of salvation is an almighty struggle for power and its aim is victory over all the powers of evil'. He therefore disagrees with Lord Acton's statement that 'all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely' and says that if this statement were true 'God would be the epitome of absolute

⁷⁷ I employ the term theo-logical to draw attention to an approach that makes God (Gk. Θεος) the centre of reflection (λογος). This contrasts with approaches which, while claiming to be 'theological' nevertheless marginalise God. I am indebted to Frostin (1988:passim) for the distinction between 'theo-logical' and 'theological' approaches.

⁷⁸ A reading of the two texts being analysed here shows that while Balcomb's strength is the socio-political analysis of the context which gave rise to 'third way theology', Nolan offers more extensive theological motivations for the church's involvement in the liberation struggle. Balcomb (1993:228-229) makes the point that Nolan's approach is too discontinuous with the orthodox position to be of much use to the church in the context of the end of the 1980s when the 'third way' position had become dominant. Balcomb therefore prefers the model provided by M.M. Thomas which he sees as being as politically radical as it is theologically orthodox. While Balcomb's utilization of the M.M. Thomas model is legitimate, he does not adequately justify his critique of Nolan. He accuses Nolan of too great a re-interpretation of historical Christian symbols like sin, salvation etc thereby causing outrage and/or amazement in people like Morphew and Nicol. Interestingly it was not the oppressed Africans who were outraged by Nolan's theology but white theologians whose theological orientation is philosophical rather than socio-political analysis. It may therefore be said that the real difference lies in the fact that while Balcomb sought to address and correct whites who practised 'third way theology' Nolan's interlocutors were the oppressed themselves.

corruption' (:112). What corrupts is not power, but its abuse. Power, as God means it to be exercised, is meant for service.

Service is the key. Power should be used to serve people, to protect them, save them and give them freedom. When power is misused to dominate, control and oppress people, it corrupts. Power is abused when it is exercised for the benefit of some at the expense of others. Power is a service when it is exercised for the benefit of everyone. The power that serves is a power that is shared by all. The power that dominates cannot be shared. ... In South Africa today we call it people's power: power that is shared by all, for the benefit of all and as a service to all. The Bible calls it God's power.

(Nolan 1988:112)

In the above quote Nolan takes a bold and controversial stance of equating God's power with 'people's power'. It would follow from what Nolan is saying that any political dispensation is reflecting God's power to the extent that it is democratic. Is God a democrat? Looked at from this perspective it is hard to agree with Nolan. But in a broader sense Nolan has a point. All power originates with God, and when properly used for the benefit of all people it becomes compatible with God's purpose. Nolan supplies a number of biblical illustrations for the use of power to transform society in the interest of love and justice. In the Old Testament God used his power to defeat the evil oppression of Pharaoh and save the Hebrew slaves (:113). In the New Testament 'Jesus emerges as a man of tremendous power and authority' in 'conflict with demonic powers' and with the oppressive system of holiness and purity (:113). Furthermore Jesus not only displayed power; he also empowered the poor, which is why he was considered a threat by the oppressive system which fought back, leading ultimately to Jesus being crucified (:113).

God's power becomes socially transformative when embodied in social structures. As Nolan (1988:115f) says, 'Structures of true power are structures that embody the right use of power: the power of service, the power of sharing, the power of solidarity and love, the power of faith and commitment, the power of hope. In the name of justice and freedom it is these embodiments of God's saving power that will confront the systems of sin and evil'. When people power is embodied in socio-political structures in this way the effect is to level the political/economic playing field for the benefit of all the people. In sum, positive social transformation is a way of empowering the oppressed.

In the light of this assertion African Theologies which are questing for identity will be interrogated on the extent to which they contribute to an empowering social transformation.

An empowering gospel of salvation

The above discussion already indicates that Nolan has a view of salvation that goes beyond the forgiveness of personal sins for the sake of qualifying people for entry into heaven. We now elucidate his understanding of the two key words 'gospel' and 'salvation' to indicate both their holistic and empowering nature.

The central task of the church, declares Nolan, is to proclaim the gospel of salvation. But what is the gospel? This question is so important to Nolan that he devotes a whole chapter in his book to answering it. For Nolan the fact that the 'same gospel can be expressed in an endless variety of ways' means that it is always contextual. 'The particular set of words or expressions that one may choose to use depends upon the language, culture and politics and needs of a particular time and place' (:8). What makes the gospel unchangeable to different people and different times is not the verbal content but the spirit or shape of the message. He then identifies at least six interrelated characteristics of the message that must be present to make that message qualify to be the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The first is that the message (Greek *εὐαγγέλιον*) 'must be good news' (:9), welcomed as such by those who hear the news. The news of the return from exile as proclaimed in Isaiah 52:7 was welcomed as *good* news (:9). Similarly the rule of God that Jesus came to proclaim was welcomed by the poor because they knew that it 'embodied all their hopes and aspirations' (:10). Furthermore, 'When the disciples went out and proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, it was the news of the century. The excitement after years and years of waiting and praying would be difficult to contain' (:10)

This leads naturally to the consideration of what would be 'good news' to the oppressed and suffering people of South Africa during the apartheid years. Nolan (:10-11) rightly insists that in the context of apartheid, good news would not consist in the mere repetition of the verbal forms that were used by the apostles or other characters in the Bible.

If we simply repeat the formulas of the past, our words may have the character of doctrine and dogma but they will not have the character of good news. We may be preaching perfectly orthodox doctrine but it is not the gospel for us today. ... If our message does not take the form of good news, it is simply not the Christian gospel (:10).

In the context of apartheid the gospel would be what promised a better future without oppression – news that would make the oppressed happy and hopeful about the future while also energising them to ‘respond to the challenges of life’ with ‘courage and strength (:11).

The second feature of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Nolan (1988:11-12) is that its primary interlocutors had to be the poor. In a situation of social contradictions ‘it is impossible to find any news that will be welcomed by everybody immediately and spontaneously as good news’ (:12). It is for this reason that ‘what Jesus said and did was good news for the poor and bad news for the rich and the powerful’ (:12). Not surprisingly ‘The rich and the powerful had no doubt that, however you looked at it, Jesus’ message was bad news – such bad news that he had to be silenced forever and handed over to the Romans to be crucified’ (:12). While this did not mean that the gospel was exclusively for the poor, Nolan (:12) is in no doubt that according to Jesus ‘there was no salvation for the rich while they remained rich, while they refused to share with the poor, while they continued to worship money instead of God’. The gospel becomes good news for the rich when they practice justice and mercy for the benefit of the oppressed. In other words, Nolan (:13) insists that ‘what we preach will not be the gospel of Jesus Christ ... if it does not have this characteristic of being good news for everyone by being in the first place good news for the poor’. The temptation to soften the gospel message so that it is not divisive and controversial must be resisted. Otherwise ‘We end up preaching abstract truths and vague generalities that are supposed to be equally applicable to everyone but, in fact, are good news for no one’ (:13).

Thirdly, the gospel must take the form of ‘a prophetic message for our times’, a message which is therefore not made up of timeless dogma (Nolan 1988:14). It must be a message about ‘what God is doing in these times’ (:14). Nolan goes on to illustrate this characteristic of the gospel from messages of Moses, Joshua, the prophets and Jesus himself (:14-15). They all avoided the tendency so prevalent in modern preaching which Nolan (:15) calls ‘the universalising tendency’ whose end result is ‘an abstract God who deals with abstract “man” in an abstract world’. From this Nolan (:15) concludes: ‘If the gospel for us in South Africa today is to have the shape of a prophetic message, it must proclaim news for our time, news about what God is doing and about to do in our

country'. This characteristic makes the gospel message empowering because it makes 'God alive and active in our midst' (:16).

The fourth characteristics of the gospel, already suggested by the preceding ones, is the newness of the message. Nolan (1988:16) argues that 'God remains the same precisely by always doing new things in every new set of circumstances'. His actions 'are not always repetitions of past actions'. Indeed 'The gospel can only be the same as in the past if it continues to be about the new things that God is doing in our time' (:17). At the same time 'it must be shaped by what has been said about God in the Bible in order to bring us the good news of what God is doing in South Africa today' (:17). Such gospel news becomes both exciting and relevant, and to that extent also empowering.

The fifth, and perhaps for Nolan, the most central characteristic of the gospel is that it must be Christ-centred (:17-19). What Jesus did and said must form the normative paradigm or shape of what we must do and say. This does not mean replicating the words and actions of Jesus, but rather to have 'the mind of Christ' as we deal with contemporary problems which may not be the same problems as Jesus dealt with. 'Having the mind of Christ means tackling the problems of our times in the spirit in which he tackled the problems of his times' (:18).

This in turn implies the sixth characteristic – that of 'reading the signs of the times' as the prophets and Jesus did (Nolan 1988:19-21). 'The process we call reading the signs of the times is the process of discovering the religious significance of public events, which means discerning, differentiating and interpreting them in relation to God' as Moses, the classical prophets, the apostle Paul and Jesus did (:20). Through this process conclusions are drawn about what God is doing and the way his people should respond in the given circumstances. In other words for Nolan reading the signs of the times is not a way of encouraging an acceptance of whatever is happening as being ordained by God and therefore to be passively accepted. On the contrary even negative signs such as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (:20) were signs to Moses that God would bring deliverance to his people. Such a reading of the signs of the time empowers the oppressed with courage to claim that which they perceive God is already effecting on their behalf.

These six characteristics make the gospel empowering to the oppressed. The gospel ceases to be a set of abstract ideas but a living experience of salvation. Nolan devotes another chapter to an exploration of 'salvation' as the central goal of the gospel message.

One of Nolan's salient points about salvation is that it is the defeat of evil in all its manifestations by the power of God. Expanding on this idea Nolan (:108f) points to 'the most serious heresy of European Christianity' – that of spiritualising salvation to make it apply only to the removal of personal guilt and 'the salvation of the soul'. The reason for such a reduction of the gospel is that

the only need for salvation that was experienced by European Christians who benefited from capitalism and colonialism was the need to have their feelings of guilt removed. They felt no need, and could not imagine how anyone could feel any need, to be saved from oppression, from an excess of suffering, from the powers of evil, from the system. All such matters were conveniently excluded from the arena of religion and salvation by the device of calling them material and worldly problems. The gospel is only concerned with 'spiritual' matters like the struggle with guilt and forgiveness that take place deep in the individual soul. All that God is concerned about is guilt and punishment for guilt.

Contrary to the above 'heresy' true salvation overcomes both our own personal guilt and the consequences of 'the sins of those who oppress us' (:108). Ultimately the content of salvation depends on the historical context of each group of people so that apart from forgiveness of personal guilt salvation may, depending on the context, mean reconciliation, an experience of justice or liberation from oppression (:108).

A related fundamental idea of salvation is that it is both God's responsibility and human responsibility (:106). 'In fact God's salvation, appears precisely at the moment when people start becoming subjects of their own history, when they begin to take responsibility for their own future' (:107). For this reason some forms of apocalyptic were contrary to Jesus' teaching on the rule of God because of their 'supernaturalism which excludes the work of human hands' and the 'closely related tendency to universalise the day of salvation, thereby divorcing it from this time and place' (:132).

What relevance does Nolan's understanding of the gospel of salvation have on African Theology's quest for identity? It is basically that African Theologies are part of the empowering gospel to the extent that they help to restore the shuttered identities of Africans who are the subject of this thesis. Furthermore, Nolan's ideas on the gospel of salvation help us to assess the extent to which African Theologies are approaching their quest in the right way. To assess this, three questions arise from the Nolan model. Firstly, to what extent are the marginalised Africans the real interlocutors of the African Theologies? We have noticed how the gospel must be good news to the poor. In the light of

this we have to examine the possibility that African Theologies may claim the marginalised Africans as their interlocutors when in practice they may be ivory tower pursuits for the satisfaction of the world of the academia. Secondly, relevance to the holistic needs of the interlocutors is demanded by this model. There is a possibility of working with a group of people yet adopting methods that may not be relevant to their real needs. Thirdly, the gospel of salvation must be seen to be God's work as much as it is human work. In assessing African Theologies we will therefore need ask about the extent to which God is brought into the picture and also the extent to which human commitment is called for in the process of achieving salvation. All these questions will become relevant when we return to the individual African Theologies below.

Empowering solidarity

The third interrelated feature of the socio-political model of empowerment is the requirement of solidarity with the oppressed. Both Nolan and Balcomb insist that in a situation of conflict (contradiction) between the oppressed and the system of oppression theologians must take sides with the oppressed rather than attempting to adopt a position of neutrality or what Balcomb (1993: passim) calls 'the third way'. Balcomb provides a thorough analysis of the three theological positions that were adopted in the apartheid era. One position ideologically aligned with and legitimated the apartheid establishment. On the other hand Black Theology ideologically aligned with and legitimised the revolution. Third-way theologians sought the path of non-alignment, hoping to avoid the power struggle between forces of preservation and revolution. We now need to consider two major lines of thought suggested by Balcomb and Nolan: why third way thinking had to be rejected in the context of apartheid and how solidarity with the oppressed is both theologically appropriate and empowering for them.

On the surface 'third way theology' presented plausible arguments for its position and was orthodox in outlook. It maintained that biblical teachings on love, forgiveness and reconciliation required the shunning of extreme positions to the right and to the left. It criticised the theology of the status quo for being ideologically aligned to oppressors who wanted to maintain an unjust system for the sake of unjustly maintaining their privileged political and economic position. It also criticised the Black Theology of liberation for being aligned to the ideology of revolution which is equally 'unbiblical'. The basic assumption all along is that the third way theology itself is 'biblical' and certainly not 'ideological'. This third way position, it was assumed, would safeguard the church's uniqueness by

avoiding the power struggle between the left and the right. These ideas are succinctly summarized by Balcomb (1993:63):

The third way was offered in conscious reaction to theologies that were perceived either to be legitimising revolution or repression. These theologies were seen to be linked with political ideologies of the 'left' and 'right'. A theology of liberation was merely the 'mirror image' of a theology of the status quo. This meant that these theologies had lost their distinctively Christian character and were therefore, at best, misguided versions of the truth and, at worst, perverted versions of the truth. The third way offered a Transcendent solution to the problem by asserting that its advocates were 'not influenced by any .. political agenda', had an 'ideological freedom which does not project any particular economic or political solution for South Africa', and had 'no purpose ... either to preserve the status quo or enhance revolutionary objectives'.

Balcomb then gives a sharp critique of this third way position. Its whole position was constructed on what he (:162f) calls a 'negative mythology of power' whose effect is to discourage Christians from 'participation in political activity that involves power struggle'. The myth, says Balcomb (:150f), tries to negate power by associating it with violence and negative views of ideology and power struggle.

Furthermore, political power is seen as being antithetical to truth (:153) spirituality (:155) and God's power (:156). In this way exponents of the third way build up a case for 'not becoming consciously involved in an agenda for political liberation' for 'to do so would be to become corrupted by the power dynamic operating within any political movement' (:159).

In debunking this myth Balcomb (:passim) demonstrates the impossibility of ideological neutrality, the necessity for power in its positive sense and the possibility of non-violent forms of struggle. Third way thinking 'resulted in its cooption into the legitimation mechanisms of the political centre, so that when the government itself became the chief contender for this terrain the third way found itself legitimising the policies of the National Party' (:150). Legitimation of economic liberalism and the politics of the centre was in fact a conscious or unconscious way for the third way theologians to protect their own interests and privileges. According to Balcomb (:22) 'liberal democracy in the context of the South African situation during the period of the eighties ... indicated less of a path towards social justice than it did a manoeuvring of pieces on the chessboard in order to retain as much political power as possible in the least obvious way as possible'. By

legitimising this liberal system and delegitimizing the revolution, third way theologians were similarly using a 'polemic device' to protect their own interests (:164f).

The fact that the protagonists of the third way are usually those who have political and economic interests in a stable society means that these interests are best served in a situation where there must be as much reform as possible with as little disturbance to the socio-economic infrastructure as possible. This involves the necessity to discredit as much as possible the politics of both right and left, whose agendas tend to destabilize the economy. ... The notion that political power is essentially corrupt needs to be created in such a way that betrays as little as possible that this in itself contains a political agenda.

(Balcomb 1993:165)

In an apartheid situation where there was already a huge disparity in political and economic power third way thinking with its pretence to neutrality and 'pseudoinnocence' (:165) would in effect favour those who already had power. 'Bluntly put, in a context of severe power discrepancies, to take a middle position was to side with the status quo' (:205). One could say that neutrality could only be defensible in a situation where the political and economic playing field was level. In the apartheid type of situation any supposed neutrality could actually be 'a psychological device used by those with power to circumvent the necessity of facing their complicity with the apartheid system' (:164f).

In a penetrating interrogation of Michael Cassidy's exegesis of the Exodus story in which 'the responsibility of the people's liberation did not lie with the people themselves but with God and Pharaoh', Balcomb (:166) questions the kind of innocence that makes 'virtue of powerlessness, weakness, and helplessness'. How else

does one account for this open denial of the legitimacy of the oppressed's struggle by one who would surely be considered, rightly or wrongly, as an oppressor? How does one account for this rejection by the powerful of the power struggle of the powerless? A rejection that went as far as calling for the immediate cessation of the oppressed's struggle for liberation, for the surrender of the oppressed's right to struggle, and the adoption of the belief that someone else will struggle on their behalf? The likelihood of those who were victims of the violence of apartheid buying into such a suggestion was slim indeed.

Having rejected the way of neutrality advocated by the third way Balcomb advocates throughout the book the need for an empowering solidarity with the oppressed in their struggle for freedom. He appeals to the theological framework supplied by M. M. Thomas for such a call to solidarity. This model, based on the context of 'the Indian struggle against British imperialism', 'presented an

extraordinarily holistic approach which enabled uncompromised and wholehearted involvement on the basis of the church's Transcendent calling and unique identity' (:28). It is a model which 'operates essentially within a theologically orthodox paradigm (in terms of a third way definition of orthodoxy) but with radically different interpretations of the political significance of the concerns of the third way' (:209). The model thus recognises 'the deeply committed theism of the 'Third World perception of reality' (211) while at the same time being committed to a liberatory solidarity with the oppressed. This contrasts with the 'emergent new prophetic paradigm of the last decade' which 'appeared too discontinuous with many of the accepted norms of orthodoxy obtaining within the South African context and therefore was not recognized by a potentially significant following in the church as a Christian theology of liberation' (:219). That emergent prophetic paradigm also had the unfortunate result of weakening 'the link between faith and politics' (:219). On the other hand third way thinking had the penchant for taking 'the flight into transcendence and the retreat into uniqueness' (:235) that prevented meaningful political involvement. The M. M. Thomas model avoids both weaknesses.

What Thomas' model does is to strengthen political commitment by strengthening the theological convictions that call for such a commitment in a way that political analysis on its own would not achieve. As Balcomb (:224) elucidates:

Dangerous memory ... derives more from belief in the solidarity of Jahweh with the poor and oppressed than in having a clear understanding of how oppressive a particular political situation is. Empowerment begins to happen not only when people do social analysis but when the powerless become convinced of the commitment of God to themselves and their interests, and they begin to relate this conviction to the whole context of their lives. The potency of the exodus motif lies in the intervention of a Transcendent God who works imminently for the literal and concrete liberation of his people more than in the political cogitations of a Moses or an Aaron.

From this Balcomb (:224) concludes that 'Without this kind of reflection prophetic theology will come across as mere reductionism - a kind of instrumentalist cooption of the Christian faith for political ends'.

For Thomas 'transcendence actually leads to a greater realization of the political significance of the church in terms of releasing a potential for radical transformation' (235). His theology is 'clear in its commitment both to radical transformation as well as to the uniqueness and identity of the Christian

faith' – a theology that 'recognizes the need for rigorous social analysis' while also realizing 'its primary task as theological reflection' (:235). While for Thomas the gospel transcends all political systems it also at the same time 'provides a criterion to make political, social and economic choices' (:237). The choices are on the side of the oppressed – a revolutionary solidarity for their liberation.

Nolan (1988:passim) similarly stresses the need for revolutionary solidarity with the oppressed even though his basis for doing so is a more radical reinterpretation of the gospel than anything Thomas attempted. For Nolan (:13f)

Any preaching of the gospel that tries to remain neutral with regard to issues that deeply affect the lives of people, like the issue of the rich and the poor, is in fact taking sides. It is taking sides with the status quo, even if that is not its intention, because its neutrality prevents change. The only way that the gospel can be, in the final analysis, good news for all is by being, in the first instance, good news for the poor.

All this implies a theo-logically driven solidarity with the oppressed. This does not mean patronising the oppressed and paternalistically speaking on their behalf. Here Balcomb expresses sentiments which are in agreement with the views of Freire which we have already analysed. He labels the tendency of 'speaking for others without necessarily representing them' (:232) a

new kind of imperialism – a tendency to analyze on the victims' behalf the nature of his or her oppression, to point out to the victim that his or her faith is ideological, or inadequate, or puerile, and then to disclose the 'true' means of liberation. The need to take up the cause and agenda of the poor and oppressed without the imposition of external agendas has been recognised in South Africa since SPROCAS⁷⁹ by all but those who still maintain a right wing or third way perspective.

As we have already noted in our discussions on Freire the answer to this 'new kind of imperialism' is to empower the oppressed to be their own liberators through a process of conscientization.

From the above analysis it becomes clear that taking sides with the oppressed from a theological point of view is more empowering for the oppressed than either political activism which ignores transcendence, or a flight into transcendence which results from a 'myth of neutrality' (:247). Theological and revolutionary solidarity with the oppressed has profound implications for their identity. The consciousness that God is on their side legitimises and energises the revolutionary struggle for liberation. According to this model African Theologies would enhance their chances of success in

⁷⁹ SPROCAS is an abbreviation for 'Special Project for the study of Christianity in an Apartheid Society'.

their quest for identity to the extent to which the oppressed Africans become their true interlocutors, and to the extent to which their methodology brings God into the picture.

Empowering struggle

We have already considered the element of empowering solidarity with the oppressed in the socio-political model of empowerment provided by Balcomb and Nolan. Such solidarity does not imply an inactive sympathy for their suffering. Such 'love without power' would only be 'sentimental and anaemic' (Balcomb 1993:178). Rather the model provides for legitimising revolutionary struggle on the part of the oppressed. But what do these theologians mean by the normally controversial words 'revolution' and 'struggle'?

Nolan (1988:173) explains 'revolution' as 'radical change, a change in the basic structures of a society or an institution. As such it must be clearly distinguished from the word 'reform', which means changes that merely adapt the present structures to changing circumstances'. As an example of a true revolutionary, Nolan refers to Jesus, saying that he and his disciples 'turned the world upside down' (:173). Balcomb (1993:176) has a similar understanding of revolution, agreeing with its goal of restructuring social structures to give 'freedom for political power to the lowest classes'. It is a 'radical social transformation' whose objective is the overturning of injustice and the achieving of 'real and responsible participation of people in the centres of society and state where power is exercised' (Balcomb 1993:23).

Such revolution can only be achieved through 'struggle', for it cannot be expected that the rich and the powerful would voluntarily give up their unjust power and privileges (Balcomb 1993:24f). The concepts 'revolution' and 'struggle', however, have raised a lot of concern among third way theologians because, as Balcomb (:242) explains:

Another point of difference between Thomas and the third way is in the definition of revolution. The third way is not able to conceive of revolution without the use of violence. Thomas rejects the notion that violence is the essence of the revolution, whether it come [sic] from the Establishment or the struggle against the Establishment. To make violence a criterion for analysis of the revolution is to limit a whole range of non-violent possibilities within the revolutionary struggle.

Such non-violent forms of struggle could include job stay-aways, and refusal to disobey unjust laws. In fact Balcomb (:239), following M. M. Thomas, argues for the 'church's involvement in the

revolution' 'in order to humanize it'. Furthermore, Balcomb (:245) correctly argues that 'there is a greater likelihood of a direct relationship between powerlessness and violence than between power and violence'. In other words, it is the exploited powerless people who are likely to manifest violence out of frustration or desperation. This must give incentive to the church to be involved in revolution whose goal is just power sharing. This involvement must be guided by two parameters: 'The first [is that] the radical nature of the gospel means that it has a transformative potential that is identifiable with non-violent revolution. The second is that it is impossible to identify revolution with the gospel to the point that the two are seen to be synonymous' (Balomb:176). Thus while the Christian faith may not be reduced to an ideology of political revolution, 'The church is under divine judgement for its lack of solidarity with the struggles for justice and for its inability to be the foretaste of the new humanity in Christ' (:242).

Empowering the powerless through participating in their struggle suggests a positive view of power that can be 'retrieved into a Christian framework' (Balcomb 1993:173). This is different from the coercive and manipulative form of power which calls for 'prophetic denunciation and unmasking' (:173). Balcomb criticises third way protagonists for failing to make such a distinction between forms of power, and therefore failing to make interventions to support the creative form of power. Elucidating this point Balcomb (:175) points out that

Just as opportunities presented themselves to the church for positive participation in transformatory actions elicited by liberatory forces in society so also were opportunities presented for negative participation. ... In other words it had no credibility when it came to condemning coercive and violent power because it had not shown solidarity when it came to supporting transformative and, commumcative power.

In sum Balcomb (:167) rejects 'the tendency to identify power itself, not just the misuse of it, as evil, and the penchant to associate powerlessness with the will of God'.

The Socio-political model of empowerment: A preliminary evaluation

The socio-political model of empowerment complements other models already considered. For example it complements the Tillich and Freire models by balancing the need for inner freedom with socio-political transformation. Furthermore, like the Freire model, the socio-political model is premised on the presupposition that socio-political reality is historically open-ended rather than being fixed by fate or ordained by God. It therefore recognises that oppression is humanly designed

and buttressed by ideologies which seek to protect self-interest. When the oppressed understand this they become 'conscientized' and are therefore motivated to seek freedom from oppression. The model therefore invites human beings to become subjects who can shape a better future characterised by justice and equality. The socio-political model also provides for taking sides with the oppressed and legitimising their struggle for freedom by bringing God into the socio-political realm. In our next section we will see how these views constitute a mission of empowerment.

However, the socio-political model cannot stand on its own. For example, while it highlights politics and economics it does not deal with cultural identity. This can be readily admitted. Balcomb and Nolan whom we considered in terms of this model were driven by a concern to address political and economic disparities during the apartheid era. The fact that they are not Africans in the sense in which this thesis is employing this concept is an added reason why cultural oppression did not form part of their theological purpose. Power, however, must include cultural integrity and not just politics and economics.

We will return to the socio-political model of empowerment to consider its contribution to the mission of empowerment.

7.3 THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY AS MISSION OF EMPOWERMENT AND EMPOWERMENT FOR MISSION

So far an exposition of the concept of empowerment has been given using various theoretical frameworks. This section now seeks to establish a link between identity, empowerment and mission. Two related lines of thought are being pursued here. Firstly, it is argued that the quest for identity constitutes a mission of empowerment. Secondly it is argued that the quest for identity is a (potential) empowerment for mission. After expounding these two points we will be in a position to revisit the African theologies discussed in previous chapters in order to determine the extent to which they correlate the theoretical framework.

7.3.1 The quest for identity as a mission of empowerment

How does theology's quest for identity bring about the empowerment of its interlocutors? Bearing in mind the different models of empowerment so far discussed in this thesis it is now possible to stipulate four ways in which African theology, through a quest for identity, can empower its

interlocutors. These are: vital participation in the power of God, awakening interlocutors to the power of being, the power of critical consciousness and the socio-political power.

Vital participation in the power of God

From the theocentric model of empowerment discussed above it is now possible to link the quest for identity with the consciousness of God's power. As discussed above God is the source of all power, and through 'vital participation', human beings share in this power. This God is not only the source of power. He is also the source of the African identity. We may at this point recall the two biblical illustrations of this discussed in the first chapter. The first one from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 26:5-10) was the declaration made at the time of the offering of the firstfruits. It is a declaration testifying to God's operation in all spheres of the life of the Hebrews. The second illustration, from the New Testament (Acts 4:5 – 12), was the story about Peter and John being able to confront the powerful Sanhedrin in spite of being uneducated, simple fishermen. These incidents are a biblical witness to God's power to transform identity, provided those whose identity is to be transformed are in touch with his power.

In view of this exposition we may conclude that African Theologies which foster faith in the living God are more likely to succeed in their quest for identity than those which may have a secularising impact on their interlocutors. As we revisit the various African theologies considered in previous chapters we will therefore be asking about the extent to which they 'bring God into the picture' (Nolan 1988:24) in their quest for African identity. In any sphere of life – political, economic or social – cultivating the divine dimension is a source of great empowerment.

Awakening interlocutors to the power of being

Paul Tillich's ontological model of power as power of being was reviewed in chapter three where the issue of identity was our main focus. We bring back this model at this point with a particular emphasis on how the quest for identity can become a mission of empowerment in the Tillich sense.

Tillich's notion of the power of being, we noted, is self-affirmation of life in spite of internal and external negation – in short the overcoming of forces which drive people towards non-being. We further noted that this power of being can only be manifested in the context of power relations – that interaction of power of being with other powers of being. It is in this interaction – what Tillich

(1954:87) calls 'struggle of power with power' – that the power of being of an individual or a group is either enhanced or diminished.

How, then, does the quest for identity as a mission of empowerment fit into this picture? Firstly, the knowledge that each human being is an ontological centre of power which can be enhanced or diminished in encounter with other powers is an important source of conscientization, especially as this concept already links up with the Bantu philosophy of vital force discussed in chapter three. western powers utilized technology, western knowledge and financial power to diminish the African's power of being. But what would happen if the Africans develop the conviction that they already have cultural values which are not in any way inferior to western technology and western money? In the Tillich sense that would become a 'counter force' (1954:46) by which the Africans can preserve their identity from being overwhelmed by what would otherwise be perceived as a stronger power. Tillich calls this 'communal self-affirmation' or 'the spirit of the group' (:46). Africans too are in a position to express their power of being through the 'power of symbols and ideas in which the life of a social group expresses itself' (:101f). A mission of empowerment is therefore expected to foster this 'communal self-affirmation'.

The Tillich model goes further than 'communal self-affirmation, however. It makes 'love' inseparable from power. Ontologically love is in one sense the uniting of that which belongs together but which has been separated. As discussed in chapter three, the greatest kind of separation is self-alienation – the self separated from itself. A mission of empowerment therefore fights against self-rejection and fosters an appreciation of the positive values of Africanness – and this would include an appreciation of African languages, and the positive indigenous knowledge systems which have been unnecessarily eroded by modernity. This sense of expressing love takes us back to the concept of self-affirmation already discussed. Love, however, has another Tillichian meaning – the necessity for destroying through compulsory power that which is against love (:49). That which separates the Africans from their God-given resources like land, or from vital participation in the power of God or from themselves becomes a legitimate cause for struggle. The love driven mission of empowerment must therefore strive to unite the separated, while also destroying that which is against love.

The third level of empowerment in the Tillich sense is the fostering of justice. The Tillichian ontological triad, as we discussed before, consists of power, love and justice which function in unison. It is not possible to destroy one of these without affecting the rest. In the case of justice we pointed out that it is ‘the form in which the power of being actualises itself’ in the ‘encounters of being with being’ (:54), which in effect means the power relations that result when one person or sociological group encounters another. Those power relations are said to be just when they result in freedom and equality. From this point of view a mission of empowerment is one that promotes freedom and equality in power relations. Equality means treating each power of being, whether an individual or a sociological group, according to its ‘intrinsic claim for justice’ (:58) – which means insisting that every person be treated as a person and not a thing (:60). If there are any social forces which dehumanize sections of humanity on the basis of race, class or culture, those forces need to be denounced in the name of justice. Justice demands the upholding of the principle of freedom as well. The mission of empowerment will promote both internal and external freedom. We recall how internal freedom is the ‘inner superiority of the person over enslaving conditions in the external world’ (:61) and that without such internal freedom, external freedom pays little dividends. In the case of Africans, fostering internal freedom is a way of countering the chronic and debilitating inferiority that we commented on in chapter three. We also noted, however, that internal freedom must be accompanied by external freedom – the removal of those ‘social conditions which prevent spiritual freedom either generally or for the great majority of people’ (:61). Therefore fostering the freedoms that are encapsulated, for example, in the South African Freedom Charter of 1955⁸⁰ is part of the mission of empowerment.

This Tillichian ontological model deals with concepts of power, love and justice which are crucial to Africa and African Theology. Yet its extremely abstract and philosophical approach makes it potentially foreign to the contextual, relational approach of African Theology. It has already been noted that analytical tools of social science are more serviceable to the contextual methodology of African Theology than philosophy. This does not, however, wipe out the value of all philosophical approaches. Even though Tillich interprets power, love and justice in ontological terms we have seen how he has also drawn out the practical implications of those terms. It is therefore argued that

⁸⁰ See appendix for the full text of the Freedom Charter.

a correlation of the agendas of African Theologies with Tillich's ontological exposition can only enrich the former and help to legitimise their concerns.

Conscientization: the power of critical consciousness

Having analysed the Freire model of empowerment and looked at its shortcomings we now examine its relevance to our theme of the quest for identity in African theology. We will summarise the overall relevance of this model and identify challenges it poses to African theology.

Like the other models we have examined, the Freire model is useful for our assessment of African Theology because it combines concepts of identity and empowerment. His is an educational model based on the need to help peasants to recover their humanity which has been stolen by oppressive circumstances in which they become submerged. When their critical consciousness is awakened they discover that they are, after all, human beings – subjects who are capable of directing their intentionality towards transforming their world. From feeling that they are nobodies, they now become convinced that they are subjects of their own destinies. From being fatalistically submerged in oppressive circumstances they now emerge from those circumstances, objectivize them and transform them. Their former 'culture of silence' is broken as they engage in liberating dialogue with other subjects – dialogue which helps uncover the world and diagnose the real reasons of their suffering. From being receivers of oppressive actions and false charity emanating from oppressors they now become agents of world transforming praxis. In sum their human identity is restored in the process of being empowered to express their humanity in ever increasing measure.

What challenge does this pose to African Theology? Arising from the Freire model three challenges are directed at African theology in its quest for an empowering African Christian identity. Firstly, African theologians must demonstrate a high level of social engagement and not be operating as an ivory tower. Moreover, the social engagement, in order to be empowering, must be between Subjects – those who co-intent on transforming and humanising reality. In no way must the people led be regarded as objects to be moulded by the leaders. The extent to which the leaders demonstrate love, faith and humility towards the people will need to be examined in the light of Freire's pedagogics.

Secondly, the extent to which African Theology develops critical consciousness in its interlocutors will become the subject of examination in the light of the Freire model. The explication of critical

consciousness given above will provide a framework for measuring the achievements or potential achievements of African Theology.

Thirdly, the methodology used by African Theology in the development of critical consciousness will be assessed in the light of the Freire model. As already explained above the banking approach to educational empowerment is counter-productive to the extent that it is an oppressive tool. The problem-posing dialogical ideal will be advanced as a way to advance the goals of African Theology.

Socio-political mission of empowerment

From our review of Nolan (1988) and Balcomb (1993) we discovered an emphasis on a theologically motivated socio-political transformation of societal structures with a view to bringing about justice and equality in society. We will now explore how this model is relevant to empowering identity. This question is all the more pertinent in view of the fact that most talk of identity in African Theology is linked to religio-cultural rather than socio-political issues. As an example of this bias, we noted in chapter four that Bediako's extensive book on *Theology and identity* does not address socio-political issues.

It is the argument of this thesis that socio-political issues are an integral part of a quest for identity. Even those Black and African women theologians who do not consciously articulate their theologies as a quest for identity are in fact engaged in such a quest. To understand this fact we have to ask what the effects of oppression are on people's identity. An answer to this question is supplied by a description of the interlocutors of liberation theologies as 'non-persons', 'the poor', 'marginalised' etc. These are not ontological but rather sociological categories. They describe people who have been rendered unimportant, insignificant or even expendable by the oppressive systems in which they exist. As Brown (1978: 65f) explains, such people are even treated as though they do not exist:

There are more nonpersons in society than 'the poors.' North American blacks have often been treated as though they did not exist; Ralph Ellison wrote a powerful indictment of North American society from a black perspective, with the eminently appropriate title *Invisible Man*.

As we will see below women are also generally included in the category of nonpersons. By rendering some people as 'nonpersons' socio-political oppression crushes the very centre of their identity. To translate this into Tillichian terms, oppression diminishes or destroys other people's

power of being. By insisting on socio-political transformation, the socio-political model seeks to restore the power and the dignity that belong to the identity of its interlocutors.

It is from this point of view that the socio-political model can rightly be considered as simultaneously a quest for identity and a mission of empowerment. The model shares some common features with other models already considered. For example it shares with the Tillich and Freire models the need to match inner freedom with outward conditions of freedom. When we apply this to African Theologies we will therefore need to assess whether they give attention to both inner and outer realities of freedom. Freire, as we have seen, utilizes the method of conscientization to achieve this inner and outer freedom. This agrees with the stance of the socio-political model we have considered whose presupposition is that the state of oppression is not ordained by God. Oppression is humanly designed and buttressed by ideologies which seek to protect self-interest. When the oppressed understand this they become 'conscientized' and therefore motivated to seek freedom from oppression.

Furthermore the socio-political model is a mission of empowerment through the methodology of taking sides with the oppressed and legitimising their struggle for freedom by bringing God into the socio-political realm. This stance raises relevant questions that we will address to the various African Theologies. To what extent are they socially engaged with their interlocutors? To what extent do they take sides with the oppressed? To what extent do they bring God into the situations of oppression with the view to legitimising the struggle for freedom?

There are, of course, some concerns surrounding the use of the socio-political model as a mission of empowerment. We have already considered some of these and concluded that the model needs to be supplemented by others. One more concern is whether this model is not overemphasising socio-political power at the expense of the power of the cross, the power of weakness. Ukken (1999), for example, discusses 'poverty, weakness and humility' as 'signs of God's kingdom on earth' as the title of his article articulates. The article argues that power and wealth are hindrances to the evangelisation of the Third World and urges missionaries to adopt the model of Christ crucified in poverty, weakness and humility. What appears to be weakness, argues Ukken, turns out to be the real power of God. This message immediately appears to be at variance with the socio-political model we have considered. Must we then choose between Ukken and the political theologians we

have considered? The answer lies in the recognition of different needs being addressed. At a macro-level, Ukken is certainly right that western missionaries who come to the Third World with a display technological, financial and other forms of power become a hindrance to the gospel. Such missionaries, coming as they do from privileged societies which benefited from years of colonialism and exploitation of Third World countries, need the model of crucifixion. But what about people in the Third World countries who have long been crucified through the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism? People whose identity is shattered surely need the message and model of the resurrection. This does not in any way negate the fact that at individual level all Christians need to maintain the dialectic of the crucifixion and the resurrection paradigms.

Thus the socio-political model of empowerment remains valid and useful in spite of the criticisms against it that we have considered.

7.3.2 The quest for identity as an empowerment for mission

In the above section we have established a framework for considering African Theology as a mission of empowerment. The focus was on holistically strengthening the interlocutors of African Theology in terms of their powers of being, critical consciousness, religio-cultural integrity and socio-economic life. At this point we shift our focus from the quest for identity as a mission of empowerment to a consideration of the quest for identity as an empowerment for mission. The intention now is to see what role African Christians, once empowered, can play in advancing the rule of God in the world.

A phenomenon of our time, according to several writers, is a shift in Christianity's centre of gravity from the Northern, economically developed countries to the Southern economically underdeveloped nations (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1992, Bediako 1995, 1996b, Walls 1996, 2000). For Walls (1996:9-15) the southward shift in Christianity's centre of gravity will make Third World theology, with its cultural conditioning, the representative Christian theology. Furthermore he considers Africa with its rapid growth in the Christian population to be so central to this southward shift in gravity that 'if you want to study Africa you have to know something about Christianity' and that 'it is equally true that if you want to know something about Christianity, you must know something about Africa' (2000:1). The future of world Christianity will be determined by the events and processes taking place in African Christianity (:1-3).

To the extent that Walls and others are right in their assessment, one of the critical implications of the southward shift is that African Christianity has a missionary responsibility that must begin at home (its own Jerusalem) but extending to the rest of the world (Acts 1:8). That missionary responsibility, in short, consists in being agents for advancing God's rule in the world (See chapter 6 for a full discussion of the meaning of mission). We therefore now consider what a healthy African Christian identity can contribute to worldwide Christianity, and how vocational consciousness can lead to the crossing of frontiers. We first establish a theoretical framework for these missiological realities and then move on to re-consider African Theology both as a mission of empowerment and as an empowerment for mission.

African Christian identity: Contribution to world Christianity

Our standpoint is that a strengthened Christian identity carries with it a significant missionary *dimension* which we will look for as we re-examine African Theologies. Firstly, a strong African Christian identity is likely to make it worthwhile for fellow Africans to want to become and remain Christians. If Christianity can be seen to be an African rather than a foreign religion (inculturation theologies) and that it is relevant to the project of social transformation so that people can live in freedom and equality (Liberation Theologies) then the possibility of making disciples for Christ in Africa becomes enhanced.

Secondly, a strong African identity can contribute to the shaping of world Christianity. Brown (1978:84-85) builds a six-point case for the need for Christians to be 'open to the insights of others': Firstly, 'What we see is not necessarily what is there'. Secondly, 'What we see depends on where we are standing'. By this Brown draws our attention to the importance of our context in determining the meaning we assign to experiences. Thirdly, 'When others tell us what they see, we need to know where they are standing as well as where we are standing'. Fourthly, 'No matter how much anybody sees, nobody sees it all'. He expounds this one by saying all of us 'need help from all sources in putting together an accurate picture of what is really going on' (:85). Fifthly, 'What we see is always subject to correction'. From these points Brown (:85) makes the following conclusion regarding biblical hermeneutics:

What we hear in a Biblical text may not actually be what the text is saying. What we hear depends in part on the viewpoint we bring to the text, and this will also be true of what others hear in the text; to know their viewpoint will help us to assess their interpretation. And since

nobody can possibly hear everything, we need not only to listen to what others hear but to be open to correction in the light of what they tell us.

For too long African Christians have listened to what western Christians have said about how the Christian faith is to be appropriated. It was one-way communication. Africans were made to feel that they had nothing worthwhile to say that could be of benefit to world Christianity. The result was that African Christianity was a pale shadow of western Christianity. The rise of African Theology in its various manifestation raises the hope that African Christians can take their rightful place as agents for God's rule, and not merely as receivers of the missionary effort from the West. As we re-examine African Theologies we will be concerned to draw out of them what the rest of the world can learn about Christianity from Africa. That is the missionary *dimension* of African Christianity.

We should go even further still. We should examine not just the missionary *dimension* in African Christianity but also the possibility of a missionary *intention*. For that reason the issue of vocational consciousness should be part of our missionary framework.

African Christian identity and vocational consciousness

Chapter 3 of this thesis examined what Tillich (1954:102-104) has called 'vocational consciousness' and established a general link between the quest for identity and such vocational consciousness. It was concluded in that chapter that the greater the sense of identity in a social group the greater the vocational consciousness.

The question now arises as to how the link between identity and vocational consciousness applies to the quest for African identity. This issue can easily be linked with what we said earlier about the power of being, and how much this is realised in encounter with other powers of being. In this case thoughtful Africans are now asking themselves whether their significance lies in only being victims of historical forces manifested by slavery, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Is there a sense in which Africans can be seen as agents not only of their own liberation but also agents who can have an impact on other powers of being? Does Africa have a vocational consciousness towards the rest of the world – a vocational consciousness that could be called her mission to the world? In the quest for African identity different voices are coming up with affirmative answers to these questions, and some examples of such voices will illustrate the point.

Mbiti (1969:269f) points out that ‘respectable writers have put in a lot of effort to prove that “Black Africa” was the mother of civilizations. Diop, for example, has demonstrated that the ancient Egyptian civilization was the product of “black” or “Negro” Africans’. What Mbiti says almost in passing is elaborated at great length by Mazrui (1986:72f) who describes an African ‘school of *romantic gloriana*’ as follows:

Defending themselves against European contempt, one school of African thought emphasised that Africa before the European had had its own complex civilisation of the kind that Europeans regarded as valid and important – civilisation which produced great kings, impressive empires and elaborate technological skills. This particular school of African thought looked especially to ancient Egypt as an African civilisation, and proceeded to emphasise Egypt’s contribution to the cultures and innovations of ancient Greece. ... We call this school of African assertion a *school of romantic gloriana*. It seeks to emphasise the glorious moments in Africa’s history defined in part by European measurements of skill and performance, including the measurements of material monuments (emphasis in the original).

Serious problems have, however, been raised against this ‘*romantic gloriana*’ as a way of validating Africa’s dignity and of demonstrating Africa’s vocational consciousness. In the above quotation Mazrui himself has already indicated one of its possible flaws, namely utilising ‘European measurements of skill and performance, including the measurements of material monuments’. In this way *romantic gloriana* does not escape from captivity to westernism. Mbiti (1969:268) criticises it, together with the whole idea of Négritude, as a ‘myth of the *Zamani*’ which articulates ‘the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world’. Because in Mbiti’s writings *Zamani* refers to a long past (see chapter 4), his criticism here implies that ‘*romantic gloriana*’ by itself is not coping with the reality of the present and the needs of the future in Africa. Appiah (1992:286) makes this criticism even more explicit when he says that those who look to Africa’s glorious past, whom he calls the ‘Egyptianists’, have ‘chosen to root Africa’s modern identity in an imaginary past’ and therefore ‘divert us ... from the problems of the present and the hopes of the future’.

The above criticisms may be accepted only as *potential* impediments to *romantic gloriana*. None of those criticisms faults the intention of *romantic gloriana*, which is to demonstrate that Africans are capable of making a sound contribution to the whole world based on the glorious past represented, for example, by the Great Zimbabwe ruins and ‘ancient empires of Ghana and Mali’ (Mazrui

1986:73). What is needed is not to displace the *romantic gloriana* but to supplement it with more generally accessible African contributions based on African criteria of validity.

From a missionary point of view, what is needed is to ask how an empowered sense of identity can enhance the vocational consciousness of African Christians in the form of being agents for the spreading of the rule of God beyond the African Christians themselves. Some of the frontiers that may need to be crossed in the process of spreading the rule of God may be geographical, cultural, racial and class. We take up this question in the next section. We will interrogate the different African Theologies we have already considered to see if they have any viable paradigm for African Christianity to be involved in missionary work.

7.4 THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN AFRICAN THEOLOGIES AS A MISSION OF EMPOWERMENT AND EMPOWERMENT FOR MISSION

Having established a theoretical framework for empowerment and the quest for identity as both a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission we are now in a position to revisit the different African Theologies and interrogate them in terms of that framework. We will consider in turn Inculturation Theology, Black Theology, and African Women Theology.

A word of caution needs to be given before we proceed. It is not intended that the above theoretical framework and its relationship to mission be used as an external measure by which to judge African Theologies. Had that been the intention African Theologies would be right in protesting that they need to be judged in terms of their own agendas and methodologies rather than by imported, foreign criteria. The point of view being taken here is that the categories chosen as the basis for interrogating African Theology are not foreign to African Theology but are instead logical conclusions of their own agendas. The use of historical Christian theology, Christian and non-Christian thinkers in clarifying these categories helps to show the universality of the need for the mission of empowerment and the empowerment for mission arising from the quest for identity. In other words critical correlations can help to create dialogue 'between trenchantly differing perspectives' (Balcomb 1993:120) without reducing one to the other.

7.4.1 The quest for African Christian identity in Inculturation Theology and its contribution to mission

That Inculturation Theology is a hermeneutic of identity with a dual task of Christianising the African tradition and Africanising the Christian faith has already been demonstrated in chapter four of this thesis. We now examine to what extent this constitutes a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission.

The quest for identity in Inculturation Theology: A mission of empowerment

Firstly we consider this theology as a mission of empowerment according to the theoretical model set out above. The clearest way this theology demonstrates a mission of empowerment is the way it evokes the power of the Transcendent – the theocentric model of empowerment. In this respect African Theology is more than a reaction against the western Enlightenment model of practising the Christian faith as a system of ideas rather than a system of power. African Theology, by reasserting the continuity of the primal worldview in the practice of the Christian faith, is helping to restore God's power to all aspects of life. God is, after all, the source of all power. As previously noted, the primal worldview recognises the spirituality of all existence with no dualism between the sacred and the secular. It therefore makes the power of God relevant to the whole of existence. It makes God's power available to ensure an elevated sense of identity, so that Africans do not need to be overwhelmed by the western technological and military power. It is the affirmation of the continuity of the God who Africans have always known that enabled Inculturation Theology to successfully overturn the negative evaluations of the African traditional society that prevailed in Europe and America before and during the colonial era.

Together with a focus on God there has also been a focus on the Africans themselves as bearers of God's revelation and God's power. This reactivating of the agency of Africans, which Inculturation Theology shares with other theologies in Africa, has arisen from the theocentric model. If appropriated properly and fully this has the potential to give Africans the 'power of being' that we have noted in Tillich's ontology. In our exposition of this concept we were able to link it with Tempels' concept of 'vital force' in Bantu philosophy. One task of African Theology is a recovery of this 'system of power' (Bediako 1995).

If Inculturation Theology derives its empowerment from the power of the Transcendent which also becomes the vital power of its interlocutors, how does it fare when it comes to the power of critical consciousness?

Although the Freire model of empowerment that we considered above would normally be associated with liberation from socio-political oppression there is no reason why it should not also apply to religio-cultural marginalization. As we have noted above this model does not only describe a mode of empowerment; it is simultaneously a method of achieving such empowerment – a method which we have identified as conscientization through educative dialogue. It is a method that requires a high level of social engagement between the educator-student and the students-educators. Unfortunately the inculturation theologians we have considered, while coming up with empowering ideas, have not shown much consciousness of the need to be socially engaged with ordinary Christians who are not in the world of academia. Without developing a method of directly impacting ordinary Christians, the probability remains that such Christians will remain dominated by Eurocentric thinking especially in this age of globalization.

As for socio-political empowerment the inculturation model as currently manifested is at its weakest. We have already noted in this thesis that Afro-pessimism arises from, inter-alia, corruption, military coups, civil wars and dictatorships in some African countries. Because the inculturation model has focussed so much on religio-cultural issues it has not addressed these political problems which have impoverished so many African people. This need not remain so, however. The inculturation model has the potential to widen its sphere of endeavour to socio-political issues. Since the primal worldview provides for a holistic view of life without dualisms between the religious and the political, the sacred and the secular (Bediako 1995) it already has theoretical tools for such political involvements. Indeed there are signs of an awakening to this responsibility for political empowerment amongst inculturation theologians. Bediako (2000:6) explains the reasons why, until recently, African Theology concentrated almost exclusively on religio-cultural issues of identity. Africa's pre-Christian past was being under-estimated, undervalued, neglected or condemned. Hence the 'predominant concern of African Theology' was to 'achieve a positive theological interpretation of the pre-Christian religious traditions of Africa'. Now that this task has largely been accomplished Bediako now recognises the need for a 'deeper insight' in African Theology which must embrace the liberation concerns of Black Theology. In the

light of the political and economic impoverishment of Africa, such a liberatively empowering concern by African Theology is overdue.

So far in this sub-section we have been re-evaluating Inculturation Theology as a mission of empowerment. We have discovered that it is already a mission of empowerment in some important respects, and potentially so in others. But is it also an empowerment for mission? In other words, does the empowerment that results from Inculturation Theology result in a vocational consciousness in the sense we have already explained?

The quest for identity in Inculturation Theology: An empowerment for mission

We have already broadly defined the missionary vocation by saying it is bringing about the rule of God in individuals, societies and nations. To sharpen this insight even further we can say that Christian mission is about working towards conversion or turning the totality of human life towards Christ (Walls 2000:4). The question then is how the quest for identity in Inculturation Theology is or can become a power for mission. This question can be answered in several ways.

Firstly, Inculturation Theology helps with the process of conversion at home, in sub-Saharan Africa itself. As Walls (2000:4) rightly says: 'The conversion of African culture is the task of turning to Christ what is already there'. The quest for African Christian identity is a way of saying to Africans that they can turn to Christ without ceasing to be Africans. With the rise of nationalism in Africa, Christianity faced a severe attack because of the close association of the nineteenth century western missionary movement with imperialism and colonialism. This fact has been highlighted in chapters two and three of this thesis. Without Inculturation Theology such attacks on Christianity would have been difficult if not impossible to fend off. Thus Idowu's work on the indigenization of the Christian church, Mbiti's work on African traditional religions and philosophy as *praeparatio evangelica* and the work of Sanneh and Bediako on the translatability of the Christian faith may have done much to prevent the demise of the Christian faith and to encourage those many Africans who want to affirm their Africanness to become and to remain Christians. In the Acts 1:8 pattern, Inculturation Theology has helped Christians to be Christ's witnesses in their Jerusalem.

But does Inculturation Theology also witness to Christ in non-African societies the world over? If the future of Christianity is to be decided by events and processes taking place in Africa, Asia and Latin America, it becomes important to ask about Africa's missionary responsibility to the rest of

the world. Here we confront a major obstacle in the form of the generally understood sense of mission as crossing geographical and cultural frontiers for the purpose of 'making disciples' and exercising works of mercy. Bediako (interview, 14 September 2001) rightly points out that such an approach to mission, which has been characteristic of western missions since the 19th century, requires financial surpluses which are not generally available to the African church. He then pointed out the need for a paradigm shift in missionary thinking so that Africans can also be in the mainstream of missionary work without needing to imitate what the West did or may still be doing. Some of what Bediako mentioned in the recorded interview is worth quoting at length as it is not accessible in this form in books and articles that he has written:

If indeed it is confirmed that by and large the heartlands of the faith are now concentrated among societies which at the moment appear to retain the vitality of the primal worldview, the sense of the spirituality of all life, the sense that life essentially revolves around the reality of the living God who explains all life, that spiritual and material are not to be separated, that the living and the dead overlap, and [that] in the world of technology and technological advance prayer is still vital as many Africans testify ... [Many African Christians] will know the ins and outs of computers but they will still pray over everything, very sophisticated in the technological age and yet ... believe in prayer, ... believe in the Transcendent, the realm of spirit power ... If that is reality then quite clearly a cultural framework that retains this sense has responsibility to live in such a way that the rest of world which may have lost this sense will come to its senses. Now people with that sense maybe can show the world that not everything in the world is militarism and economic power and that mammon is not the god of the universe.

As the interview proceeded Bediako cast doubt on the viability of imitating the nineteenth century western missionary paradigm.

The missionary movement as we have known it from the West requires certain economic surpluses to make it possible; requires a certain industrial output and surplus which could be harnessed into that kind of operation. Africa doesn't have that. And perhaps it doesn't need to be reinvented. After all the Christian community that turned the world upside down in the NT was the marginal side of that world. They were not at the heart of empire. But they turned the world upside down by just the way they lived. They lived differently. Now I think we may well be in a situation where we must talk of a new paradigm in mission. Not mission as going anywhere, to teach anybody. But mission as in fact the West coming to receive. ... By creating the kind of environment, the kind of centre, the kind of framework in Africa which will sustain precisely this vitality of faith, this vitality of the sense of the Transcendent here where it is culturally congenial and socially appropriate so that the West, when it gets tired of its machines, and it gets fearful when they think that somebody they call Bin Ladin strikes, ... they may well find a haven somewhere where God is still God and is recognised as such. This to me is the African contribution, not to go and roam around and teach but to be where we

will be found to be teachers of the Word. And I believe with all my heart that Africa will be the teacher of the Word, and the West will come home and drink from the streams of living water where the faith is alive.

As the above extended quote indicates, Bediako, a central figure in the Inculturation Theology model, strongly advocates for a centripetal missionary model, the one that was mainly dominant in the Old Testament (Bosch 1980). It is a model that can be likened to light shining in darkness and therefore being able to attract termites and other insects. Theoretically it is a model validated by such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 60:1-3:

Arise, shine, for our light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

At the same time, while we continue to sustain the hope that Africa will become a radiant light to which the world will come for enlightenment. African Theology should also stimulate African Christianity into the sort of centrifugal pattern of mission of mission that we see dominating the New Testament. The lack of resources that Bediako pointed to in the interview quoted above is a real factor that cannot be lightly dismissed. The need for a new paradigm in mission in the light of such resource limitation cannot be disputed. At the same time we need to acknowledge that those early Christians who Bediako referred to in the interview as having turned the world upside down were on the periphery of society. Yet their vocational consciousness was such that their witness radiated from Jerusalem until it reached European lands. Without necessarily copying their methods, is there a centrifugal missionary paradigm that African Theology can cultivate in African Christians? To be realistic, not all people in the rest of the world who can benefit from African Christianity would come to the shining light of Africa if and when such a light begins to shine.

The reality is that African Christians are spreading throughout the world for educational or professional purposes, or even as political or economic refugees. At least two Pentecostal denominations in Zimbabwe have recognised the potential of such a dispersion of African Christians for reaching out to other parts of the world with a vibrant Christian faith. One such denomination is the Family of God Church which, apart from spreading to several African countries, now exists in several European countries. The second such denomination is the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God (Africa) commonly known as ZAOGA. It too has spread to several

African countries as well as the United Kingdom, Australia and the USA⁸¹. Indeed the outreach by African churches into countries which were formerly the missionary sending countries can form a significant research project on its own. Inculturation Theology needs to reinforce these possibilities by emphasising Africa's missionary responsibility to the rest of the world. A revitalisation of African Christian identity must give rise to such a vocational consciousness.

7.4.2 The quest for African Christian identity in Black Theology and its contribution to mission

As with Inculturation Theology we now dialogue with Black Theology on the basis of the framework we established at the beginning of this chapter. To what extent is Black Theology in its quest for African Christian identity a mission of empowerment? Secondly, to what extent is it an empowerment for mission?

The quest for identity in Black Theology: A mission of empowerment

The first criterion for being a mission of empowerment according to our scheme is the reality of the living God – the extent to which Black Theology puts its interlocutors in touch with the greatest transcendent power. To a large extent this question can be answered in the affirmative. It was noted in chapter five that for Black Theology, along with other liberation theologies, the main question is not whether or not God exists but on whose side God is. The affirmation that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed Blacks is empowering in several respects. Firstly, it boosts their sense of identity. This is a critical factor. Nolan (1988:51f) describes the humiliation that Blacks were subjected to under apartheid. He points out that 'Anyone who is not legally classified as white is treated as inferior not only by individual whites but by the whole system of laws with their "whites only" restrictions' (:51). He called this system 'legalised humiliation', consisting of a 'systematic attack upon the dignity of so many human beings' (:51). Under this system

One becomes less than an animal, less than a precious object or possession, a nobody, a non-person. When whites speak about 'South Africans' or about 'people' they mean other whites. Blacks are simply not taken into account. It is as if they didn't even exist. Of course not all whites are the same. There are exceptions but that does not bring much relief to the daily diet of humiliation (:52).

⁸¹ These two denominations are members of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe on whose executive I served from 1998-2000. The information on their missionary activity was gleaned in the course of my interaction with some senior leaders of those churches.

How did Black Theology seek to help African to psychologically survive such humiliation? One of the most important ways was to point to reality of the living God who, through Jesus, deeply cared for them and affirmed their humanity. If God who created the mighty universe affirms Blacks and their blackness, then whatever negative evaluation of Blacks the settler White community and the apartheid regime made were potentially nullified.

Not all practitioners of Black Theology, however, manifest faith in the living God. Chapter five raised the problem of horizontalism in the work of Mosala and a few other Black theologians. In its extreme form it represents God as an ideological weapon created in the image of mainly hegemonic forces. Hence Mosala (1986b,1989a) sees many Gods and many Jesuses in the Bible and in the modern world, all created as a means of legitimising their creators' material interests. This is not to claim that Mosala is mistaken in every respect. There is a widespread recognition in modern theology that perceptions of God are indeed coloured by the context of the perceiver. But that is different from making God as God a product of dialectical materialism. Thus we can restate here the conclusion we arrived at in our analysis of Mosala's thinking that extreme anthropocentrism or horizontalism has negative consequences for the quest for African identity in Black Theology. Without a conviction that the God who really exists is on the side of the oppressed Africans, there would be no ultimate way to debunk the white superiority complex. The ideological war is then reduced to the survival of the fittest. In that case hegemonic forces are likely to have the upper hand. Fortunately Mosala's Marxist thinking, which reduces God to a product of dialectical materialism, is not representative of the majority of Black theologians.

Our second measure of the mission of empowerment is that of the Tillichian power of being. On this measure Black Theology served the interest of educated Blacks during apartheid in a very significant way. The utilization of the Black Consciousness philosophy by Black theologians served to emphasise to the Blacks that they are fully human, and that they could affirm their blackness without in any way feeling inferior to Whites. Chapters three and five gave a very full exposition of this concept and therefore there is no need to go over the same ground. Suffice it to restate at this point that Black Theology, by limiting itself to the world of the academia, did not benefit the majority of the ordinary Christians.

What about the development of critical consciousness as a means of empowerment? To the extent that Black theologians held conferences and wrote books and articles to liberate the thinking of the black Christians who were exposed to such facilities, it is possible to say that there was a certain amount of conscientization going on. However, this is a far cry from Freire's liberative pedagogics. Firstly, Black Theology became the product of experts developing and disseminating their ideas in a top-down fashion. This is the 'banking system' of educating the oppressed which 'objectivizes' them rather than conscientizing them to be subjects of their own liberation. Freire would even go so far as to say that the Black Theology top-down methodology is a continuation of the kind of dehumanization that the oppressed had experienced under apartheid. What is called for is '*co-intentional* education' consisting of liberative dialogue between teachers-students and students-teachers. This kind of humanization through the development of a critical consciousness would mean enhanced identity and therefore power for self-liberation.

Secondly, and arising from the above, Black Theology does not exhibit enough social engagement with its interlocutors – unless such interlocutors be identified as colleagues in the academia. As already discussed, what is called for is the kind of socially-engaged liberative hermeneutics that West (1999) advocates. Chapter five has already explicated this point.

When we come to the socio-political model of empowerment Black Theology scores very highly. All the empowering factors identified in our exposition of the Balcomb-Nolan model are visible here. Black Theology, at least in theory, chose the oppressed as its interlocutors. That means it took their side against the apartheid oppressive forces. It legitimised their struggle against oppression and brought God into the process of social transformation. Black Theology boldly rejected the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political and therefore transformed the struggle for political power into a theological category. We have argued that all this is relevant to the issue of the quest for identity. If deprivation of political and economic rights destroys a people's humanity, the restoration of such rights is also a restoration of their human dignity and worth.

The conclusion from all this is that Black Theology, through its quest for identity is, on balance, seen to be a mission of empowerment. We turn now to Black Theology's quest for identity as an empowerment for mission.

The quest for identity in Black Theology: An empowerment for mission

We recap here the thought that Christian mission is about turning the totality of human life towards Christ in order to effect the rule of God in individuals, societies and nations. To what extent does the quest for identity in Black Theology provide power for mission so defined?

In a bold, and at first rather startling statement, Nolan (1988:xi) says that Liberation Theology 'might be described as evangelisation rather than theology' and then proceeds to say that 'perhaps in the final analysis there is no great difference between doing theology and preaching the gospel'. On reflection it appears true that Black Theology, an aspect of Liberation Theology, is in itself already a mode of doing mission. Mpumlwana (1988:ix) articulates the agonising questions of many black Christians suffering under apartheid which was still prevailing at that time. They questioned how any thinking black Christians could justify sharing their Christian faith with the white oppressors who used the same faith to justify oppression. Some opted to give up the Christian faith, associating it with oppression. As Nolan (1988: 5) says,

... the youth of the townships have lost patience with the Churches and with all the confused and contorted interpretations of the gospel. They are leaving the church in their thousands. To them the gospel seems to be at best an irrelevant distraction and at worst an obstacle in the way of genuine liberation and peace.

Black Theology, however, was able to show that there was a credible alternative to giving up the Christian faith. That alternative was to show 'African Christians that their lost souls and lands can be regained in legitimately religious and Christian ways' (Maluleke 1996b:37). Looked at in this light we can, in agreement with Nolan's statement above, say that in the final analysis and given the oppressive circumstances of the apartheid era, doing Black Theology was a mode of doing mission. Though no statistics are available we can safely assume that many thinking black Christians were converted to or kept in the Christian faith because Black Theology showed them a God who was on their side and who legitimised their struggle for freedom. Salvation became historicized, unlike the ordinary preaching which sought to pin people's hopes only on the life in heaven after death. Indeed one could even say that salvation in Black Theology was often too exclusively historicized. The caution by Bosch (1992:508) is well taken that

neither the eschatologization nor the historicization of mission satisfies. In its fixation on the parousia, the first has neglected the problems of this world and thereby crippled Christian mission. In its preoccupation with this world to the exclusion of the Transcendent dimension,

the second has robbed people of ultimate meaning and of a teleological dimension without which nobody can survive.

The point of accepting Bosch's caution is not to then advocate a kind of third way which seeks only a partial eschatologization mixed with a partial historicization of salvation. The goal of salvation must be fully historical and fully eschatological. God's righteous and just will should be done on 'earth as it is in heaven' according to the 'Lord's prayer' in Matthew 6. Black Theology concentrates on God's will being done on earth, and that includes restoring the worth and dignity of the Blacks who were created in God's image.

But does the quest for black identity lead to the crossing of other mission frontiers so that God's will is done in contexts other than that of Blacks? Some Black theologians provide evidence that their quest for Black identity is in itself a mission to White oppressors. They have convincingly argued that oppression dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressors. Furthermore, the oppressors do not have the inner resources to humanize themselves. They therefore need the oppressed to help them recover their own humanity. This stance is justified on the basis of the ideological captivity of the oppressors coupled with the epistemological privilege of the oppressed.

The concept of 'ideological captivity' of the oppressors does not imply an ideology-less existence on the part of the oppressed. Ideology is common to both groups as argued in chapter five. Rather, what this means is that the oppressors are so bent on legitimising their privileges at the expense of the poor that they become blinded to the ideology at work in their consciousness. In effect it means they begin to actually believe their own lies. For example they may come to a point of believing that they deserve what they have, that the underprivileged are what they are because they are inferior beings or simply that God has so arranged things that the rich are made for their castles and the poor are made for their shacks. We have already noted how apartheid received theological legitimation from the Dutch Reformed Church. That is ideological captivity. Brown (1978:79) summarizes the concept of 'ideological captivity' by saying that it is the failure to acknowledge the ideological assumptions that 'rationalize keeping things as they are, particularly when things are working to our benefit'.

How does this differ from the 'epistemological privilege' of the poor? The poor would also have an ideology, for example the ideology of liberation. The question, however, is whether the truth claims

in this ideology have greater validity than the ideology which legitimises oppression. Who is in a better position to understand the effect of oppression, the oppressor or the oppressed? To bring the situation to the apartheid context of South Africa, Nelson Mandela saw himself as a ‘freedom fighter’ and Black theologians, who were also oppressed, validated this claim. The apartheid state security system saw the same man as a ‘terrorist’, and as a result consigned him to prison and to Robben Island for nearly three decades of his life. Which of these two claims to truth should be privileged over the other? In this light the idea of the ‘epistemological privilege of the poor’ becomes obvious. The fact that Jesus chose to base his ministry among the poor peasants of Galilee rather than among the rich and powerful classes of Judah lends weight to Liberation Theology’s ‘epistemological privilege of the poor’.

The poor and oppressed, then, must help the rich and powerful to regain their humanity through struggle. Their ideological captivity means that the oppressors cannot be helped in any other way. People who believe their own lies cannot be persuaded to abandon their dehumanizing oppression through conferences. Brown (1978:79f) rightly says that ‘We begin to recognise our ideological captivity when confronted with another way of viewing reality sufficiently at variance with our own to *force* us to take the other view seriously’ (emphasis added). Let us here use several quotations from Boesak (1978) to illustrate this mission to oppressors by the oppressed. He insists that ‘blacks know only too well the terrible estrangement of white people; they know only too well how sorely whites need to be liberated – even if whites themselves don’t’ (:15-16)! How, then can the Black oppressed love their oppressor neighbors? Boesak (:125) has a ready answer. ‘To love whites, i.e., the enemy, is to confront them as a Thou without any intention of becoming an It. The new black refuses to speak of love separated from justice and power, and profound love can only exist between equals’

All this does not, of course, mean that only Whites needed *metanoia* – conversion. To Boesak (:30) conversion is needed for both Blacks and Whites:

for blacks, in order to become reconciled with themselves, but also for whites, to become reconciled with themselves and to accept blackness as authentic humanity. This is sharing in God’s creation, participating in a new Exodus, creating a new black being, thereby demythologizing white superiority and humanizing white living from its own idolatrous absurdity and black living from its own blasphemous non-beingness.

So far we have seen how Black Theology, through the quest for identity, crosses two frontiers so that reality can be turned around to conform to the will and the rule of God. The first frontier we have looked at is that between belief in God and the rejection of God. That is applicable to the Blacks when they see the holistic love of God. The second frontier is the oppressed taking the love of God to the oppressors so that the latter can be humanized too through the practice of justice and equality. We may here conclude by saying that this kind of empowerment for mission need not be limited to the apartheid context. It provides a paradigm of mission for any situation of oppression whether at home or abroad, and whether the oppression is based on race, colour or gender. Gender oppression in Africa is, however, the particular focus of the African Women Theology to which we now turn.

7.4.3 The quest for African Christian identity in African Women theology and its contribution to mission

This thesis has already established that oppression is a form of dehumanization that robs the oppressed people of their sense of identity. It is in this light that we have interpreted liberation theologies in Africa as a quest for identity. Our focus now is on how the quest for identity in African Women Theology can be said to be a mission of empowerment as well as an empowerment for mission.

The quest for African Christian identity in African Women theology: A mission of empowerment

We will process African Women Theology through our four point evaluative grid as we have done with the other theologies in order to determine the extent which it can be said to be a mission of empowerment.

We begin by seeing how far this theology invokes the supreme power of God for liberating the humanity of the African women. This question necessarily draws a very mixed response. In an interview that this writer conducted on 11 September 2001 with Mercy Oduyoye, one of the key African women theologians, this mixed feeling was highlighted. On the one hand there is a recognition among some African women theologians that African women are generally very religious. For example, more African women than men attend churches and other religious functions. There is therefore no way theologians can liberatively impact their lives without

recognising and utilizing this religiosity. In the interview already referred to Oduyoye revealed that she has deliberately chosen to make the ordinary faith communities with their theo-centric worldviews her interlocutors, rather than academic communities.

Yet on the other hand there is a discomfort among some of the theologians about some of the ways God is portrayed both in the Bible and more especially in the hermeneutical approaches of a society dominated by patriarchal structures and androcentric thinking. For this reason some of the African women theologians work like Oduyoye herself work from a critical theo-logical perspective with emphasis on the ordinary women. In her *Hearing and knowing* (2000:120-137) she invokes the biblical portrayal of God and Jesus Christ to liberate the humanity of women. In particular she finds strength in the concept of maleness and femaleness being equally part of the image of God. She argues: 'If God is spirit, why should we feel alienated by the application of both male and female imagery?' (:129). Both males and females are therefore God's image bearers, which should rule out the theological marginalization of women. Apart from the *imago Dei* principle, Oduyoye (:136) also finds strength in the fact that 'Women and men are depicted by Scripture as being equally the objects of God's love' and are equal recipients of God's gifts for ministry. Finally Oduyoye evokes the image of the Trinity as a paradigm of the way human beings created in the image of God should relate to one another.

The Christian proclamation that God is not a nomad but rather a center of relations in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act and interact without subsuming or subordinating any of the Persons and yet act as One toward the world – may provide us with a model of the integrity of persons within community and their interrelatedness. An examination of what the early church was trying to say in the doctrine of the Trinity may yield models for building the human community – not on a hierarchy of beings but on the diversity of gifts that operate in an integrative manner (:136f).

Oduyoye, then, illustrates the school of thought in African Women Theology which believes in the liberative power of the God who really exists – or at least in biblically orientated theological affirmations of such a God.

A different school of thought can be illustrated by Musa Dube who adopts the same kind of hermeneutic of suspicion as we have observed in Itumeleng Mosala. An exposition of Dube's views was given in chapter five of this thesis. This school of thought works from the presupposition of the

God of the Bible being an ideological creation of mainly oppressors.⁸² This makes it problematic to use the same Bible to empower the masses of Africans for whom the Bible is 'Scripture' or 'sacred text' (Draper 2001) and who therefore expect to experience the reality of God through its pages. It is also disempowering in as much as it then leaves those who fight for women's liberation to their own human resources unaided by the liberator God.

How does African Women Theology measure against our second criterion of empowerment – the power of being itself? This is an important question against the background of religious and cultural forces in African that combine to deny the humanity and the experiences of women (Phiri 1997:46). What Brown (1978:63) says about the status of women generally is particularly true about women in Africa:

... women have often been treated as nonpersons in a male-dominated culture. Not only have they been denied access to the male world of employment, status, privilege, and income, but the very use of language has ignored their existence. Women feel excluded when a congregation sings 'Rise Up, O Men of Cod,' or a homiletician preaches on 'the brotherhood of man'.

In the light of this marginalization, indeed dehumanization, of women, to what extent does African Women Theology uphold their power of being in the Tillichian sense already discussed? Three positive contributions of African Women Theology may be explored at this point – the dignity of African women, the elevation of their experience to a theological category and the insistence that their gifts and talents should not be circumscribed to the home environment.

Firstly, then, African Women Theology continually communicates the message of women's dignity and the fact that they deserve to be treated with respect just like the males do. We have already noted above an example of how Oduyoye associates African women with the *imago Dei*. The repetition of this message is necessary for the African women themselves to begin to accept themselves as being equal in dignity to the men. After so many years of the African culture and the Christian practices combining to make them inferior beings women need the message of feminism to play the same role in their lives that the Black Consciousness Movement played in the lives of Blacks in South Africa. African Women Theology is taking the Christian gospel and using it as a

⁸² Musa Dube never in fact declares that God does not exist, so she cannot be labelled an atheist. The existence or non-existence of God as such is not part of her theological agenda. Rather, her concern is to demonstrate that the words and actions of 'God' in various biblical texts are in fact ideological creations of the various writers of those texts. Her agenda is to expose the colonial agendas of those texts.

vehicle to convey the positive aspects of the feminist philosophy. The feminist insistence on the dignity of the African women is also needed to change the thinking of the African men themselves. Their ingrained patriarchy and androcentric patterns of thought need to be reversed as a result of continually being told that women are indeed equal to men in dignity and in the respect that they deserve. That way the men will be disinclined to continue weakening the power of being of the women.

The second aspect of the elevation of the women's power of being is the elevation of their experience to a theological category. Phiri (1997), for example takes women's perspective as the basic assumption of her article and uses this to critique 'culture and Christianity in Africa for denying the experience of women' (:46). She attacks the assumption in African Theology that 'women's experiences of God are the same as men's' and therefore that 'when African men are writing African Theology they are speaking on behalf of all Africans' (:47). It is such assumptions that have 'marginalized women and women's issues' (:47). For this reason African women theologians have gone on the offensive in terms setting up structures, organizing conferences and increasing their written output all so that women's voices may be heard. Phiri (1997) describes such processes, in particular the setting up of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter 'the Circle') and its written outputs. Its research and outreach arm is the 'Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture' (:46). Such efforts as these have led to a gradual acceptance of the uniqueness of women's experience and how such experience is a legitimate data for theologising. Recognition of the women's experience is in effect the strengthening of their power of being in the Tillichian sense.

Thirdly, there is the question of creating adequate space for African women to exercise their gifts and talents. Traditionally the role of African women was circumscribed to child-bearing, child rearing and looking after the home. Public roles in church and society were reserved for men. Oduyoye (2000:122) laments the fact that 'Women's experience of being persons primarily in relation to others – as mother or wife – predominates in Africa. A woman's social status depends on these relationships and not on any qualities or achievements of her own'. Now, as a result of feminism generally, and the work of African women theologians in particular, there is a clamouring for recognition of what women can do in church and society. This issue was treated in great detail in chapter four of this thesis.

These three ways by which African Women Theology elevates the power of being of women are perhaps best summed up by Oduyoye (2000:135):

Positively put, we are called to struggle for the transformation of relationships. We have to live the life of the future even as we seek to bring it into existence by our insistence on personal accountability, participation, and on the importance of becoming authentic reflectors of the Image of God. In this way we may hope to build a human community whose obligations arise from within ourselves rather than from outside pressure. This view challenges the traditional view of authority. It is a part of the liberation process that will surely encompass all persons.

All this amounts to the fact that African Women Theology is playing a crucial role in the strengthening of the women's power of being through an elevation of their sense of identity. This is a process; many more years are needed to reverse centuries of assault on women's power of being in a patriarchal society.

Our third measure of empowerment is critical consciousness through conscientization. Here we seek to go deeper than the proclamation of liberative ideas. We seek to find out how much co-intentionality exists between educators-students and students-educators. On this measure African Women Theology must be given credit for going a lot further than Inculturation and Black theologies. We have, for example, commented on the establishment of a research and outreach arm of the Circle of Concerned African women theologians called the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, hereafter referred to as the Institute. Mercy Oduyoye is now working full time for the Institute in association with Trinity College in Ghana.

In the interview of September 2001 referred to above Oduyoye revealed that she is actively involved with women in various faith communities, tertiary students and NGOs in the course of her working for the Institute. Her modus operandi is to organize seminars and discussion groups following both a gender and a feminist approach. The gender approach consists of audiences of mixed men and women while ensuring a preponderance of women. Separate discussion groups follow plenary sessions. The idea is to avoid situations where the preponderance of men in plenary sessions or the mixed nature of discussion groups could easily silence women. 'Men have been speaking for the past two thousand years of Christianity, and now need to listen as women also get their turn to speak', declared Oduyoye in the interview. At the same time she believe that social transformation cannot be achieved by an exclusive feminist approach because men's attitudes, as

much as women's, need to be transformed through exposure to women's issues. The gender based meetings also aim at liberating the thinking of such men.

Be that as it may, the fact that the Institute is so involved in stimulating discussions at grassroots level brings it very close to the model of conscientization. The impression this writer received from the interview with Oduyoye is that ideas are not imposed top-down. Rather the participants are stimulated to examine and challenge the assumptions behind religious and cultural oppression of women. Oduyoye's watchword, according to the interview, is that an unexamined life is not worth living. As the cultural and religious assumptions behind patriarchy and androcentricism are examined and challenged so does the level of conscientization rise. This indeed is 'doing theology in community' (Phiri 2000:48) as opposed to theology being an ivory tower pursuit.

Once again we must affirm that this is going to be a long process. We are beginning to see church women's meetings and Bible study groups examining gender and feminist issues. Some of these are only occasional meetings, such as when a church women's group invites an African woman theologian to address some of these issues. What is needed is to multiply in more countries the model that is working in Ghana of the partnership between a university or seminary and the Institute. Nothing less than an intentional drive will reverse patriarchy and androcentricism so strongly ingrained in the African psyche.

We have identified the fourth measure of empowerment as socio-political liberation. In one way we have simultaneously been dealing with women's social liberation in the course of discussing the development of critical consciousness and the elevation of women's power of being in Africa. What we need to acknowledge at this point is the women's fight for liberation, recognition and involvement in church and society. Women's fight for liberation includes involvement in national political issues as well. We may here summarize some of the salient points that arose in chapter five in connection with this level of women's recognition and participation. We noted Oduyoye's (1995) protest that the valorisation of women's childbearing and domestic roles in Africa is a trap to keep them from participating in political decisions that affect their future. Women are kept out of the public sphere because of 'gendered socialization' and not because women are constitutively unable to play their role in that sphere. For that reason the agenda of African Women Theology includes agitating for women's involvement in the actual law-making process, because their absence from

such processes will easily lead to laws being passed that are detrimental to their interests. The rationale for such agitation, as we noted in chapter five, is that a privileged group will not voluntarily decide to give up their power and prestige.

At this early stage of African Women Theology, however, *modus operandi* for such political agitation have not yet clearly emerged. While the voice of African Women Theology is now starting to be heard at the grassroots, especially of (Christian) faith communities, there are no structures yet for the voice to be heard by politicians. There is also a continuing concern that church teachings on women are discouraging most Africans from voting for women to be in political positions (Phiri 2000:53). This issue will obviously need to be addressed as the Circle gains strength in the years to come.

The quest for identity in African Women Theology: An empowerment for mission

As we have done with other theologies we must now ask what missionary vocational consciousness to expect from women whose sense of identity has been awakened by African Women Theology. Once again we have to search for a new paradigm of mission, different from, but not necessarily excluding, going to other countries to preach and plant churches. We have to revert to our understanding of missionary work as that of being agents of God's justice and kingly rule. With this kind of definition of mission it is possible to see how the mission of empowerment can also become an empowerment for mission in African Women Theology.

Firstly, women so empowered can lead to a society transformed to better reflect the will of God. This arises from the insistence by African women theologians that any society which excludes women's experience and full fledged contribution is denying itself the enrichment that God intends for it. Oduyoye (2000:135) rightly asserts that 'we must admit the feminine experience as a legitimate part of the data for theological reflection or we will continue to live in our brokenness'. She goes on to explain that the feminine experience is necessary for understanding and living out a Christian anthropology. If male and female were both created in the image of God, it follows that excluding the female principle from life is in fact an act of society depriving itself of an important part of what it means to be in God's image. God cannot be exclusively imaged in male terms because God is spirit (:129). Affirming the same idea Phiri (1997:48) says that 'there is an awareness in the Circle that in Africa women's concerns are human concerns. Therefore any

attempts to create a whole community of God in Africa cannot afford to marginalize women's concerns'. All this adds up to the affirmation that when women make their presence felt through all the strata of society they are not just doing it for their own wellbeing but they are carrying out a missionary mandate for the benefit of society as a whole.

The mission of empowered Christian women is not just limited to the general societal transformation. They also carry out a specific mission to men in particular. On the surface it may appear that men have been the strong ones without any need for missionary outreach from women. Oduyoye has exploded that myth. In the interview referred to above she talked about how men are also oppressed by sexism in the African tradition. As an example she quoted a situation where some fathers may want to play with their babies and change their nappies but feel constrained by a culture that sees this as a woman's role. Many other examples could be added. For example some men may go hungry when their wives are too sick to cook because tradition has told them that the kitchen is for women. In the emotional field, some men may be moved to cry because of the loss of a loved one but will suppress this and other emotions because this is supposed to be a 'woman thing to do'. Such men desperately need liberation. The success of the war against sexism would be to their benefit as well.

It is even possible to visualise that when the demon of sexism has been exorcised from African societies this in itself will have a missionary impact on other societies, perhaps in Asia, where sexism is deeply rooted. In a world which is a global village, the possibility of African Women Theology impacting other continents through written and electronic media cannot be discounted. Already in the global sisterhood, books and articles by African women theologians are being read, and may in future continue to do so in larger volumes.

7.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Whereas chapters four and five sought to demonstrate that African theologies were underlined by a quest for identity, this chapter has sought to demonstrate that such a quest for identity is in effect a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission. Because the concept of mission was the subject of chapter six, most of this chapter has had to concentrate on empowerment as a linking factor between the concepts of identity and mission.

Power, we have discovered, is a highly complex issue that has needed to be explored from a multi-disciplinary perspective. From our point of view the most important of the perspectives is the theological one which has focussed on God as the source of all power. Even this one perspective has needed multiple lenses to uncover its complexity. We have looked at it with the eyes of historical Christian theology, biblical testimonies and African religion. Next came an educational perspective to empowerment which focussed on conscientization as the development of critical consciousness. We then examined the socio-political model of empowerment as liberation. The fourth model, taking the perspective of philosophy of religion, is that of the power of being. This particular one was analysed in chapter three where the concept of identity was our main focus. It has been invoked in this chapter from a different but related angle, that of power.

These models of power are by no means exhaustive. They have been selected for their particular applicability to our theme. In analysing each of them we have concluded that for all their individual usefulness they need each other in order to satisfy the demands of our theme. The models resulted in an evaluative grid of empowerment consisting of four elements: vital participation in the power of God, awakening interlocutors to the power of being, conscientization and socio-political liberation. It has been the argument of this chapter that these four elements are compatible with the aims of the different African theologies, but that they also constitute challenging goals against which African theologies can measure their attempts to empower their interlocutors.

Another major argument of this chapter is that the mission of empowerment must also become an empowerment for mission. It is not enough for African Christians to be empowered in and of themselves. Christianity is both a universal and a diverse faith. Its different expressions must enrich each other. That means, *inter alia*, that African Christianity in its different expressions must play its part in the enrichment of other expressions of the Christian faith and therefore also in the spreading of God's rule beginning with Africa and spreading to other parts of the world.

Armed with the above conclusions we were now in a position to revisit the different African theologies considered in chapters four and five. For each of them we applied the four-fold evaluative grid in an attempt to measure the extent to which it was both a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission. In the main, the results have been affirming of the different African theologies. At the same time we recognised that this is a process. None of the theologies

can claim to have attained perfection on the basis of any of the measurements. Theology is, after all, a product of human effort of relating the perceived revelation of God to changing contexts.

Therefore no theology anywhere in the world is perfect. In our case we are acknowledging that African theologies constitute a *quest* for identity which also becomes a *quest* for empowerment. The *Oxford Thesaurus* lists synonyms for 'quest' as 'search, seeking, pursuit, chase, hunt' (1994:661). These words suggest a continuing, even tentative if not elusive process. This is a process that will therefore have to continue into the foreseeable future.

As we turn next to our concluding chapter we seek to draw together the overall findings of this thesis.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 ORIENTATION

A few tasks remain to be accomplished as we come to the end of this thesis. The first task is to summarize what this thesis has been about so that the reader does not miss the major thrust of the thesis because of the details in the previous chapters. Section 8.2 sets out to do that. The second task is to examine some of the critical issues arising from this thesis. Although those issues were not part of the core of our theme, they nevertheless arise from a consideration of that theme. Section 8.3 is intended to accomplish that purpose. Thirdly, we need to look at the overall thesis and ask what it has contributed to the fields of African Theology and Missiology. We look at this question in section 8.4. Finally since no thesis can deal with any subject in an exhaustive manner section 8.5 will suggest some areas of further research that this thesis has hopefully opened up.

8.2 SUMMARY OF THESIS

The theme ‘quest for identity in African Theology as a mission of empowerment’ has controlled the many details and even the seeming sideroads that have occupied us in this thesis. We begin our summary with general considerations.

8.2.1 General considerations

Chapter one set out the limitations, presuppositions and other methodological considerations that have governed the way the thesis has been pursued. Chapter two provided the background that explained the intensity of the quest for identity in African theology. Slavery, colonialism and the marginalization of Africa in the New World Order were considered to be among the causes of Africa’s identity crisis. The resulting quest for identity was seen to be reflected both within and outside the church. The latter includes the ongoing quest for the African renaissance. Within the church the call for a moratorium and the African Instituted Churches provided us with examples of such a quest. The anecdotal nature of the chapter was a deliberate attempt to paint a broader picture of the quest for identity in Africa so that African *Theology* is not seen to be the only agent engaged in such a quest. This opened the way for the discussion of substantive issues which form the core of what the thesis is about.

8.2.2 Meaning and practical implications of identity

In chapter three we delved into the complex issue of what we mean when we talk about the quest for *identity*. At a simple level we concluded that identity means the ‘consciousness of the uniqueness of their kind’ manifested by societal groups. We also noted that consciousness of being of a kind, of being in some sense unique, does not automatically arise in an abstract fashion. Rather it arises as people relate to realities that surround them, including the reality of geography, history, possessions and the people’s perception of the supernatural realm. Yet because these realities are constantly changing the quest for identity is an ongoing experience. We took this as confirmation of Appiah’s statement that identities are ‘complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities’.

Nevertheless we repeatedly emphasised in this thesis that there is a traditional African worldview which gives a spiritual dimension to all the realities and which gives a stamp of authenticity to the concept of Africanness. The erosion of this authenticity in Africa’s interaction with the hegemonic forces of colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism in the New World order has given rise to the quest for African identity. The quest goes beyond the simple consciousness of uniqueness of kind in contrast to other identities. The importance of this quest lies in the implications of this consciousness of kind. Among other things, identity has to do with the power of being of the Africans vis-à-vis the forces that seek to diminish or crush that power. Secondly, that identity is tied in with the need to protect African self-worth in the face of negative evaluations of Africans and their subsequent mistreatment through slavery, colonial subjugation and continuing exploitation in the New World Order. Thirdly, the identity issue is tied up with the protection of self-interest in the light of land-dispossession and the crippling of the Africans’ economic well-being. Fourthly, a strong sense of identity is needed to fuel African ‘vocational consciousness’.

Having discussed these implications of identity chapter three proceeded to discuss some manifestations of the quest for identity in Africa. The Black Consciousness Movement, Négritude and the African Personality, Postcolonialism, African philosophy and Religion all supplied illustrations of the definition of identity and its practical implications. Each of these was discussed both in terms of its own contribution to the quest for African identity and in terms of its compatibility with Christian values. We had to face squarely the question of whether the quest for identity in Africa is compatible with the Christian faith. In debate with African critics we looked at

the question of whether there is a fundamental incompatibility between the concepts *African* and *Christian* such that the Christian faith would in fact militate against the quest for African identity. To answer this question we had to face two supplementary questions. Firstly, is there a worldview conflict between Christianity and African religiosity? Secondly, is Christianity part of the agenda of western exploitation of Africans?

A discussion of these questions led to the conclusion that it makes sense in spite of various problems to talk of an African *Christian* identity. Not only is it legitimate to regard Christianity as an *African* religion; the Christian faith is a potentially strong weapon in the quest for an African identity. In particular we concluded by stating that African Theology can contribute to the quest for identity in Africa in various interconnected ways. Firstly it can create a consciousness of a God-given identity. Secondly it can cultivate a sense of African cultural distinctiveness. Thirdly, it can lead to a positive evaluation of self. Fourthly, African Theology can contribute to the sense of African ownership of their culture, their colour, their land etc. Fifthly, African Theology helps to cultivate a sense of self-determination including the right to determine the meaning of God's revelation for the African context.

8.2.3 Inculturation Theology as a quest for African Christian identity

Chapter four was an interpretation of Inculturation Theology as a quest for African Christian identity. We divided Inculturation Theology into two categories. The first is the early Indigenisation Theology typified by Idowu. The second is the Translation Theology represented by Sanneh and Bediako, with Mbiti as a bridge between the two.

The quest for identity in the early Indigenization Theology was focussed on two thrusts. The first is the religious one, consisting of rehabilitating the African religious traditions by attempting to demonstrate their compatibility with the Christian faith. In that way this theology sought to preserve that which was of value in African traditional religions. Considering the inseparability of African religions and cultures, the preserving of the African religious values was tantamount to the preserving of the very identity of the Africans. The second thrust, the cultural one, was the call to indigenise the church – including her structures and the whole Christian way of life so that Christianity is not perceived as a foreign religion, or worse still as an effective tool of western imperialism. With these two thrusts, Idowu's refusal to accept that Africans should live on

borrowed (foreign) religion and culture is seen as Idowu's most enduring contribution to the quest for African Christian identity.

Mbiti's theology might be called the early Translation Theology. For him Christianity is already an African religion and therefore does not need to be indigenised as if it were a foreign religion in the first place. He arrives at this stance not just on the basis of the long history of the Christian faith on the African continent, but especially because of his understanding of the very nature of the gospel as a God-given reality applicable to any culture. Any culture and any civilization are capable of giving expression to that eternal gospel. This leads Mbiti into a detailed study of African religions and philosophy. From this study he arrives at an understanding of African religion as the centre of existence, belief in the after-life, the quest for spiritual power, the sense of community and kinship, ethics for safeguarding the community life and past and present orientation of the African worldview.

Mbiti's assessment is that much of what he finds in African religions and cultures is compatible with Christianity. Therefore African tradition should be seen as *praeparatio evangelica*. On the hand Christianity should be seen as fulfiller rather than destroyer of African tradition. The result is that true Christianity, by its very nature, must bear the stamp of its context. This implies, *inter alia*, that Africans will have freedom to be truly African while also being truly Christian. Christ is the integrating factor for African Christian identity. Mbiti however, saw the challenge of the unfinished agenda for Christianity and Christian theology in Africa. While the Christian faith has transformed the African tradition African tradition has not yet impacted the way Christianity is practiced in Africa.

The two-way transformative process that Mbiti saw as necessary is in fact the basis of the Translation theology of Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako. They argue that the universality and plurality of the Christian faith make it a linguistically and culturally translatable movement. On the other hand the gospel had already been prepared for through Africa's cultures, religions and languages. That translation ensured that Christianity could legitimately claim to be an African religion. It is this translatability that has caused the phenomenal growth of the church in Africa. Moreover this translatability of the gospel ensured that the agentic role of the African Christians became a more important factor than the missionary factor.

We therefore characterised the theologies of Bediako and Sanneh in terms of 'identity through translatability'. It is a theology that emphasizes the value of the African heritage, universality and plurality of the gospel, translatability of the Christian faith, the need for a synthesis between the old and the new and the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. The result of this theology can be seen in the way Bediako goes further than Idowu and Mbiti had gone in their theologies. His hermeneutic of identity seeks to Africanise the Christian faith rather than merely Christianising the African tradition. While earlier theologies sought a Christian way of reading Africa's past, Bediako now seeks an African way of reading Christian theology covering themes like Christology.

Four essential features of the quest for African Christian identity emerged from the consideration of Idowu, Mbiti, Bediako and Sanneh. Firstly they successfully overturned the negative evaluations of the African traditional society that prevailed in Europe and America before and during the colonial era. Secondly these theologians have helped to ensure a reaffirmation of the universal and pluralistic nature of the Christian faith. Thirdly, they have advocated for an identity involving a synthesis of the new and the old, the universal and the particular. Fourthly, they affirm a re-reading of the history of Christianity in Africa from the underside thus affirming the agency of the Africans.

The most serious criticism of this Inculturation Theology is the fact that it has taken too limited a view of the African context of the Africans, and therefore of their marginalization. The African religio-cultural context is being pursued at the expense of the socio-political context about which it has had nothing meaningful to say. It is for this reason that Black and African Women theologies have played a crucial role on the African theological scene.

8.2.4 Black and African Women theologies: A quest for African Christian identity from a liberation perspective

Chapter five focused on the quest for identity in Black and African Women theologies as representative liberation theologies in Africa. Their main focus is the struggle against political, economic, race and gender oppression. The point of view taken in this chapter is that the quest for identity and authenticity is not separable from the struggle for liberation from different kinds of oppression and marginalization.

Black Theology and the African Women Theology share a common methodology applied to different contexts. Their starting point is the adoption of the underprivileged, at least in theory, as

their chief interlocutors. They then raise their historical *context* to a prime hermeneutical category, presupposing the need for social and conflict analysis. Their theological goal arising from a conviction about both the nature of oppression and the nature of the gospel, is liberation, not as something to be achieved *for* the oppressed but to be achieved *with* them. This necessitates that theology be dialectic praxis going from action to reflection and vice versa.

We examined various features of Black and African Women theologies against the background of the general methodology. Black Theology, we found, is a theology of black liberation, seeking to affirm black humanity in the context of apartheid white racism, political oppression, economic marginalization and the ideological legitimation of these forces of dehumanization. The struggle was also for black power and for a consciousness of black worth. Hermeneutics is among the weapons for such a struggle, with Mosala providing the most articulate approach to the method.

African Women Theology is similarly a struggle, but this time against patriarchy and androcentrism in the general culture and their practical consequences in terms of economic, political and social marginalization of women on the African continent. Like other liberation theologies, African Women Theology utilizes the experience of the oppressed (in this case African women) as its point of departure. From there it enters into a struggle not only against sexist oppression in its institutional forms, but also against its ideological and cultural legitimation. The goal is a programmatic and ideological reshaping of the identity of the African women. Three weapons have been utilized for this exercise – a critique of androcentric ideology from a theological point of view, biblical hermeneutics and mobilisation for praxis.

We concluded that these two theologies, despite their seemingly different agendas, share the same undercurrent of the quest for identity which arises out of the experiences of oppression. Oppression has the effect of robbing and destroying that which essentially belongs to the oppressed with consequent psychological and other forms of devastation. Therefore the quest for identity is fundamentally a struggle for restoration of what essentially belongs to the oppressed – whether that is lost land, freedom, dignity or the power to determine their own future. It is a struggle that has both psychological and structural dimensions. They are equally opposed to structures of oppression and the ideological legitimation of the same. This comes from the recognition that structural freedom without psychological freedom, and vice versa, cannot fully build up a positive identity

among the oppressed. Furthermore, these theologies seek to advance the identity of the disadvantaged communities by focussing on them as both interlocutors and agents of their own liberation.

The nature of these theologies makes it legitimate to read them from the perspective of a quest for Christian identity. This is in spite of various problems examined in chapter five. Perhaps the most serious of these problems is the disjunction between theory and practice that we noted particularly in Black Theology. The theory presupposes a theology that is socially engaged and whose interlocutors are the poor and the marginalized blacks. In practice the theology has more or less been an ivory tower exercise for academicians. Furthermore, the success of the liberation struggle ending with the dismantling of apartheid has placed Black Theology into a crisis of self-definition whereby it needs to either refine its agenda or merge with one of the existing theologies.

8.2.5 The quest for identity in African Theology as a part of *missio Dei*

Chapter six set out to show that the quest for identity, central to the various African theologies examined in chapters four and five, is part of mission understood as *missio Dei*. Four critical aspects of *missio Dei* were seen to have implications for the quest for identity.

The first is that a central purpose of *missio Dei* is the restoration of the *imago Dei*. A discussion of this concept led to the conclusion that it is God who has made the desire for self-worth and a dignified identity a very part of the human constitution and that therefore the quest for identity becomes an expression of the *missio Dei* and a means to glorify God. The second aspect of *missio Dei* is its purpose for the salvation and liberation of humankind, a fact which links it with the purposes of Black and African Women theologies discussed in chapter five. The third and fourth aspects had to do with *missio Dei* being effected through *missiones ecclesiae* and *missio hominum*. *Missio Dei* does not therefore imply that God is in mission for idle human beings who are passive receivers. God is interested in the agency of human beings, and this therefore justifies a consideration of the quest for identity in African Theology as an aspect of *missio Dei*.

These aspects of *missio Dei* were then used to elucidate criteria for assessing the extent to which the various theologies discussed are in fact serving as agents of *missio Dei*. The purpose-related criteria had to do with upholding the image of God and effecting salvation and liberation. The methodological criteria were centred around the incarnation.

Applying these criteria to inculturation theologies, we were satisfied that they are credibly seeking to restore the image of God in the religio-cultural spheres of African life. However, they do not espouse salvation in the full measure demanded by the *missio Dei* principle. In terms of their *methods*, demonstrating areas of continuity with the past is consonant with the incarnational principle, while the limited nature of social engagement falls short in this regard. A similar application of the criteria to the liberation theologies considered yielded mixed results. To a very large extent they do uphold the image of God, consciously or unconsciously, through their accentuating of the liberation motif. However we concluded that they have only a partial view of salvation. In the area of methodology we concluded that the focus on African experience, the struggle, praxis and the agency of the oppressed were largely in line with the principles of incarnation.

This whole discussion led us to observe firstly, that the quest for identity in African Theology helps to make God real to the Africans in the cultural sphere as well as in the socio-political realm. Secondly, the quest for identity in African Theology is an uncompleted agenda on the African continent. Thirdly, to be true to *missio Dei*, the quest for identity in African Theology must combine local (contextual) relevance with a worldwide significance. Fourthly, the insight that *missio Dei* is also effected through *missio hominum* justifies the utilizing of resources from non-Christian sources in the quest for identity, but also necessitates a humble recognition by Christian theologians that the quest for identity is not a preserve of the Christian faith.

8.2.6 The quest for identity in African Theology as a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission

Chapter seven built on the argument developed from chapter four to six on order to establish that the quest for identity in African Theology is primarily a mission of empowerment and secondarily an empowerment for mission. A theoretical framework of empowerment was developed consisting of four interrelated concepts of power.

The first is a spiritual model of empowerment as vital participation in the power of the transcendent. The second is the educational model of empowerment as the development of critical consciousness for humanization. The third is the ontological power of being itself. The fourth is the socio-political model of empowerment centering on liberation. Bearing in mind these models of empowerment we

stipulated four ways in which African theology, through a quest for identity, can empower its interlocutors. These are: vital participation in the power of God, awakening interlocutors to the power of being, the power of critical consciousness and the socio-political power.

Another impulse associated with the quest for identity in African Theology has to do with an empowerment for mission – that is African Christians, once empowered can potentially play a role in advancing the rule of God in the world. This is especially significant in the light of the acknowledged southward shift in Christianity's centre of gravity. That shift implies African Christianity having a missionary responsibility that must begin at home (its own Jerusalem) but extend to the rest of the world (Acts 1:8). A healthy African Christian identity can contribute to worldwide Christianity. It carries with it a significant missionary *dimension* through making God real Africans in both the cultural and the socio-political dimensions and adding a fresh dimension to Christianity in the rest of the world. Apart from the missionary *dimension* in African Christianity there is also the possibility that African identity can give rise to a vocational consciousness leading to a missionary *intention* within the African church.

It is in the light of these considerations that we re-examined African Theology to assess the extent to which their quest for identity is indeed a mission of empowerment and empowerment for mission

The quest for identity in Inculturation theologies, we concluded, is a mission of empowerment on the basis of its invoking the power of the Transcendent – the theocentric model of empowerment. Secondly their focus on the Africans themselves as bearers of God's revelation and God's power is also a mission of empowerment. On critical consciousness, however, the inculturation theologians we have considered have not shown enough social engagement to make much difference to the ordinary Christians who are not in the world of academia. They also manifest their weakest point when it comes to socio-political empowerment. As for inculturation theologies being an empowerment for mission, we concluded on one level that they manifest a significant missionary dimension – pointing to the desirability for Africans turning to Christ without ceasing to be Africans and enabling the rest of the world to see vitality in the Christian faith. On another level, however, an active vocational consciousness for impacting the rest of the world with the kingdom of God is not yet evident in these theologies.

The quest for African Christian identity in Black Theology was also put on the spotlight in terms of its being a mission of empowerment and an empowerment for mission. To be a mission of empowerment a theology must create a consciousness of the reality of God and his involvement in the situation of the interlocutors. This is largely true of Black Theology. The affirmation that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed blacks was seen to be empowering to them. On the power of being itself, Black Theology utilized Black Consciousness philosophy to emphasise to the Blacks that they are fully human, and that they could affirm their blackness without in any way feeling inferior to whites. A certain amount of critical consciousness was also developed in those who came into contact with Black Theology through conferences and in its literature, though this falls far short of the concept Freire developed. Black Theology scores very highly on the criterion of socio-political power. What about Black Theology as an empowerment for mission – especially the mission of turning the totality of human life towards Christ in order to effect the rule of God in individuals, societies and nations? We concluded that Black Theology is already a mode of doing mission. We can assume that a number of educated black Christians were kept in the Christian faith because Black Theology showed them a God who was on their side and who legitimised their struggle for freedom. The struggle also had the side effect of helping the rich and powerful to regain their humanity through the practice of justice and equality and get out of their ideological captivity.

We similarly examined the quest for African Christian identity in African Women theology as a mission of empowerment. Most of the theologians operate from the theocentric model of empowerment while only a few, like Musa Dube, would see God as an ideological creation. In terms of the power of being itself three positive contributions of African Women Theology were noted – advocating for the dignity of African women, the elevation of their experience to a theological category and the insistence that their gifts and talents should not be circumscribed to the home environment. However, we noted that this is a process; many more years are needed to reverse centuries of assault on women's power of being in a patriarchal society. On the measure of critical consciousness through conscientization we gave credit to African women theologians for going a lot further than inculturation and black theologies through some developing models of 'doing theology in community' (Phiri 2000:48) as opposed to theology being an ivory tower pursuit. We also acknowledged the women's fight for liberation, recognition and involvement in church and society, though the *modus operandi* for political agitation have not yet clearly emerged. As for the quest for identity in African Women Theology as an empowerment for mission we saw that

empowered women can transform society to better reflect the will of God. Since male and female were both created in the image of God, it follows that excluding the female principle means society depriving itself of an important part of what it means to be in God's image. Empowered women also means the liberation of men who are also dehumanized by the very sexism that disempowers women. Moreover, in our 'global village', the possibility of African Women Theology impacting other continents through written and electronic media cannot be discounted.

With this summary of what the thesis has been about, we are ready to consider some of the critical issues arising from it.

8.3 SOME CRITICAL ISSUES ARISING FROM THE THESIS

The topic of this thesis suggests three issues that did not receive sustained treatment in the thesis but that constitute dilemmas which are still critically important to think about. The intension here is to briefly discuss these issues as an excursus to the thesis. They have to do with whether there is such a thing as a recoverable African identity, whether Africans can get both 'bread' and 'being' in the New World Order and whether the quest for identity is not a contradiction of the 'message of the cross'.

8.3.1 Is the quest for identity a lost cause?

While, as this thesis has hopefully demonstrated, it makes sense to talk about a *quest for African identity* it is quite another issue to hope that a distinctive *African* identity is still a sensible conception in a rapidly changing, globalising world. Two factors seem to make it extremely difficult to define who or what an African really is.

The first factor is that Africa has a multiplicity and diversity of people groups who all claim the right to be called Africans. We take the example of J N J (Klippien) Kritzinger (2002:158), professor of Missiology at UNISA. He claims to be an African, following a definition of 'African' by Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe of the PAC which discounts race or skin colour as a criterion. Rather an African is one whose 'only loyalty' is to Africa, and who 'is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African majority'. Kritzinger traces his descentance from Germany. His forefathers, however, 'lost their German roots and became part of the "Afrikaner" community in South Africa'. It is that very Afrikaner community which instituted apartheid in South Africa and came up with an ideology that said that different colours meant different races and even different nationalities. The

apartheid system helped to heighten colour and race consciousness on the basis of which it legitimised inequality. Now that apartheid is gone, some Afrikaners like Kritzinger are claiming equality of Africanness with other Africans regardless of colour. How legitimate is this claim? Indeed how legitimate is it for people whose whole cultural way of life is tied to their European roots to claim to be Africans like any other African? As in the case of Kritzinger, some of these people who may be 'European' in cultural orientation have no other homeland except Africa. On that basis they are Africans. Yet many black Africans do not automatically think of white 'Africans' as Africans. So who really is an African? What role do factors like culture, colour, origin and sentiment play in the definition of who an African is? Should the analogy of African-Americans be applied on the continent of Africa so that we talk of 'African-Africans', 'European-Africans', 'Arab-Africans'? In short the multiplicity and diversity of people on the continent has complicated the definition of who an African is.

The second complication comes from the homogenising effect of globalisation. The information super-highway is bombarding Africa with European and American symbols, images and value-systems. World economies have become inseparably intertwined. European languages dominate African education, and have become indispensable even for Africans communicating with fellow Africans. The result of this globalisation is that Africans have to do so many things the European and American way if they are not to be further marginalized. We saw this as one of the dilemmas facing African leaders as they engage in an 'African renaissance' which turns out to be a very 'Eurocentric' kind of renaissance. This leads one to wonder if, in spite of the postmodern rebellion against grandnarratives, Africa is not irrevocably caught in Euro-American economic, social and political grandnarratives.

The church does not seem able to escape these grandnarratives despite calls by Sanneh and Bediako to emphasise cultural and linguistic translation of the gospel. For example, no less a person than Mugambi, perhaps the most articulate advocate of 'Reconstruction Theology' in Africa, seems to have taken the 'if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them' attitude to Africa's development and missionary obligations to the world:

Owing to the imbalance of economic and political power between Africa on the one hand and on the other, Europe and North America, it is not possible in the near future for Africa to send Christian missionaries to re-evangelize the post-Christian societies of the North Atlantic. It is

important, however, to emphasize that the industrialization, urbanization and secularization of the North Atlantic has enabled the societies of that region to dominate the world. If Africa is to emerge from this domination, then the same processes will have to be accelerated. Secularization without secularism, as Lesslie Newbigin in *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (p 18) insists, is humanizing and even desirable ...

(Mugambi 2000:99)

There are, I am sure, a good number of Africans who find it disturbing that Mugambi should advocate that the only way to make progress for ourselves, and to contribute missiologically to other nations is for us to be as western (modernist) as possible, including even the need for secularization. The question that quickly arises is: 'Where is Mugambi's sense of African dignity and worth in our own right, and not as measured by western standards of progress?' On the other hand, others may exonerate Mugambi for his honesty in admitting that in this globalising world trying to maintain a distinctive 'Africanness' is, as it were, 'chasing the wind'.

So the question remains: 'Is the quest for African identity a lost cause?' Is there really an *African* identity, and if there is, does it have much *value*? In Africa's premodern interface with Europeans a negative identity was created: 'You are different in an undesirable way'. In that period of slavery and colonialism one could affirm the *presence* of an African identity while being encouraged to deny its *value*. It was labelled as primitive, uncivilised and heathen. The result of the negative construction of Africans was their internalisation of self-rejection. What was African was despised wholesale. What was western was *ipso facto* valorised. This led to the second stage – dis-Africanisation and westernisation. This goes by the name modernisation. But this was done without carrying that which was valuable from the African past. The result gradually became the *absence* of a distinctive African identity and the acceptance of the *value* of Euro-American globalisation. That which took the western world more than two millennia to achieve, Africa wanted to copy in less than three generations. Yet this copying of westernism is proving more and more problematic as many Africans come to realize on the one hand what valuable heritage they have lost, and on the other how bankrupt some of the western values have proved to be.

So running parallel with the second stage is the third – a quest for reasserting African identity. The desire at this stage is the assertion of both the *presence* of a distinctive African identity as well as its *value*. So the quest for identity continues, even though it may seem like running after the horizon.

8.3.2 Bread and being: the dilemma of Africa

Closely parallel with the first dilemma of whether a distinctive and valuable Africanness is recoverable is the second one of how to simultaneously acquire *bread* and *being* in Africa. The concepts 'bread' and 'being' here are being used in the way Balcomb (1998:40-41) used the terms when referring to the 'theologies of bread and theologies of being' in South Africa. 'Theologies of bread are to do with the role of the Church in the political, social and economic reconstruction of South Africa (sic) society. Theologies of being are to do with the quest for identity in a society dominated by western values' (:40). In other words 'bread' has to do not just with food on the table, but the totality of economic needs and all that goes into ensuring that such needs are met. Being has to do with the kind of quest for identity that has been our preoccupation in this thesis.

Balcomb (1998:40-41) proceeds to make two salient points that are the basis of reflection in this sub-section. The first one is that there is a reciprocal relationship between bread and being in Africa so that the two become inseparable:

It is through our identities as members of families, communities, ethnic groups, churches, business and trade unions that we receive our bread. It is in the meeting of our need for bread that we find ourselves with the capacity to build identity, dignity, love, creativity and spirituality.

The second point is that in the beginning stages African Theology emphasized being without linking it to bread, while Black Theology, while emphasising the being of 'blackness' for the sake of bread, neglected the wider being of Africanness. This thesis has demonstrated that the quest for identity is inadequate if 'bread' or 'being' is emphasized to the exclusion of the other. Identity is affected by both cultural factors (Inculturation Theology) and socio-economic factors (Black Theology). What has been lacking in the past was an integrationist approach.

The dilemma for Africa arises when this debate is carried into the context of the New World Order. Africans want both bread and being, but are constantly having to choose between bread without being (economic dependency) or being without bread (economic independence). Africa, in spite of her rich natural resources, is facing poverty of an unimaginable magnitude. Multinational Corporations control world markets and are able to manipulate the prices of raw materials and of finished products (Tandon 2000). Africa is exporting more of her wealth to the rich countries of the North than she is receiving from them. Therefore many African countries depend for their bread on

loans and economic 'aid' from the rich countries. Unfortunately, the conditions attached to these loans and this aid are tantamount to the loss of their 'being'. Those who do not agree to be shaped in the image of the West are in danger of being starved to death. So African countries have been forced to undertake un-African and unworkable structural adjustment programmes for the sake of their bread. Unfortunately they have been more impoverished in the process of 'adjusting' their economies to suit western economic interests. This makes them need the West even more for their bread, with greater resulting humiliation. There is a bread versus being vicious cycle which Africa does not seem to know how to break.

African Theology, therefore, obviously has a continuing prophetic role in the New World Order. As Balcomb (1998:42) rightly says, 'the Church in Africa must continue to develop theologies of liberation ... as well as theologies of inculturation'. The theologies must emphasize 'being-for-bread' and 'bread-for-being'. In particular, as African leaders rush to sell their birthright for a pot of porridge, the message from African Theology must ring loud and clear 'being precedes bread'. This, of course, is not to deny that there are also occasions when 'bread precedes being'.

8.3.3 The weakness of the cross or the power of resurrection?

We come now to the third dilemma suggested by our topic. Our emphasis in this thesis has been on the mission of empowerment for the marginalized through a quest for identity. The question arises as to whether emphasis should not rather have fallen on the power of powerlessness rather than the need to overcome power with power; to fight fire with fire. To put it into a theological perspective, does the weakness of the cross not precede the power of resurrection?

A passing reference was made in chapter seven to Balcomb's (1993:156-157) criticism of the theology of Michael Cassidy in this regard. Cassidy (1989:305) contrasts what he calls 'the human way of power' with the 'power of the cross' which is in fact the power of weakness. To Cassidy 'The way to spiritual power in one sense, is not to become stronger and stronger, but to become weaker and weaker'. Paul makes reference to this power of weakness when he says, 'But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty' (1 Cor 1:27). Ultimately the power of the cross is the power of the 'crucified God' (Moltmann 1974).

The power of the cross is also the power of service and sacrifice. It is the power of giving and not taking, of humility and not self-assertion, and of dying that others may live. In a world where self-assertiveness is receiving more and more emphasis there is surely a case for theologians to emphasize the power of the cross. Should we not indeed, despite Balcomb's (1993:166) protestations, adopt Cassidy's theology that makes 'virtue of powerlessness, weakness and helplessness?' The answer must surely be both yes and no.

As Christians we must accept the theology of the cross. But it must be a theology in context and not an ahistorical spiritual truth. The Africans we have been talking about are already a crucified people; they are already 'crossbearers' as suggested by the title of Mofokeng's (1983) book. This comes out very clearly in Nolan's analysis of 'a crucified people' (1988:49-67). After explaining that God is on the side of the oppressed because they are oppressed and not because they are holy, Nolan (:67) brings his analysis to a climax by saying that God is in fact visible in and through the suffering people:

God can be seen in the face of the starving black child. God can be heard in the crying of the children in detention. God speaks through the mouth of a person whose face has been disfigured by a policeman's boot. It is not their innocence, their holiness, their virtue, their religious perfection that make them look like God. It is their suffering, their oppression, the fact that they have been sinned against. Suffering makes God visible as the one who is sinned against. The suffering of the people of South Africa is one of the great signs of our times. It is a sign of God's presence as the crucified Christ. It is the sign of the cross.

What Nolan says concerning the suffering caused by apartheid is transferable to the suffering of the African people from the days of slavery up to the current New World Order. It is transferable to any other situation of oppression and marginalization as well. The point now is that if the people of Africa are already a picture of the crucified Christ, is it the message of the cross that they are already bearing that they need to keep hearing or rather the message of the resurrection? It can be credibly argued that they still need both messages. But it is how the messages are put across that matters. The message of the cross must be to assure them that Christ is crucified with them; that God is on their side. It is a message of humanization, not dehumanization, of courage not

cowardice. But it is a message that must also be accompanied by hope. It must be a message that says that although today is Friday, Sunday is coming⁸³.

The message of the cross should therefore be preached differently to different contexts. To the West, maybe the message should be that unless they die to their arrogance and selfishness, they will not live. Balcomb's criticism referred to earlier had to do with the context of Michael Cassidy who, speaking from a situation of power as a privileged white, dared to tell the oppressed blacks to glory in their weakness. Maybe Cassidy should have been addressing the West and the privileged and powerful whites that they needed the cross. 'The quest for identity as a mission of empowerment' is not meant for the West but for the marginalized Africans.

With that we are ready to look at what contributions to theology this thesis has made.

8.4 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THESIS TO MISSIOLOGY AND AFRICAN THEOLOGY

As we look back over the terrain covered in this thesis we ask what has been its significance to the disciplines of Missiology and African Theology which it has tried to bring into dialogue. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis we will look at the contributions in general terms before looking specifically at areas of Missiology and African Theology.

8.4.1 In general

The boldest contribution of this thesis has been its making a conscious link between 'the quest for identity' 'mission' and 'empowerment' as theological categories in a mutually enriching and dynamic relationship to each other. Furthermore, while the relationship between these categories has been fashioned in theological terms, the thesis has tried to demonstrate that all truth is God's truth by utilizing models drawn from various fields, including philosophy, education, postcolonial criticism and political theology to build various frameworks needed to relate those categories to one another.

⁸³ Tony Campolo (1984) has written an inspiring little book called, *It's Friday, but Sunday is coming*. It gives hope to those suffering that Christ suffered on the Good Friday, but he was sustained by the hope of the soon coming Easter Sunday. Those who, like Christ, are being crucified should know that Sunday is coming for them too.

The thesis has therefore created many dialogues, even between fields of thought that are not normally seen 'talking' to one another. However, it is hoped that the multiplicity of voices has enhanced rather than drowned the primary voices of Missiology and of African Theology.

8.4.2 Contributions to Missiology

The thesis has hopefully made at least two contributions to the field of Missiology.

Firstly, by framing the 'quest for identity' as constituting a legitimate part of 'mission' the thesis has hopefully strengthened some recent impulses in Missiology that have debunked the traditional privileging of the geographical concept of mission as something that you do to expand the work of your denomination or even of the kingdom of God when you have gone to another country other than your own. This geographical conception of mission which Bosch (1991:73-74) demonstrates to be a result of a misreading (misinterpretation) of Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) has done the greatest harm in marginalizing Africa and other Third World nations in the field of mission and Missiology. It has created the assumption that since third world countries do not have the material and technical resources that industrialized countries have to be able to go overseas (or even to neighbouring countries) they are incapable of becoming missionaries. While the theological basis for the unsustainability of the geographical concept of mission has already been laid, the practical demonstration of how African theology is already playing a role in the new understanding of mission had not yet been systematically done. Only when the concept 'mission' has been reconstructed does it become true to talk in any real sense of 'the missionary nature of the church' (Bosch 1991:372-389). This thesis had made a contribution in that regard.

Secondly, and arising from the first point, the activities that can legitimately fall under the category of 'mission' have similarly undergone a further refinement. Fortunately, as the historical review in chapter six showed, the conceptual understanding of mission as constituting only evangelism and church planting has been superseded in the last few decades by a holistic understanding of mission that includes 'humanization'. What this thesis has done has been to apply the quest for identity in Africa to that new understanding of mission. By including 'being' as part of humanization, the thesis has helped to expand our understanding beyond its normal association with 'bread' considerations.

8.4.3 Contributions to African Theology

Just as there are two contributions of the thesis to the area of Missiology, there are also two contributions to the area of African Theology.

The most significant contribution has been the expansion of the conceptual framework of 'identity' for reading African Theology. Both Walls (1980) and Bediako (1992) have done significant work in this regard. However, their framework of 'identity' was limited to inculturation theologies in Africa. This thesis has sought to expand this understanding by arguing that even liberation theologies are, at their base, also a quest for identity. A word of caution needs to be sounded here. Reading various African theologies from the conceptual framework of 'identity' is not meant to be a form of reductionism. African theologies can be read as other things apart from a quest for identity. This thesis has merely sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of 'identity' as a conceptual frame for understanding the theologies discussed.

Secondly, while Walls and Bediako have generally assumed the meaning of 'identity', this thesis has sought to problematize the concept in such a way that 'identity' and 'power', while not identical, can be seen in the same light.

With this we can now look at other areas of research opened up by this thesis.

8.5 FURTHER AREAS OF RESEARCH

No thesis can give an exhaustive treatment of its subject. This would be especially true of a thesis that has tried to be as ambitious as this one has been. One advantage of a thesis is that it stimulates further areas research for other researchers. To begin with, some dilemmas have been briefly discussed as an excursus in section 8.3 above. Each of those can be an area of research in its own right, or in combination. However two other areas of research stimulated by this topic can also be raised.

Firstly the quest for identity can be examined in terms of African Christianity itself. This thesis has focussed on the quest for identity in African theology. Therefore it has concentrated on mainly written sources that reflect the formal theological enterprise in Africa. A focus on African Christianity would raise many other interesting possibilities and different methodologies. For example, the quest for identity in a particular denomination of a particular country raises

possibilities of participant observation, interviews etc. This would be taking theology to its grassroots, and this would no doubt be a very worthwhile exercise.

Secondly, researchers can pursue various other areas of application for the quest for identity. For example, how does identity relate to church structures, church governance or to the willingness of church members to financially support their churches? The current concern for environmental degradation and its horrendous consequences for humankind can be addressed from a fresh angle of how our conception of who we are influences the way we treat not just other people, but the totality of the environment. These are only a few of the issues that could be researched from the point of view of identity.

Glory and honour be to our God who is the true source of our identity.

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APPENDIX : THE FREEDOM CHARTER

As adopted at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955

Preamble

We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people; That our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality; That our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities; That only a democratic state, based on the will of the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief; And therefore, we the people of South Africa, black and white, together equals, countrymen and brothers, adopt this FREEDOM CHARTER. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing nothing of our strength and courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

The People Shall Govern!

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws; All the people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country; The rights of the people shall be the same regardless of race, colour or sex; All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government.

All National Groups Shall Have Equal Rights!

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races; All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride; All people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs; The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime; All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people; The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole; All other industries and trades shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people; All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and profession.

The Land Shall Be Shared Among Those Who Work It!

Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger; The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers; Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land; All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose; People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished.

All Shall Be Equal Before the Law!

No one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without a fair trial; No one shall be condemned by the order of any government official; The courts shall be representative of all the people; Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance; The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people; All laws which discriminate on the grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed.

All Shall Enjoy Human Rights!

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children; The privacy of the house from police raids shall be protected by law; All shall be free to travel without restriction from countryside to town, from province to province, and from South Africa abroad; Pass laws, permits and all other laws restricting these freedoms shall be abolished.

There Shall Be Work and Security!

All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers; The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits; Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work; There shall be a forty-hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave, and sick leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers; Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work; Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished.

The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened!

The government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life; All the cultural treasure of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands; The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace; Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be

opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit; Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan; Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens; The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

There Shall Be Houses, Security and Comfort!

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, to be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security; Unused housing space to be made available to the people; Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no one shall go hungry; A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state; Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children; Slums shall be demolished and new suburbs built where all shall have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, crèches and social centres; The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state; Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all; Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

There Shall Be Peace and Friendship!

South Africa shall be a fully independent state, which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations; South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation not war; Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all; The people of the protectorates Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland shall be free to decide for themselves their own future; The right of all the peoples of Africa to independence and self-government shall be recognised, and shall be the basis of close cooperation.

Let all who love their people and their country now say, as we say here: 'These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty.'