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AFRICAN LIBERATIVE THEOLOGIES

Joseph Ogbonnaya

Every theology is contextual, emerging from the sociocultural, economic, religious, and historical conditions of its time. The most popular of liberation theologies, Latin American liberation theology, emerged in response to oppression and injustice arising from the socioeconomic and political conditions in Latin America in the 1960s. Foremost were the roles played by transnational corporations in collaboration with corrupt governments and international communities. The inability of Latin American countries to repay the huge sums borrowed from international financial institutions to finance development projects during the economic crash of the late 1960s and early 1970s inflicted hardships that increased poverty and deprivation. These situations were complicated by totalitarian oppression. Latin American liberation theology sought the liberation of the people from such injustices and the promotion of their integral development in the light of the gospel, using predominantly Marxist socioeconomic analysis.

The situation in Africa with regard to liberation theology (especially in tropical sub-Saharan Africa) bears a close resemblance to that of Latin America in many ways. Centuries of slave trade during which Africans were reduced to articles of commerce were followed by centuries of colonialism under various European powers. In this colonial period and after, African communities found themselves distorted by the merging together of previously heterogeneous peoples and the creation of artificial nation-states that seemed almost intended to fail. The neocolonialism that followed the end of the colonial era, during which many African governments worked under the tutelage of their former colonial masters, forced African countries to serve foreign interests.

Still today, many corrupt African leaders selfishly advance their private economic fortunes to the detriment of their fellow citizens, promote group interests, and continue to practice tribalism and nepotism, all of which militate against the national unity of their countries. The predatory practices

of transnational corporate organizations seeking to exploit African natural resources only heighten the injustice, deprivation, oppression, violence, and economic mismanagement that all too often characterize the material situation of Africa.

However, in spite of the striking resemblance between Latin American conditions and the African socioeconomic and political conditions mentioned above, Africa has not reacted theologically in the same way. Africans have not formulated a theology that can be called liberation theology in the Latin American sense, although Latin American theology has influenced the formulation of aspects of African liberation theology. Instead of a unified liberation theology in the Latin American sense, African liberative theologies are heavily contextual, dealing with specific cultural issues of African indigenous religions, an African cultural appropriation of Christianity (inculturation theology), the African use of Christianity for political liberation (black/reconstruction theology of South Africa), the reconciliation of peoples for mutual coexistence, especially after political instability has engendered hatred, violence, and war (reconciliation theology), and the developing theology of African women.

Generally, like all theologies of the developing world, African theologies are liberative in that they begin as protests against colonialism and the Eurocentric cultural forms by which the Christian faith was spread by various missionaries, especially to sub-Saharan Africa. They seek liberation from all forms of cultural domination—not only from colonialism, postcolonial oppression, and bad governance, but also from the religious domination that results from presenting the Christian faith in foreign theologies that are mindless of distinct African cultural forms and values through which Africans experience and encounter the risen Christ.

History of African Liberative Theologies

The demand from African nationalists in the 1950s and 1960s for African independence in all aspects of life—social, political, economic, cultural, and religious—gave rise to the first African liberative theologies. Many African leaders who were practicing Christians began to question not only the continuity of expatriate leadership of the church but also foreign theologies that had little or no relevance to African culture and history. For instance, Kenneth Kaunda (a Presbyterian) and Julius Nyerere (a Catholic) began to question why the church in Africa is not more African. At the same time, the emergence of black awareness movements such as that of *négritude*, as well as the development of African philosophy through the pioneering work of Placide Temples, resurrected an African appreciation of themselves as distinct peoples. This led to a demand for different forms of Christianity in

accordance with African aspirations for cultural authenticity and political liberation.

Négritude movement: The *négritude* movement of the 1930s and 1940s, a response to the colonial domination that obliterates African history and destroys the African future, awakened a black consciousness that enabled African priests to overcome the invisibility of Africans by helping them begin to formulate a Christian theology that is distinctly African.

The climate was ripe for the emergence of distinctive African ways of being Christian, ways that were quite different from the mission theology of saving souls and the colonial theology of planting churches, theologies that neglected Africa's contexts. There is little wonder, then, that the emergence of distinctly African theology took place in the 1950s and '60s within a cultural rebirth arising from the nationalists' demand for independence from colonialism. This quest for an African theology was first articulated in 1956 with the publication of a book entitled *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent* (*Some Black Priests Wonder*) by African priests studying abroad.

At the same time, African nationalists and some newly independent African states following the path of the earlier pan-Africanist movement were forming the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union); they aimed primarily at the unity of African peoples as well as cultural affirmation and independence from Eurocentric domination. African Christian leaders were formulating African Christian theologies in the same way Africanization aimed at upholding African dignity, racial equality and independence, solidarity and cultural affirmation. The first meetings of the All African Conference of Churches in Ibadan, Nigeria, and in Accra, Ghana, happened in the same year, 1958, that Kwame Nkrumah called for a meeting of the independent African states at the All Africa People's Congress in Ghana. Another meeting at Kampala, Uganda, in 1963 and in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1966 led to the formation of the All African Conference of Churches (AFCC). The AFCC is considered the birthplace of African liberative theologies. In other words, African theologies developed at the same time African peoples were emancipating themselves from foreign domination and colonialism. This initial growth of African theologies culminated in the publication in 1966 of *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, edited by K. A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth.

Because of the tendency (not accepted by all) to think of African theology in evolutionary terms—that is, as constantly changing according to Africa's socioeconomic and political exigencies—some authors think of African

theology as progressing from inculturation to liberation to black theologies. These formerly prominent theologies in Africa, proponents of this way of thinking argue, have been surpassed. What are preferable now are reconciliation or reconstruction theologies. It is worth noting, however, that many of these African liberative theologies have existed simultaneously and in parallel, albeit interdependently, reflecting culturally, socioeconomically, politically, and spiritually on African conditions in the light of the gospel.

The Need for Liberation

African liberative theologies aim at restoring the self-esteem of Africans shattered by centuries of denigration and dehumanization; Africans have been made timid before people of other races and nationalities. The **anthropological crisis** (using the terminology of *Africae Munus* of the Second African Synod) that Africans continue to suffer because of subtle forms of cultural imperialism heightened by globalization and totalitarian ideologies makes liberative theologies not only important, urgent, and necessary, but a basic feature without which the theology that is distinctly African does not exist.

Anthropological crisis: The "anthropological crisis" the Africans are undergoing as a result of what the Cameroonian theologian Engelbert Mbveng called "anthropological poverty" is not deprivation of food or other material possessions, but poverty arising from various forms of cultural imperialism, the indignity of being, that is the result of being denied their basic dignity as human beings, "their identity, their dignity, their freedom, their thought, their history, their language, their faith universe, and their basic creativity."

African liberative theologies emphasize the distinctness and worth of Africans and their experiences for articulating the Christian faith and for transmitting this message to new generations of Africans. Their strength is being both African and Christian without dichotomizing African identity, personality, and cultures. They represent the Africanization of Christian faith culturally, socioeconomically, politically, and religiously. For instance, because the colonialism and early Christian missionary activity both denounced African cultures as barbaric and pagan, African theology in much of Africa through inculturation emphasizes a cultural emancipation of the Christian faith from Eurocentric influence.

Throughout Africa, political independence has not brought the much-promised and hoped-for material progress and development, but instead has led to economic backwardness, hardship and deprivation, poverty, disease,

and maladministration, especially during the long process of decolonization. With the collapse of the New International Economic Order of the 1970s, the second development decade, and the imposition of the Structural Adjustment Program owing to heavy loans accumulated to finance development projects, Africans yearn for greater economic autonomy and liberation from poverty and want. Some theologians, such as Barnabas Okolo and Jean-Marc Ela, propose an African liberation theology alongside the Latin American model as imperative for Africa. For these theologians, development and globalization, especially neoliberal globalization, must focus on the welfare of the people who are the subjects of development. The poor must be prioritized by theology as God takes the side of those at the margins.

The situation of blacks who suffered under South Africa's apartheid rule is different from that of Africans who regained political independence from other colonial regimes. Consequently, South Africa's quest for liberty is different from that of western and eastern Africa. A theology that addresses the situation of South African blacks must first emphasize racial equality, because they were dominated by white segregationist minority rule. A black theology with an emphasis on black consciousness thus emerged, and black theologians appropriated the Christian faith by reading biblical stories from their particular experience of racial marginalization. Neither inculturation nor liberation theology could address their divergent issues adequately. However, with the dismantling of apartheid and the emergence of black majority democratic rule in South Africa in 1994, as well as the attainment of political independence by all African countries, the emphasis in African theology began to shift from black theology of liberation to a quest for ways of reconstructing Africa in order to benefit from independence much more fruitfully. This shift, called the theology of reconstruction, seeks an end to "the blame game" and advocates that Africans take responsibility for their affairs.

Most, if not all, societies in Africa, like theology in general, are patriarchal. Can one then claim that the interests of women have been adequately represented in the various liberative theologies emerging thus far in Africa? Women theologians confirm that this has not been the case, and they have begun to champion the cause of women who suffer various forms of marginalization both in church and in society. Thus various forms of womanist theologies have emerged in Africa, re-reading and interpreting the scriptures as well as theologizing from women's perspectives.

Method

Methodologically, the various forms of African liberative theologies emphasize "contextualization," that is, the importance of the various circumstances

and historical experiences of each people for the appropriation of the Christian faith. Contextualization considers the sociocultural and economic-political, as well as the religious, horizons of people as important for shaping the form the Christian faith takes among them. Contextualization is not anachronistic, seeking to recover the past of the peoples' life and culture, but progressive, attending to the concrete circumstances of the peoples as they are today and their relevance for authentic Christian identity. Contextualization is not just a comparison of African cultures with the Christian faith but also critical analysis of African conditions in the light of Christian faith. Thus, it is dynamic, ongoing, and progressive, and it keeps Christian faith contemporary. It recalls the emphasis of the Second Vatican Council on "reading the signs of the time."

This emphasis on context is the unifying theme for all forms of African liberative theologies. As the last frontier, contextualization as the backdrop of Third World theologies, including African theologies, indicates that the differences among African liberative theologies—Africanization and black theology, African women theology, reconciliation and reconstruction theologies—can easily be resolved in a both/and manner instead of the either/or approach of liberation and inculturation that have been at the heart of the debate thus far. These theologies form part of African liberative theologies, though some theologians tend to dismiss the one(s) they themselves do not emphasize as either irrelevant or surpassed. In other words, inculturation, liberation, black/reconstruction, reconciliation, and theologies of women are also African liberative theologies. One cannot talk of African liberation theology while excluding any of them. They form key aspects of African theology, involving complementary viewpoints regarding the relevance of Christian faith for Africans. Although each has arisen in response to some historical exigency, they all remain in vogue in Africa. This includes the black theology of South Africa despite the end of the apartheid regime.

In no way does contextualization present African theologies as a monolith. On the contrary, the plurality of contexts within which theology is done in Africa indicates not only the complexity of theologies in Africa but the importance of recognizing the variety of contexts in such a way that one is saved from falling into the pit of categorizing Africa in a homogenous, monolithic form. Africa is a diverse continent, and theologies arising from the variety of contexts present the richness of its spiritual reflection. However, this diversity does not rule out sociocultural, economic, political, and religious similarities in African life. While contextualization reveals that doing theology in Africa is no easy task, it also ensures that the human conditions of African people, cultural, social, economic, political, religious, and personal, are given due theological consideration.

Contextualization removes theology from the ivory towers of merely academic theology and situates its dependence on the experience of ordinary African Christians. Contextualization also is cognizant, and therefore respectful, of the distinctness of the variety of human conditions and pays attention to them in their particularity. At the same time, contextualization notes the interrelatedness of the issues the human condition of Africans presents to theology. On account of this, African liberative theologies emphasize different aspects of liberation, depending on the variety of contexts and their peculiarities. These theologies are nuanced in a variety of ways to emphasize the different components, needs, and interests theologians pursue in their contexts.

African liberative theologies are not without influence from theologies from other continents, and they certainly rely on the Christian faith and tradition. As the Christian faith is appropriated by African cultures and situations, these theologies draw from both scripture and tradition to make sense of the faith. Inculturation theologies, both in their moderate forms—applying the adaptation model—and in their radical forms—creatively engaging African cultures—interpret the Christian faith. African liberation theology draws on Latin American liberation theology when it concentrates on the conditions of poverty arising from the structural injustices of the international financial institutions and corporate organizations, globalization, and neocolonialism. Black theology of liberation, which began as a movement for blacks oppressed under the apartheid regime of South Africa, draws from the black theology of the United States, especially from the work of James Cone. These influences in no way override the creativity of African theologies; instead they serve as a springboard for theologizing within African contexts. One can generically speak of African liberative theologies as streams of theology emerging from responses of African Christians to divergent situations in history that deny their self-identity, oppress and marginalize them, and dim their consciousness of who they are as Africans in the light of the gospel.

Let us then examine briefly the various modes of expression of African liberative theologies: inculturation theology, liberation theologies, black and reconstruction theologies, reconciliation and womanist theologies.

African Theology of Inculturation

From Paul VI's 1969 charge to have an African theology, as expressed in his address to the first Pan-African meeting of Roman Catholic bishops at Gaba, Uganda ("Eucharistic Celebration at the Conclusion of the Symposium Organized by the Bishops of Africa," #2), to John Paul II's 1982 exhortation in the course of an apostolic pilgrimage to Nigeria, Benin, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea ("Address of John Paul II to the Bishops of Nigeria, Lagos, Monday,

February 15, 1982," #3) to African bishops to be responsible for the formulation of African theology, African Christian theology has been dominated by inculturation theology. Inculturation is quite distinct from "adaptation" and "indigenization" contextual models. It involves a dialogue between faith and culture, one whereby the culture and Christian faith mutually influence, benefit, and enrich each other.

Because it is premised on the richness of African cultures and the transformative dynamics of Christian faith, inculturation theology adopts both the wholesome values found in African cultures and gospel values freed of foreign cultural accoutrements. As a liberative theology, inculturation theology liberates African Christianity from various forms of religious and cultural imperialism arising from evangelization methods, including foreign institutional structures that deny the existence of genuine African cultures and civilization. While this theology does not call into doubt that what is inculturated is Jesus Christ, the Christian faith, and its tradition, inculturation theology takes seriously the social, cultural, political, personal, and cultural aspects of African peoples as the important historical contexts within which African peoples religiously experience salvation in Christ.

Inculturation theology holds in tension the universality of gospel values and the particularity of the gospel's expression in diverse cultural contexts. Recalling the westernization agenda of the Christian missionaries in Africa, and its repudiation of African cultures as well as the attendant crisis of identity among Africans, African inculturation theology insists on the transformation of African cultures by the Christian faith as well as the purification of Christian faith of foreign cultural forms, be they Eurocentric, North American, etc.

African inculturation theology pastorally promotes evangelization by making the Christian faith meaningful to the people in the light of the people's cultures and values. By removing the various foreign cultural forms of the Christian faith, inculturation theology creates possibilities for African Christianity to become a way of life, to inform African cultures, and indeed to become part of African cultures in ways that integrate the gospel with African cultures. Since Christ is not encountered in the abstract but through a personal encounter made possible by the religious experience of each person within a particular cultural milieu, African inculturation theology insists that gospel values challenge African cultures. This makes encounter with the risen Christ possible. Through a promotion of the dialogue of the gospel with African cultures, authentic African Christianity will emerge within diverse African cultural milieus. In this way, inculturation theology hopes to contribute to the healing of the anthropological crisis at the heart of Africa's crisis of identity. The gospel of the risen Christ Son of God transforms

African cultures and, by being made relevant to African experiences, it gives new meanings that are redemptive for African anthropological poverty. In this way, African inculturation theology alleviates Africa's crisis of identity with a new identity as redeemed sons and daughters of God in Christ.

There have been advances in the various African christological inculturation theologies. Worthy of note here is the incarnational approach based on the logic of incarnation: that as God became human in human culture, the Christian faith must take flesh in African human cultures and be expressed in such cultures so that the redemption brought by Christ will be actualized in them. This incarnational approach to African Christology is associated with such theologians as Aylward Shorter, Peter Sarpong, Justin S. Ukpong, and Ngindu Mushete. The *logos spermatikos* (seeds of the Word) approach holds that African cultures contain the seed of Christian faith, because Christ pervades all human cultures. This approach is associated with Francis Cardinal Arinze and Efoe-Julien Penokou. The functional analogy approach, which seeks to describe the redemptive role of Jesus in terms analogous to the patterns of African thought, is associated with John S. Pobee, Bénézet Bujo, Charles Nyamiti, and F. Kabasele. For Pobee, Christ is the Greatest Ancestor or Nana of the Akan; for Bujo, Christ is the proto-ancestor, whereas Nyamiti refers to Christ as brother-ancestor. Aylward Shorter uses the African word *nganga*, or witch doctor, medicine man, to refer to Christ analogously as healer. This list is not exhaustive of the varieties of Christologies in Africa as people appropriate the Christian faith to their cultures in the course of encounters with the risen Christ through the scriptures.

Challenges of African Inculturation Theology

In the face of poverty, worsening socioeconomic conditions, political instability and poor governance, the inculturation of Christian faith may appear to be a useless waste of time and resources. The reason for such a position is the difficulty, at times, of grasping the connection between culture and socioeconomic and political development. Also for this reason, some people think African theology is ethnographically reconstructed by the cultural past of the people and cannot therefore engage in the ongoing African condition, one characterized by the dynamics of continuity and change that result from cultural contacts. And again for this reason, some people think African theology is completely different from black theology, which was concerned with the political liberation of South Africans as they suffered under the racist, exclusionary apartheid regime, experiencing deprivation as well as oppression under white minority rule. But theologians in post-apartheid South Africa no longer consider inculturation theology irrelevant. The reconstruction of South Africa heavily emphasizes reconciliation, and it draws on

African cultural values to incarnate the Christian faith in their diverse socio-cultural realities.

Although some theologians do not accept inculturation theology, seeing it as "paganization" of Christianity, the greatest challenge facing inculturation theology is not theoretical but practical. Apart from changes in some liturgical vestments (often for special occasions), hymns in African languages, melodies from common folk songs, and the introduction of a few liturgical rites like the official **Zairean Rite** and other (unofficial) Eucharistic prayers in use in experimental centers in East Africa, very little has been done to inculturate other areas of Christian faith in Africa.

Zairean Rite: The Zairean Rite received official approval from the Catholic Church on April 30, 1988. It includes prayers that have links to the ancestral tradition, and its richly communal nature has an equally healing role in the community. It is also liturgically integral, allowing a celebration of the Word with free expression in song, body movements, and dance.

While theological reflection on inculturation has garnered sufficient attention, and some regrettably few changes in liturgy and church structure (which is to a large extent still Eurocentric) have occurred, inculturation has yet to be accomplished regarding marriage and family. This slow process of inculturation is truer of Africa west of the Sahara than of East and Central Africa. The practice of setting up Christian villages whereby converts to Christianity are separated from their so-called pagan kith and kin still continues, if only psychologically. Many African Christians separate themselves from their cultural values to embrace the Western lifestyle they consider definitively Christian. The various agents of social transformation and the manner of missionary enterprise in Africa have made many educated Africans and ordinary Christians ignorant of their cultures. This lacuna must be filled if the African inculturation of Christian faith is to become solid. Many cultural elements deemed evil are only believed to be so because missionaries with limited knowledge, or even total ignorance, of the cultures have branded them evil. People at the forefront of African inculturation theology include Vincent Mulago (known as "the first African theologian"), Tharcisse Tshibangu, John Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti, Kwame Bediako, François Kabasélé, Bénédzet Bujo, Justin S. Ukpon, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, Patrick A. Kalilombe, Jesse Mugambi, Kato Byang, Yusuf Turaki, and others.

A critical study of African cultures will make it easier to find elements of what can be considered the blind spot of African inculturation, and for which it has been severely criticized: the romanticizing of African cultures

and the uncritical effort at recovering their purity while glossing over their weaknesses. This is important because while inculturation cannot take place without clear knowledge of African cultures, inculturation must not be approached in such a way that it appears ignorant of the effects of modernity on African cultures. Further knowledge of African culture should uncover unwholesome characteristics that exclude, marginalize, and oppress people while impeding progress and the common good. At the same time, better knowledge and appreciation of African cultures will lead some denominations, groups, and theologians who are suspicious of African cultures to realize that one cannot be Christian outside one's cultural ambience and values. A positive disposition toward inculturation and inculturation theology's appreciation of African cultures would mutually benefit those African cultures and the Christian faith. But when culture became the ideological tool of the apartheid regime in South Africa, the dialogue of faith and culture of Africa became inadequate in mainline churches in response to the struggle against segregationist rule.

African Theology of Liberation

The thrust of African theology of liberation is the human situation of Africans, particularly the question of human dignity and human worth of Africans. The African theology of liberation, which at times is modeled on Latin American liberation theology, is the recovery of African dignity and human worth degraded and demeaned by experiences of the slave trade, colonialism, neocolonial socioeconomic and political structures of the international communities, and corrupt African leadership. Its theological focus is the redemption of the common masses of Africa from the poverty and deprivation that dehumanize them and reduce their worth as human beings. This redemption implies recognition of the unjust economic structures comprising the activities of the transnational corporations (TNCs), international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the Paris Club, and the International Monetary Fund, and the unfair trade regimes (e.g., World Trade Organization) as well as the collusion of local commercial banks in Africa that militate against African economies. The nefarious activities of corrupt African leadership also trap Africans in a perpetual cycle of poverty and want in spite of Africa's abundant natural and human resources, resources that are often exploited to the benefit of international communities and selfish African elites and bureaucrats.

African theology of liberation is guided by the insight that the sociopolitical and economic plight of Africa is theological and urges African churches, through its hermeneutic of the poor drawn from the Exodus account, to be engaged in the struggle for the liberation of Africans from poverty. The

foremost exponents of this theology are Jean-Marc Ela, F. Eboussi Boulaga, and Engelbert Mveng, as well as Barnabas Chukwudum Okolo and Laurenti Magesa. Apart from interest in inculturation theology, most African theologians' attention to the poor and oppressed, to social and economic justice, to the exploitation of the poor by the rich and other forms of marginalization draws on African liberation theology, as does their approach to Christology.

The challenge for African liberation theology is extricating African Christianity from colonial and neocolonial Christianity and Eurocentric attitudes to Christianity, theologically and in practice. For this reason, some African liberation theologians, such as Eboussi Boulaga and Jean Mac Ela, insist on the freedom of African Christianity from Eurocentric ideas and ideals; that is, they demand changes in ecclesial structures to reflect the concrete situations of Africans, structures Africans can maintain without dependence on financial assistance from overseas. The future of African liberation theology lies in its ability to theologize from the concreteness of diverse African conditions. This implies making sense of the structures of sin that continue to marginalize and impoverish Africans materially and mentally, locally and internationally. These structures are entrenched nationally by bad governance and internationally from the unjust structures that African governments must comply with in order to remain politically sovereign and yet not isolated in the international scene.

Beginning theology from the concrete situations of the everyday lives of people remains imperative for the future of African liberation theology because of the seductiveness of theoretical theology that seeks a kind of universalism. However, African liberation must be able to balance theory with practice within the praxis of African conditions; neglecting reflection while emphasizing action limits such theology to mere activism. Since theology and the Christian faith can be meaningful to people and prepare them for liberation only in the light of their concrete historical conditions, African liberation theology stands to lose when it fails to theologize and reflect on the Christian faith from the perspective of African conditions. The idol to be overcome in Africa is the idol of colonial Christianity through the incarnation of the Christian faith into African cultures and the neocolonial structures that impoverish Africans.

Black Theology of South Africa

The black theology of South Africa emerged from the experience of Africans living in white-dominated societies where blackness was used as an excuse to subject black people to oppression and exploitation. This attitude was based on the theological notion that white people's superiority to Africans is ordained by God. The African theological response to the decades of dehumanization

arising from the deceitful and paternalistic white “goodwill”—by which whites believed themselves to be divinely ordained to civilize Africans—gave rise to black theology, as Africans read the Bible and realized that God takes the side of the poor and the oppressed. The black theology of South Africa can be traced first to the various forms of dissent African Christians expressed to the rigidly Eurocentric form of worship imposed by the various Christian missionary churches. There followed the rejection of the segregated worship enforced by the Dutch Reformed Church, the agent of the Afrikaner supremacist policy of domination and white privilege as early as 1857, when apartheid’s segregationist policies gained ground.

The formation of the Black Theology Project of the University Christian Movement evolved from black discontent with white racial oppression and dehumanization. Its leaders were influenced heavily by the black theology of the United States, especially by James Cone’s early writings. Of particular importance were his books *Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology of Liberation*. The relationship of black theology of South Africa to black theology in the United States can be attributed to the similarity of their situations. When black theology in South Africa was battling apartheid and racist exclusionary policies, black theology in the United States was also struggling against racist policies against blacks in America. The gains of the civil rights movement in the United States were an inspiration to the blacks in South Africa. For this reason, they drew upon American achievements.

The formation in 1968 of the all-black South African Students Organization (SASO) by Steve Biko was a boost to the black consciousness movement, which not only questioned the education of the Bantu by the apartheid regime but also championed the cause of correcting the miseducation of black people. This miseducation aimed at making black people despise their traditional cultural values as barbaric. The philosophy behind the black consciousness movement was to awaken blacks to a consciousness of being black, to their value as human beings, and to their dignity as children of God. Black consciousness became a way of life among black people who sought to embrace their blackness as God’s gift and as not demeaning in any way. The formation of the African National Congress in 1912 strengthened black theology.

The praxis of black theology of South Africa was the liberation of South Africans oppressed by the apartheid regime. The major source of this theology is the Bible, read in the light of the Exodus motif of liberation. The majority black experience of deprivation, marginalization, and oppression under the minority white apartheid rule was compared to the slavery of the people of Israel in Egypt. Liberation was compared to awaiting entry to the Promised Land. Among other proponents of black theology were Manas Buthelezi,

Gabriel Serloane, Desmond Tutu, Simon Maimela, Frank Chikane, Dwight Hopkins, and Allan Boesak.

The major challenge to black theology of South Africa is determining what its task is to be now that the apartheid regime has ended. This has been problematic because black theology concentrated all its energies on freedom from apartheid and did not articulate broader theological approaches to liberation as a whole. Its future may lie in a paradigm shift that interprets liberation broadly to address such growing pains in post-apartheid South Africa as poverty, the spread of HIV/AIDS, disease, income inequality, class and gender discrimination, the brutality directed against immigrants from other African countries, and increasing crime and violence.

Theology of Reconciliation and Construction

Post-apartheid theology deals with issues left unaddressed so that black theology could concentrate on liberation from apartheid. Contemporary South Africa is faced with the two key issues of reconciliation and social change. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission seeks ways of restoring the justice that is essential to reconciliation. Post-apartheid theology asks, "In the face of bitterness and anger against perpetrators of heinous crimes against blacks, what Christian resources can be tapped not only to foster forgiveness but also to establish mutual relationship in a multiracial South Africa that ensures respect for the human rights of everybody?"

Theologies of reconciliation address questions of individual and corporate guilt, the healing of memories scarred by the crimes of apartheid, reconciliation and justice, and the Christian imperative of love and forgiveness. Important here is the relation between the gospel and improving living standards, healing in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the progress and development of South Africa through empowerment of citizens to overcome poverty, and fostering the contribution of all to the common good. In this regard, the African sense of community expressed in *ubuntu* is brought into play in addressing the South African way of being church in the wake of the segregationist policies of apartheid. The ecclesiology of inclusion emerges to integrate the differences that are no longer causes for segregation but proof of the belonging of many in the one people of God. Broadly, the emerging ecclesiology includes issues of gender equality and gay and lesbian rights. In countries that have experienced hatred, violence, war, and even genocide, as in Rwanda, the theology of reconciliation seeks to foster renewed relationships in the spirit of the gospel.

Although some theologians argue that theologies of reconciliation are a distinct form of liberative theology, ultimately they seek to reconstruct African countries emerging from political dependence or devastated by war. In

this sense at least, the theology of reconciliation paves the way for theologies of reconstruction. In South Africa, for instance, many Christian movements whose identity was defined by the anti-apartheid struggle now face a crisis of identity. This crisis is further intensified by religious pluralism. Theologies of reconstruction redefine the potential role of such Christian movements in reconstructing a new South Africa where equality, justice, prosperity, and peace will be enjoyed by everybody. These movements champion the cause of justice by serving as voices for the voiceless, mediating for the marginalized, stamping out all traces of racism, and guaranteeing a just society in South Africa.

Appropriating the biblical symbol of the reconstructionist postexilic prophet Nehemiah instead of the Exodus motif of liberation theology, the major proponents of reconstruction theology are Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Charles Villa-Vicencio, and Brigalia Hlophe Bam (South Africa), Jesse Mugambi (Kenya), Kä Mana (Democratic Republic of Congo), Ukachukwu Chris Manus (Nigeria), and Jose Chipenda (Angola). They charge the church to resist the temptation of blaming Africa's woes on external factors such as Western countries and missionary activities in Africa. They urge Africans to instead recapture Africa's self-esteem, dignity, and integrity by thinking critically and contributing toward the reconstruction of their nations by enshrining the virtues of democracy that bring justice to all in the context of the new globalized world. Most proponents of reconciliation theology, Emmanuel Katongole, Desmond Tutu, John Rucyahana, Villa-Vicencio, Valentin Dedji, and Julius Gathogo among them, equally spearhead, in related but diverse ways, movements for the reconstruction of Africa. This reconstruction is to be achieved by replacing Africa's self-image as a continent of hatred, violence, and war with a self-image as a continent that fosters reconciliation, justice, and peace.

The major weakness of reconciliation and reconstruction theologies is their demand for a paradigm shift from liberation theology. This claim presupposes the existence of one African liberation theology that metamorphoses into various forms depending on the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural challenges of Africa. This demand remains a weakness even though reconstruction theologians understand "paradigm" in the sense of sublation, that is, of the new motif of reconstruction going beyond previous theological motifs without destroying them. The demand for a paradigm shift away from liberation weakens reconstruction and reconciliation theologies because theologies in Africa are by definition liberative. One does not evolve from one to the other, and none is exclusive of the others as well.

Furthermore, the reconstruction theological motif is based on a supposition that racism, oppression, and the Cold War ended with the attainment of the political independence of South Africa in 1994. But does this

independence really mean the end of oppression in Africa? This claim of the reconstruction theological motif lacks concrete supportive facts; oppression remains prevalent in Africa not only from tyrants and corrupt politicians but also from the subtle international trade regimes that would keep African economies from growing optimally even if African leaders tackled the endemic issue of corruption. The future of reconciliation and reconstruction theologies depends on their abandonment of the claim of exclusivity, the demand for a paradigm shift, and the desire to collapse other liberative theologies into the theology of reconstruction.

African Women's Theology

African women's theology is different from the womanist theology of African American women. Although both theologies concern women of black skin color, their historical contexts are different. For example, African American womanist theologies struggle with racism, sexism, and classism in America. African women's theology addresses traditional societies, colonialism, and slavery and the after-effects of these contexts in contemporary African societies. These include a rise in poverty engendered by the impact of globalization and neocolonial economic structures in Africa.

African women's theology: African women's theology engages in an open critique of the patriarchy that keeps women faceless in society instead of coping by ploys and self-abasement in order to gain the attention and approval of men. African women seek autonomy, self-affirmation, to name themselves, and integrity in both religion and culture.

Liberative Theology in Action: Confronting Extreme Poverty

In spite of recent growth in Africa's economy, an estimated 414 million in the continent still live in extreme poverty, lacking food, good drinking water, electricity, and other infrastructure basics. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization 2010 estimate, 239 million Africans are undernourished. The United Nations Millennium Project estimated that more than 50 percent of Africans suffer from water-related diseases such as cholera and infant diarrhea. According to the World Bank, approximately 550 million people in Africa live without electricity.

Putting African liberative theologies into action has the potential to contribute to the elimination of poverty. For example, not only does

inculturation correct the miseducation of Africans because of which they prefer other cultures and consume mostly imported goods, but it heals the anthropological crisis at the heart of African indigence of being that pushes Africans to the precipice of fatalism. African theology of liberation sensitizes not only Africans but the global community to the unjust terms of trade that exclude Africans from equal partnership in international trade and exposes the various ways and means that African corrupt leaders collude with some international financial institutions to loot their nation's treasury, thus perpetuating poverty. The agitation of South African black theology against the evil of racism helped bring about the dismantling of the apartheid regime in 1994. Today, black theology focuses on eliminating poverty and inequality by advocating for just wages, an end to all forms of discrimination, including against gays and lesbians, and an end to violence.

Poverty in Africa often affects women and children the most. The activities of the circle of African women's theologians in conjunction with women's development centers in different parts of Africa are engaged in bridging the gap between men and women in Africa's predominantly patriarchal societies. This struggle against the marginalization of women and the change in the status of women from being mothers restricted exclusively to childbearing are reducing poverty among women. Not only do more women have opportunities for education, but African women's rights are improving through African women's theology. Since poverty can never be made a thing of the past in Africa without a strong civil society capable of holding African governments accountable for their stewardship, African liberative theologies need also to work toward a civil society that integrates the Christian faith and human promotion. African liberative theologies can strive to help eliminate poverty by educating the people to stand up and hold their various governments accountable and can champion varieties of free trade that do not promote Africa's economic development in unjust ways.

For instance, Mercy Amba Oduyoye observes that the seeds of objectification and marginalization of women can be found sprouting within the African religio-cultural heritage. Colonial policies fostered them, and they flourish to the extent that they benefit men in Africa's highly patriarchal societies. African women's theology believes religion should liberate the human spirit for communication with God rather than alienate people from one another or manipulate them for the good of others. African women's theology therefore critically reexamines African cultures and resists men's manipulation of religion to oppress women.

African women's theology emerges from the inability of African theology and black theology to address issues of concern to women in Africa. Oduyoye calls for a focus on "women-beingness," which is opposed to female identity based merely on childbearing, marriage, procreation, biological continuity, purity, family, culture, and religion. African women's theology gained greater prominence in 1989 in Accra Ghana at the inaugural meeting of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians; it was attended by over seventy women theologians. The Circle comes together to reflect on what it means to be women of faith within their experiences of religion, culture, politics, and the social-economic structures of Africa.

The Circle was inaugurated to facilitate research, writing, and publication by a pan-African multireligious and multiracial network of women concerned with the impact of religion and culture on African women. In her keynote address during the inauguration, Oduyoye advocated a "two-winged" approach through which men and women could worship God. African women's theology advocates for a nongender-biased, nonpatriarchal, and nonsexist theology. Its scope includes issues of colonialism, female circumcision, racism, cultural and spiritual imperialism, ethnocentrism, violence, exploitation, women's poverty and its varied implications, the scourge of HIV and AIDS, etc. In response to these issues, especially the scourge of poverty and its attendant consequences, African women's theology constructs an integral liberating theology with an element of hope that serves the entire lives of women, men, and children. It arises from the concern to live rightly and put things right. African women theologians equally emphasize the dignity of women as human beings created as equals in a complementary relationship with men and their children within a harmonious creative community where dialogue is the best means of resolving issues and conflicts. Ecclesologically, African women's theology adopts *koinonia* with an emphasis on justice and participation.

Methodologically, African women's theology uses the narrative theological approach of storytelling drawn from the rich African oral history and the Bible. It makes use of African literature in articulating theology because most African women live the scenes represented in this literature most days of their lives. According to Isabel Phir, one of the Circle's past presidents, the challenges facing the Circle include (1) the redefinition of the identity of African women theologians; (2) the promotion of more women to study theology and be on permanent staff; (3) the inclusion of African women's theology in the theological curriculum; and (4) collaboration with male theologians.

Some of the major proponents of African women's theology are Mercy Amba Oduyoye (who founded the Circle), Isabel Apawo Phir, Theresa Okure, Musimbi Kanyoro, Rosemary Edet, Rachel Tetteh, Bernadette Mbuy Beya,

Nyambura Njoroge, Denise Ackerman, Musa W. Dube, Mary Getui, Tere-sia Hinga, Hannah Kinoti, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Elizabeth Amoah, Rose Zoe, Louise Tappa, Grace Eneme, Justine Kahungu, and Brigalia Bam. The Circle has more than six hundred members from different African countries, including Angola, the Republic of Benin, Botswana, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire), Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malagasy Republic, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, the Republic of South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

Responding as they do to the various forms of Eurocentric and North American Christianity spread at various times in different parts of Africa through the missionary activities of various Christian denominations, African Christian theologies are liberative theologies. This is true even of the initial conversations in African theologies around contextualization, including the application of general principles of theology to such concrete issues as polygamy, ancestral cult, festivals, initiation rites, etc., with the aim of solving particular cases. It is equally true of the efforts to adapt African elements into Christian theology by adopting the positive elements that have parallels in Christianity while confronting the negative elements in the light of the gospel. Moreover, African theologies are obviously liberative when the entirety of the African situation and Christian theology is taken into consideration; they are the African response to the Christian faith in the light of African sociocultural, political, economic, and religious conditions. Thus, the following characterize African liberative theologies: first, the inculturation of Christian faith, which appropriates the faith in the light of African traditional cultures and religions; second, the black theology of liberation in South Africa, which decries the racialism of the milieu and engages in liberation from slavery, dehumanization, and exclusion from governance of the country; third, African women's theology, which agitates against the patriarchal nature of the church that marginalizes women within the church; fourth, liberation theology, which emphasizes liberation from the structures of sin (economically, politically and socially, nationally and internationally) that inhibit the complete liberation of Africans from poverty, oppression, injustice, and bad governance. The same is true of the budding theology of reconciliation and reconstruction, especially in response to the hatred and injustice of violence and war and to the reconstruction of Africa after such wars and with political independence. As African liberative theologies, these all arise from reflecting in the light of the gospel upon the diverse concrete situations of various African countries.

The future of African liberative theologies depends on the ability of African Christianity to be truly contextualized and independent, the critical and prophetic response to the reality of historicity to which contemporary theology becomes relevant in a theologically pluralistic Christianity. This involves the ability of African Christianity to build a true sense of community different from the elitist, clergy-dominated church inherited from the missionaries by incorporating the laity as full and equal members of the church as the people of God. African liberative theologies will persevere and be fruitful through the consistent appropriation of Christian faith made possible by the inculturation that draws out meanings in African cultural values in the light of the changes and transformations these cultural values have undergone in response to various agents of social transformation on account of modernity and multifaceted globalizing trends. The future of the African church and its liberative theologies depends on a much more authentic and profound contextualization based on theological presuppositions of African theologians in such a way that they incorporate all aspects of African life and situations in their reflection on biblical faith and Christian belief.

Study Questions

1. How are African liberative theologies different from Latin American liberation theology? In light of Africa's colonial past, why are African liberative theologies necessary?
2. African theology emerged within the context of African nationalist movements' demand for political independence from colonialism. Why do you think African theologies are liberative? Do you consider a variety of contexts important for the emergence of theologies? Is it right to think of African theology in evolutionary terms, as constantly changing according to the socioeconomic and political exigencies of Africa?
3. How can the challenges of inculturation theology be overcome? What is the relationship between African theology of inculturation and African liberation theology?
4. With the dismantling of apartheid and the institution of multiracial democracy in South Africa, do you think black theology is still relevant? If so, what should be its goals? If not, can it be replaced by reconstruction theology?
5. Why is womanist theology different from African women's theology? In patriarchal societies like Africa, what chance does African women's theology have of achieving its aims? Do you think it will receive support from African Christianity?

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