

“The relationship between sin and evil in African Christian Theology”

By

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Key words

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Witchcraft

Sorcery

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Abstract

1. This thesis is based on the recognition that there is a tension between an affirmation of ubuntu and the inherent goodness of humanity, and an acknowledgement of the corruption that seem to be endemic in an African context.

2. In the Christian tradition, the origins of evil are related to the problem of sin. This thesis investigates the way in which African Christian theologians understand the relationship between sin and evil. The question, which is addressed here, is does sin lead to evil or evil lead to sin? The main purpose of this thesis is not to offer constructive ways in which this relationship should be understood. Instead, the aim of this thesis instead, is to offer a survey of how contemporary African Christian theologians understand this relationship. And to offer a classification of various positions in this regard.

3. To accomplish this, a literature survey of books, essays, and articles published on the subject of sin in African Christian theology by African Christian theologians, between 1960 and 2001 was conducted. Some contributions by prominent theologians from the West were also noted.

4. Two classifications of how the relationship between sin and evil is understood in African Christian theology are offered. The first classification contrasts two main positions, namely that sin leads to evil, and that evil leads to sin. According to the second classification there are four positions. The second position maintains that it is sin that leads to evil, while it is also acknowledged that evil can lead to sin. Within this position, sin is mainly considered to be the product of evil, while it is also acknowledged that sin can lead to evil. According to the third position, evil is the exclusive product of sin. Within the fourth position, it is believed that sin and evil can mutually reinforce one another.

5. This thesis concludes by arguing that the issue of how African Christians understand the relationship between sin and evil should be taken more seriously, for it is closely connected to issues such as reconciliation, and socio-economic development. It is argued

that Africans need to learn to take responsibility for their own mistakes and failures. For example, they cannot continue to attribute everything that goes wrong in their lives to some external evil forces. It is also argued that this will help Africans to understand that they are partly responsible for some of the problems that are facing the vast African continent. It is further argued that a proper understanding of the relationship between sin and evil can also address the problem of a moralistic gospel, that is a gospel that promotes respectable individuals instead of righteous ones. Lastly, it is recommended that further research needs to be done especially on the effects of a moralistic view of sin in African Christian theology.



Declaration

I declare that “The relationship between sin and evil is my work, and that it has not been submitted before in any other university, and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Xolani Sherlock-Lee Sakuba

November 2004

Signed.....



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May God Bless you all.



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1. Introduction

This research project will investigate the way in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood in post-colonial Christian theologies in the African context. It will offer a survey of contributions on this problem, which have been published in English.

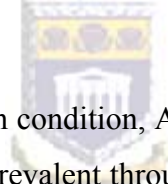
1.1 Context and relevance

The significance of this study has to be understood within the context of the contrast between the affirmation of ubuntu and the prevalence of corruption in Africa.

a) As far as African thought is concerned it is believed that human beings are inherently good and that the dignity of each person should be respected. One of the classic ways, in which this thought is expressed, is through the notion of “ubuntu”. Africans use the word ubuntu to refer to any form of behaviour that is believed to be the manifestation of authentic human nature. For example, any action that shows love and caring, or one that includes putting other people’s needs before those of an individual, is usually characterised in terms of ubuntu. Ubuntu is therefore believed to be good for society. Love, for example, is believed to promote peace, while caring for others implies respecting other people’s dignity. Also, if a person puts the needs of the whole community before his or her personal needs, such a person promotes peace and harmony within the community, for he or she does not defy the rules. Likewise, someone with a spirit of ubuntu epitomises the African conception of life, which centres on being connected and related to the community of life. This conception of life entails an ethical imperative that is against the treatment of other people as means to another end, since the other is also part of the self (Sindima 1989, 1995).

Musopole (1994:177), a Nigerian theologian, likens ubuntu, which he refers to as humanness, with the image of God. He argues that human beings have dignity and integrity that is exclusively human and that the source of these qualities is God. In addition to that, he comments that any conduct, that is inappropriate, amoral and a betrayal of moral integrity reduces one to a level of a beast with a human face. Apart

from that, ubuntu can also be attributed to what Tempels (1959) refers to as *vital force* or what Setiloane (1986) refers to as *seriti*. Tempels argues that, in African thought, everything is seen in terms of vital forces. He maintains that, from an African perspective, a human being is a vital force that is related to other forces. A human being can either influence or be influenced by other forces. Like Musopole, Tempels claims that the vital force originates from God and for that reason is sacred. It can be argued therefore that actions of ubuntu are nothing other than the manifestations of that vital force which is part of human nature. Setiloane (1986:13) describes “seriti” as the physical phenomenon that manifests itself externally to the human body. Africans believe that “seriti” is in the human blood. Seriti gives human beings power that enables them to interact with others in a harmonious way. It can be argued therefore that actions of ubuntu are nothing other than the manifestations of the vital force or seriti. Therefore, in African thinking, human beings are regarded as being inherently good, and that such goodness implies dignity, which is deeply seated in human nature.



In the light of this view on the human condition, Africans have to come to terms with the hard reality of corruption, which is prevalent throughout the African continent. In almost all African countries, poor people are suffering under the hands of corrupt individuals. There are various forms of corruption in Africa, including bureaucratic corruption and political corruption. The realisation that corruption is endemic in Africa raises a fundamental question regarding an affirmation of the goodness and the dignity of humanity. If humans are inherently good, as the notion of ubuntu seems to suggest, where should the origins of evils such as corruption be located? Why is corruption so pervasive, if a spirit of ubuntu prevails in African communities?

b) In the context of Christian theology, this appreciation of the dignity of humanity and the recognition of human corruption have traditionally been expressed in terms of both the goodness and the sin of humanity. Christianity has traditionally affirmed both these seemingly paradoxical statements about humanity. For many centuries in the context of Christian theology, this paradox has engaged the attention of the most renowned

theologians such as Paul, Augustine (e.g. in his famous controversy with Pelagius, see Olson 2000: 3), Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and several contemporary theologians.

c) One of the crucial problems that have to be addressed within the context of the Christian doctrine of sin relates to the origins of sin. Three classic approaches to this problem may be identified.

Monism: This approach argues that since God is the creator of everything, God self must be the author of sin.

Dualism: The classic example of this approach is Manichaeism. It maintains that since God cannot be the origin of sin, sin must have its origin in a reality other than God.

Human responsibility: According to Berkouwer (1971), both monism and dualism were rejected as heresy by the church. In response, Orthodox Christianity confessed that humans should take full responsibility for sin and evil. “Man’s sin is not a matter of his being only subdued, but a matter of his being wilfully conquered ... He is not innocently ”caught”, but is willingly seduced” (Berkouwer 1971: 100). According to this approach, sin is neither the product of God nor of some mysterious force that created Darkness, but the direct results of human action. These positions on the origins of sin will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

d) What then is the relationship between sin and evil? Does sin lead to evil, or does evil lead to sin? In terms of this brief discussion on the origin of sin above, it may be argued that classic Christianity has maintained that sin is the origin of evil and that evil should not be regarded as the origin of sin. Ted Peters (1994:8), drawing on insights from Paul Tillich, uses the term evil to refer to the consequences of sin. According to Plantinga Jr. (1995:1), sin leads to evils such as murder, rape, pollution, division, and breaking down of institutions. He sees sin as “an evil tree” that yields “corrupt fruit”. This description of the relationship between sin and evil may nevertheless be too simplistic. In Christian theology, the reality of evil forces such as demons and Satan is usually acknowledged.

However, the emphasis is clearly on human responsibility and human guilt, for spreading evil in the world.

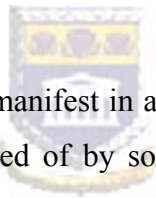
e) In traditional African religion and culture, human sin and evil is perceived more in terms of the breaking of peaceful relationships within the community (see Maimela 1982). Mbiti (1991:200) argues that African people recognise social order and peace as essential and sacred. Any disruption of these would therefore be regarded as sin, and would thereby be punishable. However, at times, this sense of peace and harmony may be disrupted and this is typically understood to be the work of the evil spirits.

This is illustrated by the following examples from Uganda: A student of 19 was arrested in connection with the murder of his colleague. He pleaded not guilty on grounds that he was taken over by the evil spirits (Africa News Service, Nov 7: 2001). In another case, a man pleaded guilty on charges of attempted suicide. He blamed this deed on the evil spirits. It is said that he even showed the court how the spirits placed the rope around his neck (Africa News Service, Dec 24, 2001). Also, in Uganda it is reported that local authorities in a town called Luwero, hired a man by the name of Ndawula Mandwa to come and exorcise evil spirits from the whole community. According to the report, Ndawula identified and destroyed several objects that he believed to be evil spirits and then charged a substantial amount for the services rendered. (Africa News Service, Oct 29, 2001). Likewise, in West African countries it is held that evil spirits can cause mental illness as a result of bewitchment (see Hale 1996:7).

Among the Zulu in South Africa, evil spirits are understood to originate from the wandering spirits of the deceased. They are often held to be spirits of certain individuals who migrated to South Africa in search of work in the mines. It is held that some of these people die very far from their families and without their knowledge. Consequently, certain rituals end up not being followed. These spirits end up wandering and thereby attacking anyone they come across while causing harm and misfortunes. One has to note that a spirit is not evil, until it takes possession of someone indiscriminately outside of its patrilineal descent (see Ngubane 1977: 146-150).

Apart from the direct impact that evil spirits are claimed to have on people's lives, it is also believed that certain individuals within the community manipulate these forces to accomplish their evil deeds. This usually transpires in the form of witchcraft and sorcery.

According to Thorpe (1996), witchcraft is the major form of disruption within the community, since it represents the dark malevolent feelings that lie in human hearts, i.e. hatred, envy, vengefulness and malice. After spending a period of approximately five years in Soweto (South Africa), Ashworth (1996: 91) observes that although people hardly speak about witchcraft in public, except to those close to them, it is part of ordinary life and something that all people are concerned with. Parish (1999: 438) makes similar observations about witchcraft in her study of the Akan society. Both Ashworth (1996) and Parish (1999) agree that jealousy is the root cause why people inflict harm against each other through witchcraft.



According to the Shona, witchcraft manifest in anti-social behaviour: "Their conduct is an inversion of that which is approved of by society, and this disregard for generally accepted norms gives them their extraordinary power to harm their fellow men" (Bucher 1980:110). According to this description, evil spirits are the reason why there is unrest within the community. Firstly, they attack people and cause illnesses and thereby cause people to point fingers to each other. Secondly, and more importantly, with the aid of these forces, those who want to cause misery and make life difficult for others do so without any difficulty.

One may therefore argue that human sin is regarded in terms of the disruption by evil forces. Sin is the result of the contamination of evil. Again, this description may be too simplistic. Individual human guilt is usually acknowledged in African worldviews and moral philosophy (see Mbiti 1969, Turner 1967, Sawyerr 1964, 1972, Adegbola 1969, and Pobee 1979). Nonetheless, the emphasis is clearly on evil forces that may influence and contaminate society from time to time.

f) Christianity has its roots in the Ancient Near East. This implies that it is as much an African, as it is a European religion. Nevertheless, most contemporary forms of Christianity have been deeply influenced by Western forms of Christianity as a result of the legacy of colonialism and missionary work. Many African theologians have therefore called for Christianity with an African face. This suggests the need for an African theology and African forms of Christianity. Theologians such as Bediako (1995), Bujo (1992), Dickson (1984), Idowu (1973), Mbiti (1969), Mugambi (1989), Oduyoye (1986), Pobe (1979) have been at the forefront of this endeavour.

Any attempt to explain the relationship between Christianity and Africa, remains problematic. This is due to the fact that both terms are complex and are influenced by a conflicting plurality of traditions. Different methodological strategies to do African theology have been proposed on the basis of concepts such as indigenisation, inculturation (Keteyi 1998), contextualisation (see Bosch 1992: 425-432, Martey 1993: 63-87), accommodation, or “constructing local theologies” (Schreiter 1985). Since these concepts are all contested and ambiguous, the methodological debates within the context of African theology remain unresolved. African theologians have been accused of putting too much emphasis on culture and thereby disregarding other important issues like the history of the encounter of African peoples with Christianity (Ross 1997). Nevertheless, it is clear that African theology may be regarded as an attempt to relate Christianity and African traditional culture.

Three phases in the development of African theology may be identified. The first phase of African theology can be linked to the expansion of Christianity in North Africa from the fourth to the seventh century. This period is characterized by great African thinkers, such as, Tertullian, Athanasius, Cyprian, Augustine (see Parratt 1995:1-13, Oduyoye 1986:15-18). The second phase, which marks the introduction of Christianity south of the Sahara, is linked to Portuguese colonial invasions around the year 1700 (Parratt 1995:4). Theologians like Kimpa Vita, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and James Johnson from Sierra Leone may be associated with this period. The third phase is the product of the expansion

of the European trade and colonialism in the nineteenth century with Africa as the “mission field” (Oduyoye 1986:6). The form of African theology / Christianity that exists today, resulted from the attempts by twentieth century African theologians to create a theology, or theologies, that are more appealing to their experiences as Africans. This was their way of saying that they were no longer interested in a theology that is distant from the African experience.

Contemporary Christian theologies in the African context have diversified considerably. One may identify the following different manifestations of African Christian theology, including a continuation of the theology of Mission Churches, Inculturation Theology, Evangelical Theology, Pentecostal Theology, and Liberation Theology. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In terms of these observations, one may conclude that, in generalised terms, while classic Christian theology regards evil as the product of sin, the emphasis in traditional African religion and culture is on human sin as the result of evil forces. The contrasting views of classic Christian theology and traditional African religion on the relationship between sin and evil, raise a number of interesting questions, especially in the context of African Christian Theology. What is the relationship between sin and evil? *How do African Christians integrate the classic expressions of the Christian faith and theology with traditional African culture and religion?* Is the emphasis on human responsibility? Or is it perhaps on the way in which humans are subjected to evil that is beyond their control? This study will focus on the way in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood within recent Christian theologies in the African context.

On the basis of the discussion thus far, the problem that will be investigated in this research project may be formulated as follows:

How is the relationship between sin and evil understood in recent publications in the field of African Christian theology?

This formulation calls for further conceptual clarification and a demarcation of the scope of the study:

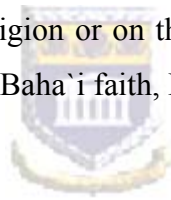
There are a number of publications in the field of African Christian theology that discuss the relationship between sin and evil in conceptual and relatively abstract terms. The contributions by Maimela (1991), Mbiti (1968, 1969), Pobee (1979), 99-119, Adegbola (1969), and Sawyerr (1964, 1972) in this regard, will clearly be of major significance to this study. However, the relationship between sin and evil is often discussed more implicitly in some contributions that reflect on issues such as healing, witchcraft, belief in evil spirits, and exorcism. The way, in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood in such contributions, will therefore be taken into account.

The problem statement above suggests that there may be various ways in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood in the context of recent African Christian theologies. This study will identify, classify and describe different ways in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood. The task of this study will therefore be one of a classification of various approaches that may be identified in the relevant literature.

This study will focus on the way in which the relationship between sin and evil is expressed in theological publications, published in English, including books, journal articles, essays in edited volumes and postgraduate theses. This implies that the way, in which this relationship is understood and expressed in oral and contemplative wisdom, will not be discussed in this research project. An investigation of the ways in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood by ordinary Christians in Africa may be highly fascinating, but will require empirical research that is beyond the scope of this research project. Given my limited language abilities, only English language publications will be considered in this study. This excludes a number of potentially important (mostly Catholic) contributions in French, especially from West and Central Africa.

This study will focus on recent publications of this nature, i.e. publications from the post-colonial period, with specific reference to the four decades, between 1960 and 2000, in which African Christian theology started to flourish. This also implies that classic African contributions to an understanding of the Christian faith, e.g. those by Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine and many others will be excluded from the scope of this study.

This study will focus on African Christian theology only. It will investigate deliberate attempts to relate Christianity to the African context. It will focus on contributions within the context of the Protestant tradition as well as African Instituted Churches (AIC's), while also noting some Catholic contributions. It will therefore not focus on Coptic, Ethiopian or Orthodox expressions of Christianity. It will also not focus on contributions in the field of African traditional religion or on theological reflections in the context of other religious traditions, such as the Baha'i faith, Hinduism, Islam or Judaism.



The terms “Africa” and the “African context”, call for further clarification. This study will focus on contributions that have been published in sub-Saharan Africa, although contributions from African authors such as John Mbiti, Mercy Oduyoye, and John Pobee that were published elsewhere (e.g. by WB Eerdmans and Orbis Books) will also be considered. North African publications will therefore not be included in the scope of this study. Furthermore, only publications on the relationship between sin and evil, which engage deliberately and self-consciously with the African context, will be considered. This comment calls for further deliberation on the notions of African identity and African culture. These are obviously complex and contested terms. For the purpose of this study, the contributions of all theologians (including white authors - to use racial categories) who discuss the sub-Saharan context deliberately and self-consciously, will be taken into account.

This study will therefore identify and classify the various ways in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood within the context of recent African Christian theologies.

1.3. Hypothesis

From a survey of the literature on themes such as sin, evil, witchcraft, evil spirits, exorcism and healing, it is evident that African Christian theologies are only beginning to grapple with the relationship between these concepts in a systematic way. I argue that there are two ways through which one can understand how the issue of sin is understood in African Christian theology. The first way is to employ what I call the "*two contrasting positions*" type of classification, and the second way is to employ what I call the "*four contrasting positions*" type of classification. I argue that if a researcher employs the first classification, he or she would discover that there are two main positions. The first position is that *sin is the source of evil*. This position is reflected in all four existing trends of African Christian theology. The second position is that *evil is the source of sin*. This position is also reflected in most trends of African Christian theology, except in African evangelical theology. I then further argue that, if one employs the second classification, one will discover that there are four positions. The first position is that *sin is a source of evil, while evil can sometimes also be the source of sin*. This position represents mainly the views of African inculturation theology. The second position is that *evil is the source of sin, while sin can also lead to evil, even though the latter is not emphasised*. This position is more common within the context of Liberation theology and Zionist theology. The third position is that *sin is the source of evil and no other way around*. Here we are looking at the views of African evangelical theology. The fourth position is that *sin is as much a source of evil as evil is a source of sin*. This represents the views of African Pentecostal theology.

1.4. Procedure

This thesis covers five chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter Two provides a brief overview of various developments of the doctrine of sin in Western Christian Theology since the time of the church fathers, until the 20th century. The emphasis here is on the contributions within the Protestant world from authors such as Karl Barth (1961), Reinhold Niebuhr (1941), Berkouwer (1971), Farley (1990), McKim (1988), Migliore (1991), Peters (1994) and Williams (1985). Chapter 3 offers a very brief survey of the emergence of an indigenous African Christian theology. Chapter 4 forms the main focus of this study. In this chapter the hypothesis as stated above, will be critically tested with regard to the available literature in recent African Christian Theology on the relationship between sin and evil. A brief concluding chapter offers a few perspectives on the way in which the relationship between sin and evil may be understood within an African context.



1.5. Relevance of the study

Systematic theology has received relatively little attention in post-colonial African Theology. Many contributions to African Theology discuss the task of the church and themes that are important in an African context such as culture, healing, the spirit, church leadership, the role of the ancestors and initiation. Urgent ethical issues such as civil war, poverty, hunger, the plight of women and children, ethnicity and deforestation, receive much needed attention as well. These contributions often include reflections on the traditional themes in Christian doctrine such as revelation, the trinity, the doctrine of God, creation, humanity, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, sin and salvation, the sacraments and eschatology. However, these often remain implicit and are seldom developed towards a systematic treatment of specific aspects of Christian doctrine.

My research project will form part of a larger co-operative research project entitled “Mapping Systematic Theology in Africa” initiated by the supervisor of my project, Prof Ernst Conradie of the University of the Western Cape. The purpose of this larger project

is to co-ordinate a number of post-graduate research projects in the field of systematic theology that will investigate specific aspects of Christian doctrine, as this has emerged in post-colonial African theology. These smaller research projects will be registered at various universities in South Africa. The University of the Western Cape will provide the administrative context for this larger project. An indexed bibliography edited by Conradie and Fredericks (2004) has been published in this regard as part of a series of "Study Guides in Religion and Theology" by the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa. The stated purpose of the larger project is to contribute to the growth of systematic theology within an African context.



2. Sin and Evil in Western Christian Theology:

2.1. A short history of the doctrine of sin

The theme of sin remains both a crucial and a controversial theme in Christian theology. It forms a crucial part of the Christian message of salvation from sin. At the same time, there have been several major controversies over an appropriate theological understanding of the significance of human sin. The history of the doctrine of sin in Western Christian Theology is usually divided into four periods, i.e. the patristic period, the medieval period, the Protestant Reformation and the modern period since the time of the European Enlightenment. Let us investigate some of these historical developments briefly:

2.1(a) Patristic views on sin

i) The Apostolic Fathers

There is not much to be said with regards to the views of the Apostolic fathers on the issue of sin, for their theologies did not dwell much on this issue. The same may also be said with regards to such issues as atonement and justification. The fact that the Apostolic fathers paid less attention to the issue of sin can be seen in the writings of well-known apostolic fathers such as Clement (active around 96), Hermas, Barnabas, and Ignatius.¹

ii) The Apologists

The issue of sin received attention for the first time in the church during the time of the Apologists.² Among those who made this possible, one may think of well-known apologists such as Justin 100-165, Titian, Irenaeus 130-200, and Theophilus. Justin believed that sin consists in erroneous belief and ignorance of what is good and in the resultant rebellion against God's commandment. He also blamed the "malign demons", which he believed were the product of the union of fallen angels with the daughters of

¹ For a more detailed discussion on the Apostolic fathers and the doctrine of sin, see Kelly (1977: 163-166) and Karl Rahner (1983).

men (*sic*). He argued that the "malign demons" swarmed everyone and infected them with obsessed human's souls and bodies, infecting them with vice and corruption (Kelly 1977: 167). Titian believed that human beings fell into sin through becoming attached to one of the angels who was more subtle than the others, as well as through venerating this angel as God. As the result of this, human beings became the prey of demonic assaults, for the guidance of the Spirit was withdrawn, even though God did not obliterate the power of self-determinism. Irenaeus argued that Adam became an easy prey to the serpent's wiles and disobeyed God. Consequently he lost the divine image and likeness, especially the latter since the former must have persisted in some degree and fell into the clutches of the devil. For Irenaeus, the essence of sin therefore consisted of disobedience, which the serpent instigated. In addition to that, the Apologists also believed that a human being is endowed with "free will". Theophilus argued that a human being is neither mortal nor immortal, but is capable of both. He then continued by saying the destiny of a human being depends on how he or she uses his or her own free will (Kelly 1977: 168). Titian on the other hand believed that a human being was not created good, but with a capacity for goodness. That means, whether he or she becomes good or evil depends on how he or she exercises his or her own free will. Lastly, the Apologists believed that the sin of Adam had some negative consequences for his descendants. Irenaeus, for example, taught that sin entails consequences for the whole human race and he had no doubt that the first man's disobedience was the source of the general sinfulness and mortality of humankind (see Kelly 1977: 171-174). This line of thinking should not be confused with the doctrine of original sin, which developed in the fourth century.³

iii) Greek fathers

The issue of sin also came under scrutiny during the time of the Greek fathers. The Greek fathers believed that before the fall (Adam's sin) human beings were in a state of perfection and blessedness (McGrath 1994: 270), (Kelly 1977: 348-352). For example,

² The name Apologists is derived from the involvement of these church fathers in apologetics, that is a reasoned defence of the church against her critics.

³ For a more detailed discussion of the views of the Apologists, see a helpful discussion of Kelly (1977: 166-174).

the Cappadocian fathers, including, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa (330-395), depict Adam as leading an idyllic, Godlike existence in Eden, stamped with the divine image and free from all disabilities such as death. He also believed that Adam lived a life that was filled with love for his creator, while he also had an intimate relationship with Him. This line of thought also features in the Antiochene tradition. Chrysostom, for example, held that Adam was neither corruptible nor mortal, while they (Adam and Eve) both lived an angelic life free from care. He also strongly believed that Adam's wisdom and knowledge were perfect. In other words, Adam knew the meaning of the divine command and the penalties attached to its violation. The views of the Greek fathers as we can see differed from those of the Manicheans, who taught that all matter or creation was evil.

The Greek fathers also taught that Adam, including the rest of the human race, fell from his original state of perfection due to the misuse of his own free will. Human nature, as a result of this, became corrupt and evil. The Greek fathers, nevertheless, also make it very clear that even though the fall corrupted most parts of the human nature, the human "free will" was not affected. One would note therefore that these theologians did not deny the fact that there are connections between Adam's sin and the present human condition. However, they never believed that the sin of Adam determines the sins of Adam's descendants. As far as the Greek fathers were concerned any act of sin was the result of an individual's own free choice. One should therefore note that the doctrine of original sin was also not yet developed during the time of the Greek fathers. As we shall see in the next section, it is only during the time of the Latin fathers that some ideas of original sin began to emerge (Kelly 1977: 348-352).

iv) The Latin fathers

Discussions about the issue of sin among the Greek fathers inspired the Latin fathers to begin their own discussions. As a result, the thoughts of the Greek fathers with regards to the issue of sin had a significant influence on the way Latin fathers in Western Europe thought about sin (Berkhof 1937: 128-130). Like the Greek fathers, the Latin fathers

maintained that a person's original state was that of supernatural blessedness. With regards to the issue of "free will", Tertullian (160-225), a leading figure during this time in the West, (Kelly 1977: 174) followed in the footsteps of his Greek counterparts, as he strongly believed that free will plays a major role in human behaviour. He even defended the existence of "free will" against Marcion and Hermogenes. This relationship between the Greek fathers and the Latin fathers became weaker as Latin fathers increasingly emphasised the issue of original sin, especially during the third and the fourth century. Unlike the Greek fathers, the Latin fathers began to pay more attention to the solidarity of the human race with Adam including all that this notion entails (Berkhof 1937: 129). For example, statements such as "all sinned in Adam", and "all are guilty in Adam" became more popular and common in the writings of Latin fathers such as Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, and Cyril of Jerusalem (315-387) (see Berkhof 1937: 127-130) and (Bettenson 1974). In addition to that, the role of free will received less attention as the focus shifted towards the role of grace. This trend reached its highest point in the fourth century through the role played by St. Augustine.



v) Augustine

Major developments within the doctrine of sin took place during the time of St. Augustine. Augustine took the discussions on sin to a new level. Lohse (1966: 114) states the following in this regard:

It is clear that Augustine imparted to the traditional doctrine of sin profundity, which it had not had before. For him sin is not merely this or that wrongful deed. Hence sin is not something which can be removed by a mere appeal to the good in man, or through instruction. Sin is rather, the wrong orientation of all human existence since Adam's fall, an orientation from which no one can free himself. It is the form of existence in which we, as humans, find ourselves. In insisting upon this, Augustine overcame the moralism, which had hitherto dominated the concept of sin.

Augustine confessed that human beings are inherently sinful because of the fall. And this condition makes the human will to be generally biased towards evil. In addition to that he believed that sin darkens the human mind. As a result, human beings are unable to think clearly or to understand higher spiritual truths and ideas. This leads to their inability to self-diagnose their situation. In other words, for Augustine, human beings have no control over sin. That means there is nothing they can do to escape its condition since they do not even know what is wrong with them in the first place. Augustine based this on his belief in the “bondage of the will”. With regards to human beings' way out of this bondage, Augustine believed that the only way for human beings to escape their imprisonment was through the grace of God, which according to Augustine is only obtainable as a free gift from God. That means that there is absolutely nothing that human beings can do to obtain grace. Augustine’s doctrine of sin became a major success, for he managed to get the support of the early church and his ideas became the main point of reference for many centuries to come. In spite of the influence of Augustine's doctrine of sin, there were those who understood this subject in a completely different way. One such person was Pelagius.



vi) Pelagius

Unlike Augustine, Pelagius believed, unconditionally, in a free will and the total responsibility of human beings with regard to sin. He taught that human beings have a unique privilege of being able to accomplish the divine will out of their own choice. He utterly rejected the idea that "human will" has an intrinsic bias in favour of wrongdoing because of the fall. To the contrary, he taught that since God created the human soul, it could not come into the world soiled by original sin transmitted from Adam. He believed that there is no congenital fault in human beings as they are born, for before they begin to exercise their will, there is within them only what God has created.

Pelagius equally rejected the suggestion that there can be any special pressure on a human’s will to choose the good. To him this meant the limitation of grace to such purely external aids as God has provided. In other words no room is left for any special, interior

action of God upon the soul, much less any predestination to holiness (this rejection is directed towards Augustine's doctrine of predestination).

Pelagius admitted that grace is necessary in every act and that grace is bestowed to make the fulfilment of God's commandment easier. However, he understood this differently. For him grace meant three things: Firstly, it meant "free will" itself, or the possibility of not sinning, which God endowed in every human being. Secondly, it meant the revelations through reason, of God's law, instructing human beings and holding out eternal sanctions. Thirdly, since this has become obscured through evil custom, grace is the Law of Moses and the teaching of Jesus Christ.⁴

2.1(b) Medieval perspectives on sin

Theologians in the Middle Ages based their understanding of sin on the views of Augustine. Together with Augustine they strongly believed in the doctrine of original sin, the bondage of the will, the doctrine of predestination, and the estrangement of the human nature. However, due to the influence of Scholasticism, these theologians saw themselves as charged with the task of consolidating Augustine's doctrine of grace, placing it upon more reliable foundations and exploring its consequences (see McGrath 1994:379). Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) contributed significantly to this idea. His contribution is mainly focused on two aspects of the doctrine of sin, that is, the nature and essence of sin, and grace and human nature. With regards to the nature and essence of sin, Thomas Aquinas described sin as "non-being" or "non-existent" (Brunner 1952: 115 and Hick 1968: 100). He believed that sin or evil cannot have its own existence, for these phenomena are none other than the privation of good, which means without good there can be no such thing as evil or sin. According to Aquinas, "God is the cause of evil by accident".⁵ "Sin (as far as Aquinas is concerned) is an unintended by-product of a good creation in which besides the first cause, secondary causes are operative. Not that they can create anything themselves, but their failures can have a wrong effect on the good

⁴ For a further discussion on Pelagian controversy see McGrath (1994: 371-373).

⁵ Quoted in Berkhof (1986: 204)

creation" (Brunner 1952: 204). Aquinas argued that there are two types of grace: "actual grace" and "habitual grace". Actual grace refers to the series of divine actions or influences upon human nature, while habitual grace refers to a created habit of grace in the human soul. Aquinas argued that an intermediate stage is established in each and every human being, whereby the human soul is made ready to host God's grace. Once the human soul is ready, it receives its future host, which is a supernatural substance called habitual grace. Thomas Aquinas believed that there is a huge gulf between human beings and God, and due to this gulf, God cannot establish a direct presence within human nature. Hence Aquinas believed that God occupies a space within the human soul in a form of habitual grace, which is something inherently good within human nature. In connection with this conviction, he also maintained that human beings were not necessarily in need of what he refers to as actual grace.⁶ Tillich states the following in this regard:

For Thomas Aquinas, with whom I am in agreement on this point, nature and grace are not two contradictory concepts. Grace contradicts only estranged nature, but not nature as such. ... nature is fulfilled in supernature, and supernature is grace. This is the structure of reality, which has existed from creation. God gave to Adam in paradise not only his natural abilities, but beyond these a *donum superadditum*, a gift added to his natural gifts. This is a gift of grace by virtue of which Adam could persist in a state of union with God (Tillich 1968: 192).

It is in response to such views that the Reformers later accused Aquinas of being semi-Pelagian in his views.⁷

2.1(c) The Reformation on sin

The reformers revived the views of Augustine by placing the doctrine of sin once more upon a genuinely biblical foundation (Brunner 1952: 114). Both Luther (1483-1546) and

⁶ For my discussion on the doctrine of sin in the Medieval Period, I am highly indebted to McGrath (1994: 379-381).

⁷ For more on this issue, see Luther's disputation against scholastic theology in Luther (1989: 13-20).

Calvin (1509-1564) based their doctrines of sin mostly on the views of Augustine, for they believed that Augustine represented the best wisdom of the ancient church, uncontaminated by the subsequent aberrations of Medieval Scholasticism (Hick 1968: 121). Both Luther and Calvin believed in original sin. Both of them believed that the root of sin is unfaith, pride and self-satisfaction. Like Augustine they believed that a "human will" is enslaved through sin, and that God's grace is the only hope for such a situation. According to Brunner (1952: 115), the Reformers brought back to the doctrine of sin four elements that feature in Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of sin. They are: the universality and totality of sin; *the non posse non peccare* as a state of unredeemed man (*sic*); the impossibility of acquiring merit and the central significance of guilt (Brunner 1952: 114). Hick (1968: 121) notes, however, that it was always the biblical and theological side, rather than the more speculative and philosophical side of Augustine's writings, that appealed more to the Reformers. Both Luther and Calvin saw the need to continue from where their great teacher had left off. Luther took the doctrine of justification further, while Calvin focused on the doctrine of predestination.⁸



2.1(d) Modern perspectives on sin

The doctrine of sin as formulated by Augustine and the Reformers came under attack in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. This was due to the fact that it appeared to contradict two central convictions of modernity: the conviction of essential human goodness and the supreme value accorded to human freedom, autonomy and dignity. Thinkers of the enlightenment criticised Augustine's doctrine of sin on different accounts. Firstly, they accused Augustine's formulation for being self-contradictory. One of the areas in which they observed this contradiction was in Augustine's affirmation of both the inevitability of sin, which is reflected in his doctrine of original sin, and the personal responsibility for sin, which he maintains through his emphasis on the "free will".

⁸ For more on the doctrine of sin according to the reformers, see McGrath (1994: 381- 388, 1986: 180-187), Durand (1978: 30-38), Hick (1968: 121-127), Althaus (1984: 141-160, 169-178), Tillich (1968: 245), George (1989: 62-86), Luther (1989: 173-226), Ebeling (1964: 210-225), and Gassmann (2001: 308-309).

Secondly, they criticised the classical doctrine of sin on account of its resting upon a literal interpretation of Genesis (2-3) as though it was actual history. For example, they argued that the terms and concepts which were used in the classic doctrine of sin, e.g. original righteousness, original sin, and original guilt, were clearly presupposing and pointing to a literal historical account of what took place. They further argued that in this way the Bible is thought to provide divinely guaranteed, infallible information concerning the creation of the world, the human condition prior to the fall and the fall itself. Challenging these and similar accounts whereby the biblical stories are taken to be literal, the Enlightenment critics, among other things, argued that the biblical narratives are not scientific accounts of natural-cosmological history. They warned that any attempt to extend biblical authority into the scientific sphere has been and is always fruitless and counterproductive.

On the third account, they criticised the classical doctrine of sin for leaving out some crucial elements of the Genesis story, especially the role of the serpent. For example, they argued that through transforming the Adam's story from a dramatic narrative of the sin of Adam and Eve into a historical account of the fall of all humanity, the classic doctrine suppressed and distorted some crucial elements of the biblical narrative. This includes the crucial point symbolised by the serpent. According to such thinkers, the serpent represents the presence of temptation prior to the fall. In other words, the serpent is an evil that is already there, when human beings were still considered to be in their original state of blessedness. This, as far as these thinkers were concerned, points towards recognition of the tragic depth of evil. These thinkers warrant that this important aspect of the creation narrative is deliberately overlooked in order to make Adam and Eve the origin of evil.

These views had a major impact on how people viewed the doctrine of sin. However, this did not stop the theological discourse on the doctrine of sin, as we shall see in the next

section, when we look at further developments within the doctrine of sin in the 20th Century.⁹

2.1(e) 20th Century developments

Despite the heavy blow suffered by the doctrine of sin in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, a number of books were published on the doctrine of sin in the very late nineteenth century and especially in the twentieth century. Major contributors in this regard include Soren Kierkegaard and prominent 20th century Christian theologians such as, Karl Barth (1886-1965), F.R. Tennant, Emil Brunner and others. Other leading figures in the development of the doctrine of sin in this period, include Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), and Paul Tillich (1886-1965). Much of this development took place during the hey-days of dialectical theology in the first half of the 20th century. All these theologians were in one way or another responding to the thinking of the enlightenment regarding the doctrine of sin. In accordance with this, they either tried to modify certain aspects within the doctrine of sin,¹⁰ or defended those aspects, which they thought were unchangeable. Others however were not prepared at all, to see any sort of modification in the classic doctrine of sin.¹¹

The issue of sin also elicited the attention of quite a number of theologians towards the middle and the end of the twentieth century. Major contributions in this regard came from prominent European and American authors such as G.C. Berkouwer (1971), Hendrikus Berkhof (1986), Wolfhart Panenber (1985), Christof Gestrinch (1997), Ted Peters (1994) and Cornelius Plantinga jr. (1995).

⁹ In this discussion I draw from a very insightful and comprehensive discussion of Williams (1985: 179-183)

¹⁰ Especially those aspects, which were heavily, challenged by the enlightenment critics. Karl Barth, for example, focused more on the issue of predestination, while others such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich, and Paul Ricoeur, Reinhold Niebuhr and Austin Farrer focused on the issue of the origins of sin by trying to analyse the aspect from a philosophical point of view.

¹¹ This is especially true of G.C. Berkouwer and later Christof Gestrinch and others.

Another development of the doctrine of sin took place within the context of theological movements such as Liberation Theology, Black Theology, Feminist Theology, and African Theology. Within these contexts, sin either came to be understood more in terms of, "*being sinned against*" through, colonialism, discrimination, oppression, and patriarchy, or in terms of *anything that hinders the well being of the society*. The former is especially true of the way, in which sin is understood within the context of Liberation Theology, Black Theology, and Feminist Theology, while the latter represents an understanding of sin that is more common in the context of African Christian Theology. Also, theologians within this context tend to focus their attention more on the impact of sin on the society. This is strongly reflected, for example, in concepts such as structural sin/violence. Major contributions in the development of this new way of looking at sin came from authors such as Gustavo Gutierrez (1978), James Cone (1969), Judith Plaskow (1980), Harry Sawyer (1972, 1964) and John Pobee (1979). The next section is an overview of the major questions which theologians have had to battle, throughout the history of the Christian doctrine of sin.



2.2 Questions pertaining to the doctrine of sin in Western Christian theology

A doctrine of sin typically addresses a number of different questions. These include the following questions: What is sin? Where does sin come from? (the origins). What is the nature of sin? How can human beings know sin? And what is the relationship between sin and evil? Let us take a brief look at how Christian theology has responded to these questions in the West.

2.2(a) What is sin?

This question focuses on what Western Christian theology believes to have happened and is happening in the event of sin. Western Christian theology has always understood sin as a conscious human decision to turn away from God. In addition to that, Western Christian theology employs a number of concepts, which it uses to explain this phenomenon. For example, sin has been understood as: an act of *idolatry*. This refers to a case whereby a

human being decides to create his or her own God out of either himself or herself, or out of an object of his or her own choice, and thereby undermining the position of God (Migliore 1991: 131). Sin has also been referred to as rebellion or disobedience.¹² This refers to a situation whereby human being(s), rise up against the authority or command of God. Sin has been referred to as apostasy,¹³ as unfaith or unbelief,¹⁴ as pride or self-appraisal.¹⁵

It is important to note that Christian theologians in the West do not put sin on the same scale as breaking the law or violating a moral code. According to Plantinga (1995: 18-27), such things as breaking the law or violating a moral code has got little to do with God, for they tend to involve human beings and their own problems, problems which are outside the realm of the relationship between God and human beings. These, instead, belong in the field of social disciplines such as secular law, psychology, psychiatry, and other related disciplines. Sin on the other hand, he continues, can and should always be viewed only in relation to God. In addition to that, Christian theologians also emphasise that sin is a condition in which all human beings find themselves once the communication between human beings and God is broken (Hill 1984: 57).

Christian Theology has traditionally identified especially two attitudes in the human nature as potential basis for the occasion of sin: human pride (*superbia*) (Augustine, Karl Barth, Niebuhr), and greed (*concupiscentia*) (Niebuhr). Augustine was the first person to look closely to the question of the nature of sin. After a long quest into this question, he concluded that pride is the beginning of all sin. However, this thought was soon overshadowed by his focus on concupiscence (*sexual desire*), which he regarded as the punishment of Adam's pride on his descendants. The issue of sin as concupiscence also comes up in Thomas Aquinas. According to him, the nature of sin lies in concupiscence

¹² See Boice: (1986: 195-196, 97), Brunner (1952: 90-92), and Erickson (1985: 572-573)

¹³ See Boice (1986: 196) and Brunner (1952: 93).

¹⁴ See Boice (1986: 194)

¹⁵ See Niebuhr (1941), Barth (1961), Migliore (1991: 131)

by which he meant, “the inordinate longing for some temporal good”, and mainly the self.

Protestant theologians, on the other hand, described the nature of sin in terms of pride. Berkhof (1986: 196) observes that in Latin, Roman Catholic, frolicsome southern Europe sin was, and is, especially viewed as desire, while in Germanic, Protestant and “Faustian” north Western Europe and North America it was regarded as pride. Apart from that, however, there is yet another line in liberal Protestant theology in which sin is understood as desire and worldliness. Berkhof (1986: 194-195) explains why pride and greed are the potential breeding grounds for the occasion of sin. He observes that having negated the core around which, and the direction, for which the human existence was created, human beings, due to the triangular relationship of God-I-the world, has only two options. That is to seek fulfilment in the world around them to which they give themselves, or to turn to themselves as their main point of reference. In this latter instance, continues Berkhof, a basic human goal becomes self- affirmation and self-realisation.



Apart from greed and pride, there are also other aspects, which have been viewed as potential breeding grounds of sin. For example, Thomas Aquinas saw the nature of sin in the "privation of good",¹⁶ Immanuel Kant saw it in an inexplicable presence of "radical evil" in human nature, Kierkegaard finds it in human despair. Other views with regards to the nature of sin come from authors such as Tillich (1957), and Niebuhr (1941). Tillich (1957: 29-44) believed that the human essence is a divinely given potential which must necessarily be actualised by the leap into freedom, which is at the same time a leap into guilt. In accordance with this belief, he saw sin as an existential estrangement, from the ground of all being, from other human beings, and from oneself, a condition, which seems to be virtually a natural accompaniment of creaturehood. Niebuhr (1941) finds the nature of sin in the tension between human freedom and human finiteness. Liberation theology finds it nowhere other than in the economic structures which determines the lives of millions of poor people the world over (Gutierrez 1973). Harrison S. Elliot

¹⁶ See section 2.1(d).

(1940) finds it in individualistic competitiveness that takes place among individuals, groups/organisations, and nations. Apart from greed and pride Peters (1994) identifies the nature of sin as, anxiety, unfaith, self-justification, cruelty and blasphemy. Apart from battling to know what sin and its nature is, Christian theologians also had to deal with the issue of the origin of sin.

2.2(b) Where does sin come from? (The origins of sin)

Does sin come from God? Does it come from some supernatural being that is in opposition to God, or does it come from human beings? This is one of the most difficult questions within the history of the Christian doctrine of sin. In the history of the Christian faith, there are three fundamental positions in response to this question, namely: *dualism*, *monism* and *human responsibility for sin*.

i) Dualism

Thinkers who followed this position understood the origins of sin to be in a cosmic power, which is hostile to God. In accordance with this understanding, there were two hostile supernatural beings, one responsible for goodness, and the other for evil/sin. This position is called dualism. This idea became popular in early Christian theology due to the influence of Gnosticism, Marcionism and Manicheanism. Augustine himself supported this idea when he was still a follower of Manicheans. This explication of the origins of sin gained support from many, for it protected both God and human beings from being seen as authors of evil. In spite of all the support dualism enjoyed, the church rejected it on grounds that it suggested that God have an opponent who was equally powerful. The church could not allow the idea of having two Gods, for that seemed to be an insult to the sovereign power of the living God. Having rejected dualism, the church had to come up with another explanation. Hence there is a position called *monism*.

ii) Monism

Under the full conviction that God is the creator of all that there is including sin, and also cautious not to repeat the same mistake of dualism, monistic thinkers reached a conclusion that God was the origin of sin. This found expression in statements such as from him and through him is all things. Sin therefore could not fall outside of this confession (Berkhof 1986). Berkhof (1986:202) observes that those who followed this idea, felt that they were backed by a number of biblical passages, which seemed to agree that God ordained sin. Berkhof quotes a number of passages such as (Ex 4: 2, 8: 15), (Rom 9: 17), (1 Sam. 16: 14), and (Matt. 18: 7). The Church nevertheless also rejected this position on the basis that God cannot combat sin and fulminate against it, if God wanted it in the first place. This implies that there must be another explanation for the origins of evil. This leads us to the third position, which is human responsibility for sin.¹⁷

iii) Human responsibility for sin

In this position, the church came to the conclusion that human beings are solely responsible for sin. This means that they have no excuse, and no scapegoat, which can absolve them from this responsibility. This position later became the official position of the church with regards to the origin of sin in Europe and in America. Although the church is not moving from this position, debates over the issue of the origin of sin did not come to an end. Firstly, to affirm that human beings are solely responsible for sin, for some, seemed to ignore, or to undermine, the role of Satan, or the Devil in the biblical narrative, as the one who invites or entices human beings to commit sin.

On the other hand, there were those who, indirectly, saw the origins of sin neither in God nor in human beings, but in the nature of creation itself. A classic example of this is the notion that, God created human beings out of nothing, which makes them changeable and imperfect. This aspect of human nature manifests itself in the freedom of the will that

¹⁷ For more on the origins of sin in Western Christian Theology, see Berkouwer (1971) and Berkhof (1986: 201-206)

makes it impossible for a human being to depend on a supreme being, but also to turn away from it and so condemn him/herself to a loss of being.

Thomas Aquinas for example, believed that God caused evil by accident. In other words God created everything good, and out of this good came sin. Other figures that contributed debates of this nature include Paul Tillich, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Reinhold Niebuhr.¹⁸

2.2(c) How can human beings know sin? (The knowledge of sin)

Can human beings understand and know sin on their own? Western Christian theology has always maintained that this is not possible. A general Christian response to this question is clearly reflected in the words of Berkhof as he says; “Knowledge of sin is faith knowledge. What God calls sin goes much deeper and is infinitely more comprehensive than what we can dig up out of our own “hearts” even with the most merciless introspection” (Berkhof H, 1986: 198).



However, there have always been differences in how this is understood in Western Christian theology. Theologians began to pay more attention to this question in and after the Reformation (Berkhof 1986: 200). For Luther, knowledge of sin does not come from human beings. Instead it comes from God via the law, while the knowledge of grace also comes from God via the gospel. According to Luther, "the light of the law instructs us, teaching us that we are under corruption and wrath, and designating all men (*sic*) as liars and sons of wrath". He further argues that there are two types of evil that the law reveals, namely inward evil and outward evil. Elsewhere, he argues that the Gospel on the other hand, aims at removing sin from human beings through grace.¹⁹ Modern followers of Luther, in line with his thoughts, regard the knowledge of sin as a result of God's

¹⁸ I am not saying that there is neither a fourth nor a fifth position within the context of Western Christian theology in this position. Instead I want to make it clear that Aquinas and other authors during modernity and during the twentieth century were not content with the decision that the church took.

¹⁹ See Luther (1958: 223-229) translated by George Lindbeck from Luther's work published in 1521. For more on the knowledge of sin through the law and gospel see Berkouwer (1971: 139-231).

universally accessible revelation in creation, which is owing to man's (*sic*) failure to live up to the creation's mandate, a revelation of wrath (see Berkhof 1986: 200).

In Reformed Protestantism, the so-called "Further Reformation" followed the same direction, but this movement did not connect the knowledge of sin from the law with general revelation (see Berkhof 1986: 200). On the contrary, it found the source of that knowledge in a peculiar illumination by the spirit, which preceded grace.

Calvin followed a different direction. He considered the knowledge of sin and the knowledge of grace as opposites. "... we mean to show that a man cannot apply himself seriously to repentance without knowing himself to belong to God. But no one is truly persuaded that he belongs to God unless he has first recognised God's grace.²⁰ In line with Calvin, Barth did not agree with the view that the knowledge of sin comes from the law, and most importantly not from general revelation, for he saw no difference between the law and the gospel. Instead, using Christology as his starting point in his doctrine of sin, Barth strongly argued that it is impossible for human beings to understand or to know sin in any other way, except through a confrontation with Christ. For Barth, human beings first need to know God who is incarnated in Jesus and only then will they understand what sin is. In other words, for Barth, the experience of sin is exclusively possible through God's grace in Jesus Christ. This is the only way through which human beings can recognise their sinfulness.²¹

d) What are the results of sin? How serious is sin?

Western Christian theology believes that sin breaks the lines of communication between God and his people. In other words what human beings and God shared is no longer in place. As a result of this, human beings lose one thing that they need most for their survival: God's love. Gestrich (1997) would say they lose what he calls "divine

²⁰ On Calvin's thoughts on this subject, see a good survey by Berkouwer G.C, 1971: 149-231)

²¹ For a view of contemporary western Christian theology with regard to this issue, see Pannenberg (1985), and Gestrich (1997).

splendour”. Defining sin, Berkhof (1986: 194) writes, “sin is the negation of the centre around which the existence of human beings was created”. Without this vital element of human existence, Augustine believed that human beings become blind to the divine truth and to God Himself. Their will is forever biased towards evil or wrongdoing. Sin takes control of the human will. In other words, the will become enslaved to sin or evil. This leads to yet another point. It is believed that sin robs human beings of their “freedom.”²² That is not all. Sin also makes human beings sick. It becomes a disease that cannot be cured. What then does this lead to?

Christian theology maintains that having negated God, human beings usually, if not all the time, find refuge in the world or in themselves. Berkhof (1986: 195) observes that because human beings stand in the triangular relation of “God-I-the world”, when they refuse to be anchored in God, their only alternative is either to seek fulfilment in the world or the self as the main point of reference. In the latter instance, argues Berkhof, a human being’s goal is self-affirmation and self-realisation (see Berkhof 1986: 195-196). In other words sin either makes us worshippers of nature or makes us our own Gods. Sin makes human beings tyrants. Niebuhr (1941) argues that while we praise ourselves, we also force others and nature to praise us as well. Sin therefore affects the sinner, those around the sinner, and nature.²³ In addition, sin does not only affect the sinner, other people and nature. Sin takes control of the whole society, including its structures (Erickson 1985). Sin pollutes, destructs, and perverts the way things were supposed to be (Plantinga 1995).

The last, and most important thing that results from sin, is that sin leads to death.²⁴ What then is the relationship between sin and evil in Western Christian Theology? The next section explains how this relationship is understood in Western Christian Theology.

²² For more information on how human beings lose their freedom through sin, see a section in Brunner 1952: 118-132)

²³ For a more detailed analysis on the effects of sin on the sinner, on those around the sinner, and on nature, see Erickson 1985: 615-619 and Boice 1986: 199-203).

²⁴ See Erickson (1985) Weber (1981: 618-628), Boice (1986), Jungel (1975: 59-94), Van de Beek (1990) and Hall (1986).

e) What is the relationship between sin and evil?

In Christian theology it is often difficult to recognise the difference between sin and evil. However, it is also true that Christian Theology treats sin and evil as two different concepts with different meanings, but closely related to each other. The relationship between these two concepts can be outlined as the follows:

Western Christian theology regards sin as an act which gives birth to evil. It is believed that once human beings turn away from God, they are immediately confronted by evil. Sin gives birth to two types of evil, that is the evil people commit and the evil they endure (Van de Beek 1990). This calls for a little further explanation. The evil people endure includes anxiety, fear, disillusionment, suffering, other peoples' evil deeds and the power that takes over their lives. The evil which people commit, consists of cruelty which takes the form of deceit, discrimination, torture, destruction of other creatures, including the environment, and injustice. For Deist (1991), as far as the Old Testament is concerned, an act of insubordination (i.e. sin) produces evil, which suffocates life. When in the creation narratives, Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, they created evil and summoned death and a divine curse. Hammer (1990: 321-323) notes that the story of Cain and Abel forms the first account of evil in the Bible. He argues that throughout this part of the Bible, sin is defined as temptation to do evil. According to this description therefore, evil is the product of sin.

We return to this question in Chapter Four albeit in a different context, when we look at how the relationship between sin and evil is understood in African Christian theology.

3. African Christian theology: A brief overview

3.1. A definition of African Christian Theology

African Christian Theology is an African expression of Christian faith that takes place orally (see Oduyoye 1986: 45-50, Mbiti 1979: 15-25, 2003: 7-8, and Parrat 1995: 16), symbolically, and in writing, by African Christian theologians using African thought forms, concepts and worldviews. It is African because it comes from the African people. To explain this, Mugambi (1989: 5-7) argues that apart from all the differences that characterise the African continent, there are some commonalities and homogeneity within the African experience. For example, Africans all over the world still value the role of the family and kinship, the role of the community and the importance of the elders. Secondly, many African countries share the same political and economic experiences. These include civil wars, persecution, oppression, discrimination, suffering and poverty.

African Christian theology is Christian because it is largely based on biblical traditions, especially the life of Jesus Christ. In addition to that, it is Christian for it draws from the rich reservoir of the Christian tradition. Oduyoye (1986: 52) confirms this, when she argues that traditional themes of Christian doctrine, such as the doctrine of God, creation, sin and redemption, are emphasised in African Christian theology (also see Mugambi 1989: 9-12, Parrat 1995: 18, and Muzorewa 1985: 94-95). On this basis one would note that African theology is neither an attempt by African theologians to cut themselves off from the rest of the Christian community, nor are they attempting to write an exclusive theology. Instead, it is the effort of African Christian Theology to understand and to live the Gospel as Africans rather than as Europeans or Americans. Hence, the main difference between African Christian Theology and Western Christian Theology is that the former is expressed and understood in African thought forms and the latter in European or American thought forms and concepts.¹

3.2. Origins and the birth of the idea of an "African Christian theology"

African Christian theology south of the Sahara emerged out of a general concern by African Christians and African Christian theologians that Christianity, in its original western format, did not reflect the understanding and experiences of the African people. The main reason for this is that the missionaries explained the gospel using either European or American concepts and worldviews, which were totally foreign and confusing to the African peoples. This included a general lack of consideration for the culture of the new African converts.

The first African to express this concern and to yield what later became African Christian theology, was a Congolese woman by the name of Kimpa Vita (see Parrat 1995: 4). Living in the 1700's, Kimpa Vita converted to Catholicism when she began to see visions and later claimed to have experienced death and resurrection. After she claimed to have seen St. Anthony in one of her dreams she began to protest against all the church rules and ceremonies. After this she taught that Jesus and the Apostles were Africans (Parrat 1995: 4). History tells us that she died around 1706.²

The second African convert after Kimpa Vita to express some concerns about the way in which missionaries planted Christianity in Africa, was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who is known to have been the first African Bishop of the Anglican Church. It is believed that his appointment to this position was a result of a request made in 1864 by Henry Vein, the then secretary of the *Church Missionary Society* (Parrat 1995: 4). One of the aspects that characterise Bishop Crowther's ministry was that Christianity should not destroy the African character. He believed that Africans must use their culture as a way of interpreting their Christian faith.³

¹ For a more detailed discussion of a definition of African Christian theology, see Mugambi (1989), Harry Sawyerr (1971), and Muzorewa (1985: 95-97).

² For more information on Kimpa Vita see Marie-Louise Martin, *Kimbandu, an African prophet and his church*, Oxford (1975)

³ For more detailed information on Crowther, also see Baur (1994: 121-125).

The third African who also believed in the significance of the African culture with regards to making the Christian faith more relevant to African converts, was Holy James Johnson from Sierra Leone. Johnson's message was simple. He believed that the church should become indigenous to the African culture. Parrat (1995: 5) suspects that Johnson may well have been influenced by the writings of Edward Blyden. Blyden was a West Indian Negro of Nigerian descent. Blyden gained popularity through his campaign for Africa's mental and political freedom from foreign domination (Parrat 1995: 5). His views led to the emergence of the first African Independent churches at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ These figures, however, did not live long enough to see their dreams of a theology that was truly African being realised. The actual formation of a Christian theology that was to become truly African took place at a conference that was organized by the *All Africa Conference of Churches* in January 1966 at Immanuel College in Ibadan, Nigeria. Delegates at this gathering included African theologians from the Catholic Church, the Protestant churches, the Coptic Church, as well as few representatives from Europe and America (Mbiti: 2003: 2). The result of this conference is summed up in a declaration made by African Christian theologians attending this gathering, which reads as follows:



We believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of heaven and earth, Lord of history, has been dealing with mankind at all times and in all parts of the world. It is with this conviction that we study the rich heritage of our African peoples, and we have evidence that they know Him and worship Him.

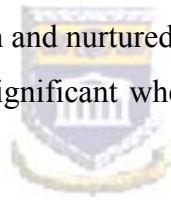
We recognise the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ: yet it is because of this revelation we can discern what is truly God in our pre-Christian heritage: this knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of Him (Dickson and Ellingworth 1969: 16).

Scholars⁵ attribute the formation of an African Christian theology to two factors. Firstly, there is a positive sense of Africanness that was restored through the views of prominent

⁴ For more information on Blyden and his work, see Baur (1998: 132-134).

⁵ For example Parrat (1995), and Muzorewa (1985).

figures such as Edward Blyden, Placide Tempels and Leopold Senghor. These figures made many Africans aware of the absurdity of being forced by missionaries to abandon their own culture in order to become true Christians. Through their unapologetic acceptance, and love of their African continent, its people, their religion and culture, including their skin pigmentation, people like Senghor and Blyden managed to relieve many Africans from their self-pity, and torture of trying to mimic their Western counterparts, in expressing their Christian faith as Africans. Also, new debates on how to reconcile Christian theology and one's Africanness, began to emerge. For example, prominent African figures such as Kenneth Kaunda, of Zambia, Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Harry Sawyerr of Sierra Leone, Kwesi Dickson of Ghana and many others, began to talk in terms of their inward struggle between their Africanness and their adopted religion (Parrat 1995: 13-15). As a result of the above, as opposed to what most missionaries believed, Africans Christian theologians began to see African traditional religion and culture as an appropriate environment from which a truly African Christianity and theology can be born and nurtured. Hence the issue of African traditional religion and culture becomes very significant when one speaks of an African Christian theology.



Secondly, a sense of *African Nationalism* swept all over Africa during the fifties, and the sixties. This sense of nationalism was reflected in the emergence of pre-independence liberation movements, and the rise of independent nations from former colonial territories. One may argue that it is this sense of nationalism and acquired independence, which motivated many churches in Africa to fight for independence from their Western mother churches. Hence the formation of the *All Africa Conference of Churches* in 1963 almost inevitably led to the inception of an African Christian theology in 1966.

3.3. The development of African Christian theology.

The Ibadan Conference left African theologians with a huge task of turning the idea of an African Christian theology into a reality. Soon after the Ibadan Conference, African Christian theologians published a book entitled *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*,

edited by Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (1969). This book was followed by a number of articles in journals,⁶ and edited books.⁷ This also includes a number of books, which were published by individual authors from all over the African continent. This growth took place despite criticism and scepticism against the very idea of an African Christian theology, both from within the African continent⁸ and from abroad.⁹ Apart from the growth in terms of literature, several universities also began to introduce courses on African Christian theology. Among the first universities to introduce such programmes, were the University of Ghana, The University of Ibadan in Nigeria, Makerere University in Uganda and The University of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. After this, African theology grew substantially as more universities began to introduce similar courses into their curriculum. Subsequently, some of the students who were among the first to enrol in these courses later became professors in the field of African Christian theology. As one would expect, some of these students also started to write articles, essays and books, taking part in a series of debates on various theological discourses. According to Mbiti (2003), these contributions are now estimated to include thousands of articles, essays and books.¹⁰



3.4. Approaches to African Christian theology

To promote an authentic African interpretation of the gospel, African theologians had to choose an approach that was going to enable them to express their faith in a genuinely African manner. Two approaches, based on adaptation and inculturation as key concepts are significant in this regard.

⁶ These include journals such as *Africa Theological Journal*, *Ghana theological Journal*, *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa*, *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* and others.

⁷ For example, *The Emergent Gospel: theology from the underside of history* edited by Torres and Fabella (1978), *African Theology en route*, edited by Appiah-Kubi and Torres (1979) and many others that followed in recent years.

⁸ Popular criticisms of an African Christian Theology came mainly from Byang Kato (1975) and p'Bitek (1972)

⁹ See Mbiti's (2003: 2-4) discussion of how theologians from Europe and America responded to the emergence of African Christian theology.

¹⁰ For a more recent list of theologians who have made significant contributions in the development of African Theology, see Baur (1994: 439-444).

3.4(a) Adaptation

Adaptation refers to a process whereby certain aspects of a particular culture, for example its concepts, philosophy and symbols, are utilised to transmit and to translate Christian theology, so that new converts from that particular culture can have a better understanding of their newly adopted religion. According to this approach, a theologian is expected to follow the format and procedure of his or her Western counterparts. This approach therefore does not allow a theologian to do theology in any other way than that of the West. The task of a theologian in this regard is merely to translate what has already been formed, in this case in the West. In this case it is Western theology, or a theology that has attained expression in the West, that seeks to adapt to its newly found African context. The danger with this approach is that it does not allow theologians to express their own beliefs that emanate directly from their encounter with the Lord.

This approach typically represents African Catholic theologians' way of doing theology during the 1960's up until the 1970's. African theologians from the Catholic Church, with the support of Vatican II and Pope Paul IV, believed that an idea of an African theology can be realised if a Christian faith was to adapt to African cultures and worldviews (Parrat 1995: 28-29). This approach had the full support of prominent Catholic theologians such as Charles Nyamiti, Vincent Mulago, and Tharcisse Tshibangu.¹¹ Other African Catholic theologians nevertheless later rejected this approach on grounds that it was no longer relevant. Instead of adaptation, they opted for *incarnation*. A theology of incarnation despite its condemnation by the Pope, appeared to be the best option for African Catholics.¹² The main reason for this is that the theology of incarnation involved immersing Christianity in an African culture so that, just as Jesus became a human, so must Christianity become African (Ukpong 1984: 27). Let us now move to the second approach, namely *inculturation*.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion on the contributions of these scholars, see Parrat (1995: 65-66).

¹² For more on the Pope's condemnation of the theology of incarnation, see *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 5, 7 November 1974

3.4(b) Inculturation

Inculturation is even more important than adaptation, for it is the approach that characterises how most African theologians seek to do their theology. What is inculturation? Inculturation is a process whereby Christianity is born out of a group of people, is allowed to grow within the culture of those people, and is expressed with concepts, symbols, and a worldview of that particular culture. In other words, it is a process whereby the expression of a Christian faith is informed by the way of living of people in a particular culture or context. It is a confession of Christian faith that is made by peoples from their own cultural backgrounds. In this case, inculturation is the birth of Christianity out of African culture and religion. What does this mean? This means that when African theologians want to express their faith, they have no choice but to use their traditional ways of expressing themselves. For example, if one has to pray to God, he or she would apply his or her traditional ways of praying. The same applies to other aspects of the Christian faith such as worshipping, asking for forgiveness, sacrifices, etc. Ukpong (1984: 29) argues that inculturation tends to move away from the traditional pattern of doing theology. He attributes this to two factors within inculturation. They are, a return to the traditional source of Christian expression, that is the Bible and Christian tradition, and a total opening up to the whole of African traditional religion and culture as opposed to a mere selection of themes from them. Inculturation theology is therefore not content with only selecting certain terms for explaining a theology that is prefabricated in the West. Rather, it makes sure that the Christian faith is incarnated in African culture and religion, and from all the different contexts that one finds in Africa. African Christian theologians therefore are the ones who are responsible for sowing the seed of the Christian gospel in the African context, whereby cultural and religious insights from this context are used to nurture the growth of this newly-born faith (i.e. the Christian faith).¹³

There are a number of terms that were either common during the time of adaptation or after the focus turned towards the theology of inculturation. The former includes terms such as imposition, translation, accommodation and Christianisation. The latter includes

¹³ See a more detailed and clear analysis of how this takes place in Schineller (1990: 24-27).

such terms as “indigenisation”, “contextualisation”, “enculturation” and “acculturation”.

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3.5. Various trends in African Christian theology

Four major streams may be identified in African Christian theology. They are *African inculturation theology*, *African liberation theology*, *African evangelical theology* and *African Pentecostal theology*.

2.5(a) African inculturation theology

African inculturation theology is a trend of African Christian theology that puts more emphasis on the importance of African religion and culture, especially in terms of the survival of Christianity on the African continent. Theologians following this trend believe that in order for Christianity to appeal to the religious aspirations of the African peoples, it must be integrated with African religion and culture. African inculturation theology is therefore mainly concerned with the use of African culture and traditional African religion, as a base from which Africans express their Christian faith. To accomplish this, African theologians following this trend have called for a continuous dialogue between Christianity, African culture, and African traditional religion. For this reason, it is not enough for African inculturation theologians to be merely Christian theologians. Instead, they also need to have a better understanding of African culture and its religious background.¹⁵ To put it in the words of Ukpong:

... to be competent to do this theology, apart from being a Christian, one must be well informed by and formed in African culture. This applies equally to the African as to the expatriate theologian (Ukpong 1984: 16).

Ukpong (1984: 18) warns that African inculturation theology is not a way of promoting African culture. Here is what he has to say about this: “... *it would be wrong to think of*

¹⁴ For more on these approaches including adaptation and inculturation see Ukpong (1984: 24-31), Schineller (1990:14-24), Shorter (1995: 5-16), and Dickson, (1984: 16).

¹⁵ Hence we see different publications by prominent African inculturation theologians like John Mbiti (1979), dealing extensively with various aspects of African traditional religion and culture.

African theology as a means of promoting African culture; any theology aiming at the promotion of a particular culture would hardly be worthy of the name theology". (Ukpong 1984: 18) He further warns that African theology also does not aim at justifying every aspect of African culture whether good or bad, for that would lead to syncretism. Instead, African inculturation theology seeks to inquire into the religious sensibility of the African peoples through a study of their cultural practices.

There are therefore three main sources of African inculturation theology i.e. the Bible, traditional African religion and culture and Christian tradition. African inculturation theology is more common among the African Protestant mission churches. Leading theologians in this trend include figures such as John Mbiti, John Pobee, Kwesi Dickson, Harry Sawyerr, Emmanuel Bolaji Idowu, Jesse Mugambi, Laurenti Magesa and others. Let us then move to the second trend of African Christian theology, namely African Liberation theology.



3.5(b) African Liberation theology

The expression "liberation theology", which refers to a theology that seeks to reflect on socio-economic development of the poor with special emphasis on structural changes, has its origins in Latin America (Ukpong 1984: 49). This expression became popular in Africa after a conference of the Third World Theologians, held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in 1976, where Latin American theologians played a major role.¹⁶ This theology became attractive to Africans, for it was designed to deal with challenges, which were similar to those that Africans had to cope with (Ukpong 1984: 49-50). Such challenges included problems such as poverty, hunger, malnutrition, starvation, political oppression, discrimination and colonialism in general. According to Ukpong (1984:52), there are three currents or trends of African liberation theology. Those are *the indigenous approach, the Latin American approach and the combined approach*.

¹⁶ For more on papers delivered in this conference see Sergio and Virginia (1977).

i) The indigenous approach

According to Ukpong (1984:52), theologians following this approach, tend to employ indigenous African concepts to promote human development, which they believe have the potential to free poor people from situations such as hunger, poverty, diseases, including other factors that keep poor people poor. Ukpong (1984: 52-53) identifies two examples to illustrate how this approach works.

Firstly, he refers to the theology of "*Harambee*", which is a Swahili, word meaning, "to pull together". This is a word that is usually employed in contexts where people are encouraged to work together in order to improve their situation. The idea of a community in co-operation is therefore at the centre of this notion.¹⁷

Secondly, Ukpong (1984: 53) refers to the notion of "*Ujamaa*". Ujamaa is another Swahili concept, which means "*family*". The notion of Ujamaa has to do with promoting communities whereby people work as a community and share whatever they have amongst themselves as a community. It is used to designate the pattern of the socio-economic and political system in a nation (1984: 53). One can argue that the notion of Ujamaa is not that different from the notion of *ubuntu*. Ukpong (1984: 53) argues that the emphasis in the indigenous approach is not just on economic upliftment of the poor, but also on the social aspect of development.

ii) The Latin American approach

As far as Ukpong (1984: 54) is concerned, in a trend of African liberation theology that is based on Latin American liberation theology, theologians often apply the basic element of Latin American theology to the African situation. That is the issue of class struggle. He (1984: 54) argues that the only difference between this form of African liberation theology and its Latin American counterpart is that the former usually involves the race

¹⁷ For a more detailed explanation of the theology of *Harambee*, see Mbinda (1978) in "Towards a theology of Harambee."

issue, while this is not usually the case with the latter. He uses the situation in South Africa during the time of apartheid as an example of how the race issue can be utilised in African liberation theology. Ukpong (1984: 54) also adds that Latin American-style African liberation theology includes issues of poverty, hunger, starvation, ignorance and diseases found all over Africa. Ukpong (1984: 54) also notes that as far as this approach is concerned, there is not much difference between American black theology and Latin American liberation theology. For example, Nthamburi (1978: 237), a Kenyan Methodist minister, argues that unlike in American Black theology, African liberation theology that follows the Latin American approach is not meant exclusively for the African people. This difference, according to Ukpong (1984:54) is also reflected by the fact that Latin American-style African liberation theology uses some of the views of Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo and Karl Marx. Ukpong (1984:53) refers to Chukwudum B. Okolo, a Nigerian Catholic priest, and Zablon Nthamburi, as among those who represent this trend of African Liberation theology.



iii) The combined approach

The third approach in Ukpong's classification refers to a form of African liberation theology whereby both African socialism, which is reflected in the first approach, and Latin American theology, are employed. Ukpong (1984: 55) refers to Laurenti Magesa's theology as a typical example of this form of African liberation theology. Ukpong (1984: 55) argues that that Magesa takes Latin American liberation theology as a model, but only with regard to the issues treated and the basic processes involved. Ukpong (1984: 55) further notes that Magesa employs African socialist principles to analyse the African situation in the light of the Bible and follows the process of Latin American theology. Ukpong (1984: 55-56) notes that unlike Okolo and Nthamburi, Magesa does not focus on the race issue, but apart from this, voices the same African issues. Ukpong (1984: 56) points us to the fact that Magesa rejects capitalism and European socialism including communism, on grounds that these are against the spirit of African socialism, which is *person-oriented*.

Ukpong's classification of different trends within African Christian liberation theology differs from other classifications. For example, Parrat (1995: 51) refer to three types or forms of African liberation theology. That is, what Ukpong refers to as the Latin American-style approach, South African Black theology and Feminist theology. According to Parrat (1995: 51), the first form of African liberation theology is mainly concerned with Africa's economic and political struggle within the context of colonialism, and it finds its expression in the works of African Christian theologians such as Jean-Mark Ela, Engelbert Mveng, Laurenti Magesa and others. The second form, which is Black theology from South Africa, concerned itself mainly with the liberation of black people of South Africa from domination under the apartheid regime. Leading theologians within this trend include figures such as Allan Boesak, Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane, Simon Maimela, Manas Buthelezi, Sigqibo, Dwane, and others. According to Parrat (1995: 51), the third form of African liberation theology, which is African feminist theology, focuses mainly on the role of women in the whole of humanity and more especially in the church. The main purpose of this trend, as Parrat further explains, is to challenge the way women have been neglected by the church and Christian theology by redressing the historical imbalance between sexes. Parrat (1995: 51) refers to this trend of African theology as "*second-generation*" liberation theology. Leading theologians within this trend include prominent African feminist theologians such as Mercy Oduyoye, Teresa Okure, Louise Tappa, Bette Ekeya, Therese Souga, Rosemary Edet, Rose Zoe-Obianga, Isabel Phiri and many more.

3.5(c) African Evangelical Theology

African evangelical theology is a trend of African Christian theology that puts more emphasis on the use of scripture as the only source of doing Christian theology, even within the African context. In accordance with this conviction, some African evangelical theologians, for example Byang Kato from Nigeria, have openly challenged the openness of African inculturation theology towards African religion and culture. Mbiti (2003: 13-14) describes African Evangelical theology as being a mission-oriented theology,

Christocentric theology and an Evangelical contextual theology.¹⁸ African evangelical theology emerged in the early seventies as a critical response to African inculturation theology (Mbiti 2003: 13), and at times to African Liberation theology and African ecumenical organizations (Bediako 1992).

African evangelical theology owes its growth to Byang Kato. Kato became the main spokesperson of African evangelicals in the seventies. In 1975 he published a book entitled "*Theological Pitfalls in Africa*". It is in this book, that Kato voices his criticism of the method used by African inculturation theologians, especially John Mbiti. Byang Kato is also the founder of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, formerly known as Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar. Madagascar is still the member of this organisation even though the word Madagascar does not appear in the new name. Other theologians apart from Kato, who have made significant contributions to this trend are Tukumbo Adeyem, Kwame Bediako, Gottfried Ose-Mensah, Osadolar Imasogie and Tite Tienou.



3.5(d) African Pentecostal theology

African Pentecostal Theology is a biblically based theology that puts more emphasis on the work of the third person of the triune God, that is the Holy Spirit. According to this theology, the promise that the Lord made during the Pentecost can still be realised today. That means, through the Holy Spirit people can be saved from their sinful lives, can be baptised in the Holy Spirit, can be healed, and more importantly can speak in tongues. For this reason African Pentecostal theologians¹⁹ tend to put more emphasis on issues such as Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the fruits or the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the deeds of the Holy Spirit. According to African Pentecostal theology, God is working through the Holy Spirit. God uses the Holy Spirit to communicate with people. It is the Holy

¹⁸ Mbiti does not explain what he means by Evangelical Contextual Theology. My guess is that he is referring to the fact that although African evangelicals usually distance themselves from African religious and cultural issues, they nevertheless admit that some aspects of our culture may be used for example during worship and for the sake of the convent's understanding of scripture.

¹⁹ I was not able to provide references in this regard, for most of this theology is not documented.

Spirit who regenerates the sinners. This emphasis on the Holy Spirit, however does not mean that African Pentecostals or Pentecostal movements in general have neglected other themes of the Bible.

Anderson (1992: 7) classifies African Pentecostals into three major streams, namely, Pentecostal mission churches, Independent Pentecostal churches and Indigenous Pentecostal-type churches, also known as the Spirit-type churches or Zionist-type churches (also see Hollenweger 1972: 149-171).



4. Sin and Evil in African Christian Theology

4.1. Introduction

The issue of sin and evil is one of the most difficult topics in African Christian theology. An investigation into this subject is immediately faced with two methodological problems. Firstly, not much has been written on sin and evil in African Christian Theology. To be more specific, up until the writing of this chapter, no African Christian theologian has published a book on this topic. Secondly, the literature that is available,¹ as limited as it is, does not always deal with issues of sin and evil in African Christian Theology. Instead, when writing on this subject, most authors tend to spend more time on sin and evil in African Traditional Religion.² Due to these problems several other related topics such as sorcery, witchcraft, healing, exorcism and salvation have to be investigated.

In spite of these problems, a few comments can be made on sin and evil in African Christian theology. Firstly, someone may argue that most African Christian theologians

¹ There are about six articles written by African Christian theologians on the subject of sin. Adeolu Adegbola wrote an article entitled "The theological basis of ethics" featuring in *Biblical revelation and African beliefs* edited by Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth in 1969, pp116-136. Sawyer wrote two articles, the first one in 1964 entitled, "Sin and forgiveness in Africa" featuring in the Spring issue of *Frontier* 1964, and the other one entitled "Sin and salvation: Soteriology viewed from the African situation" in 1972 featuring in "*Relevant theology for Africa*" edited by Hans Jurgén Becken. Simon S. Maimela also wrote two articles, which are both published in "*The Journal of Theology in Southern Africa*". The first one entitled "The atonement in the context of liberation theology" appears in issue number 39 of 1982, pp 45-54 and the second one entitled "Traditional African anthropology and Christian theology" appears in issue number 76 of 1991, pp 4-14. Pobee wrote a chapter on sin entitled sin in African Christian theology, in *Towards African Theology* published in 1979, pp 99-118. Mbiti also wrote a chapter entitled "The concepts of evil, ethics and justice" in *African Religions and Philosophy*, published in 1969, pp 204-215. An article also from Mbiti appears in 1989 entitled "God, sin and salvation in African religion, *AME Zion Quarterly*, 100: 2-8. Oosthuizen wrote a section on "The concept of sin in the nativistic movements" in *Post Christianity in Africa: a theological and anthropological study*, pp 188-205. Van der Merwe wrote an article on sin in which he reported the findings of a research he conducted on the concept of sin among the Zionists in Kwazulu Natal. This article is published in the 1989 issue of *Missionalia* Vol. 17: 3, pp 199-205. Turner also writes about the concept of sin in a study he conducted among the members of the Aladura Church of Christ. See his "*African Independent Church II: The life and faith of the Lord (Aladura)*", published in 1967. Kato also makes very brief comments on the issue of sin, but this is not much since he deals with other topics in his papers. See a collection of Byang Kato's articles and addresses in Kato (1985) *Biblical Christianity in Africa: a collection and addresses*. Also see Bediako (1992: 386-425)

² More or less 90% of each of the articles mentioned above, except for Kato and Turner, deal with sin only in African traditional religion. Only a few sentences and a paragraph here and there, deal with sin in African Christian theology. Even then, almost all these authors fail to be more specific on their own

except for those who come from the Evangelical and Pentecostal background, agree that an African Christian theological doctrine of sin and evil has to take into consideration a traditional African conception of sin and evil. These theologians reflect this in all the material that they have published on sin.

Secondly, someone may further argue that there are two basic positions from which the issue of sin is understood in African Christian theology. The first position follows the traditional Christian doctrine of sin, which defines sin as alienation or estrangement from God. According to this position, therefore, to sin, is to consciously remove oneself from the presence of God. In other words, to sin is to be selfish, self-centred, to have pride, as well as to be disobedient towards God.³ One would note that followers of this position link the entire issue of sin to a broken relationship between human beings and God. The second position, on the other hand, tends to follow a traditional African understanding of what sin is. As far as this position is concerned, sin is an act that is morally wrong, not necessarily in the face of God, but in the face of the people as well. In this context, therefore, when someone speaks about sin he or she may be referring to what society considers to be wrong. That would include such actions as smoking, drinking, beating one's wife or not wearing the standard dress code required in the church.⁴ This view of sin is very close to what Pobee calls respectability.⁵ Unlike the first position, the second position tends to use the society, or the well-being of the community, as the centre of what it means to sin.

Thirdly, one may also argue that, when it comes to dealing with the issue of sin, African theologians, like their counterparts in Europe and America, are faced with the challenge

thoughts as African theologians on this subject. All that they do is to give suggestions for what an African Christian theological doctrine of sin may entail.

³ One may say that this position reflects the views of churches, which scholars refer to as Protestant mission churches, including the Ethiopian churches (Oosthuizen 1992: 16).

⁴ This understanding of sin is more common among the followers of African Pentecostal churches.

⁵ Pobee argues that there is a big difference between respectability and righteousness (see Pobee 1979: 105)

of answering various questions that form part of the doctrine of sin.⁶ This chapter will focus on only one of these questions, which is how African Christian theologians understand the relationship between sin and evil in African Christian theology.

I will argue that there are two ways in which one can investigate how this relationship is understood in African Christian theology. Firstly there is what I call the "two contrasting position classification", and secondly there is what I call the "four contrasting positions classification". I argue that in the first classification, one would find that there are two major positions from which the relationship between sin and evil is viewed within the context of African Christian theology. The first position is that *sin is the source of evil* and the second one is that *evil is the source of sin*. I then further argue that in the second classification, one identify four positions in terms of which this relationship is understood in African Christian theology. The first position is that *sin leads to evil while at the same time evil can lead to sin, but the latter happens only in exceptional cases hence it is not emphasised*. The second position is that *sin is the product of evil and evil can be a product of sin even though the latter is not emphasised*. The third position is that *evil is the product of sin period*. The fourth position is that *sin is the product of evil as much as evil is the product of sin*. In other words they produce each other equally.

I will divide this chapter into two sections. The first section looks at the first classification and the second section deals with the second classification.

4.2. Two contrasting positions in sin and evil

4.2.1. Sin as the source of evil

The belief that sin produces evil, forms a major part of the African Christian doctrine of sin. This thought is common, especially among those who understood sin as alienation from God. Also, it is probably the most common way in which most African Christians and theologians understand the relationship between sin and evil. When they teach about

⁶ See Chapter Two

sin during their Sunday sermons and Sunday school classes, preachers and Sunday school teachers from all denominations teach that sin leads to evil. Parents and elders also teach the same thing whenever they offer some sort of guidance to those under their care. Every African child who is brought up in a Christian home knows that Adam and Eve were chased out of the Garden of Eden because of their sin. The most common expression attesting to this fact among the Xhosas of South Africa, is that “Umvuzo wesono bububi”, which means, the prize one gets out of sin is evil. African Christian theologians, coming from all trends of African Theology, know and are part of this teaching by virtue of being Christians. Apart from the fact that most people in Africa take it for granted that sin leads to evil, this is also reflected in the writings and sayings⁷ of African Christian theologians across the spectrum. Let us then take a look at how theologians from different trends of African theology reflect on this position.

4.2.1(a) African Inculturation Theology

The fact that sin leads to evil is definitely affirmed within the context of African inculturation theology. This affirmation comes out clearly through the works and thoughts of African Christian theologians such as John Mbiti (1969: 1979), Harry Sawyerr (1972, 1964), Adeolu Adegbola (1969) and John Pobee (1979).

In his analysis of the concept of sin among the Yoruba of Nigeria, Adegbola (1969:130-133) takes the Yoruban view of sin as that which produces evil as its consequence and uses it as his defence against those who previously concluded that Africans have no sense of guilt or sin. From this we immediately get an idea of his position on the relationship between sin and evil. For example, throughout this discussion one can see that his defence indicates the fact that the Yoruban concept of sin does not contradict his Christian understanding of what sin is. This also comes out in a statement he makes about the doctrine of sin in Africa:

⁷ Most African theologians have not been able to document their thoughts, hence African theology also include what is called oral theology see (Mbiti 2003)

A Christian doctrine of sin close to the heart of African ontological morality will begin with a definite recognition of sin as fundamentally an inward problem of character. The cause of sin will be seen as lying at the centre of human personality, springing out of man's urge for vital force, consisting of the inner motives animating the search for life force and the extent to which one is able to universalise this life force (Adegbola 1969: 133).

This line of thought also comes up in John Pobee's work albeit in a different form. Pobee defines sin as a violation of God's demands and the challenge to his honour, integrity and dignity. An act, "which does not contribute to the welfare, and continuance of the family; does not conform to the standards of love; while it also sunders the cohesion of the society by destroying the personality of both the victim and the perpetrator" (see Pobee 1979: 116-119). Three forms of evil resulting from sin are quite clear from Pobee's understanding of sin: absence of growth, disunity and the destruction of human personality. Pobee's understanding of the relationship between sin and evil is firmly based on his emphasis on the individual responsibility for sin. For example, elsewhere in his discussion he stresses the fact that (1979:116) the attribution of sin to personal forces of evil does not absolve man (sic) of his individual and personal responsibility for sin. He also goes on to say the mainspring of evil in a human being is lust. In other words man's (sic) lust for earthly objects, an act that results from turning away from God, is the mainspring of evil.

Harry Sawyerr, (1964: 60-63, 1973: 126-137) another leading theologian who follows this trend of African theology seems to agree with Pobee and Adegbola. For example, Sawyer seems to be quite certain that sin is nothing other than that which leads to evil. Like Adegbola, he seems to be fascinated with the aspect of an African traditional anthropology that looks at sin as that which bears bad consequences. This is especially true with respect to the part whereby sin is understood as the violation of one's individual or group rights by another, and thus the violation of the authority of the victim's guardian spirits, an act, which calls for punishment because of its consequences in society. To show his fascination with this idea, he suggests that the Christian teaching in Africa must simply substitute the God of Jesus Christ for the various spirits. This according to him will not only preserve the traditional African understanding of sin, but also enhance and

transform it into that of the covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus (see Sawyerr 1964: 63). Here we can see that Sawyer understands evil as the product of sin. If this were not the case he would not have been able to find this as the common feature, which could easily be understood by people both as Africans and as Christians. In other words, this African conception of sin fits very well with Sawyer's idea of what the relationship between sin and evil is. Without any doubt we can therefore conclude that the idea of sin as that which leads to evil is clearly reflected in the thoughts of African inculturation theologians. Is this also the case with Liberation theologians?

4.2.1(b) African Liberation Theology

African liberation theologians also look at sin as that which leads to evil, albeit from a different viewpoint. The only main difference between liberation theologians and theologians from other trends of African Christian theology is that, African liberation theologians understand sin from within the framework of being sinned against⁸. For instance, within the circles of African Liberation theology, it is believed that the sinful actions of the oppressors may lead to evils such as the suffering of the oppressed. Hence Simon Maimela (1991) believes that the idea of sin and evil in African anthropology, whereby sin is measured in terms of the life of the individuals who suffer injustice, oppression and destruction at the hands of their fellow human beings, can be a valuable contribution to Christian theology. In this regard he writes:

This African perspective on life, which lays greater emphasis on the wrongs and evils which human beings commit against one another, is the one which African Christians should try to lift up and offer as the African contribution to the theological reflection on the great questions of sin and salvation... For it reminds the church that sin is not only an evil activity which is directed against God but also has to do with all the evil deeds which are directed against our human fellows in the society. (Maimela 1991: 12).

⁸ According to Liberation theologians a sinner is the one who oppresses others. Liberation theologians then, being part of the oppressed, mainly understand sin from the position of being sinned against.

It is also within this same line of thinking that Maimela (1982: 51) criticises the traditional concept of sin. According to him, in traditional Christian conceptions of sin, sin is only understood as a personal problem and as an abstract idea, which must be discussed theoretically with reference to obedience to some divine laws, laws that are not familiar to African people.

4.2.1(c) African Independent Churches / Zionist Churches

The view that sin leads to evil is also reflected among the leaders⁹ and followers of African Independent Churches. Analyzing the concept of sin in "The Church of the Lord"¹⁰, Turner (1967: 359-361) observes, that members of "The church of the Lord" have a view of sin that is based on the Bible, with special emphasis on scripture and on sin as a human responsibility rather than on personal misfortune. He further reports that even though the role of the supernatural evil spirits is not denied in this church, the magnitude and reality of this demonic realm is not allowed to clear human beings from personal responsibility for their own sins. Instead, since the Lord is believed to have power over all the forces of evil, if the evil spirits captures a human being, that human being is seen as a sinner or as being alienated from the Lord. To be captured by evil forces, in other words, is seen as a form of punishment by God (Turner 1967: 361).¹¹

G.C Oosthuizen (1967), another well-known scholar of African Independent Churches, makes the same observation regarding the Church of Nazarene. He reports that, according to Shembe, sin is "a negative kind of mystic quality, which weakens a person's *umoya*, a burden he carries, through which evil spirits empower him; it is a material defilement which adheres physically to the unclean person until it is ritually washed away. The greatest negative effect of sin is that it puts a curse on a person" (Oosthuizen 1967: 121).

Gerhard Van der Merwe, also observes the prevalence of this conviction in a study he conducted in 1989 among the followers of the Zionist Christian Church in Pietersburg.

⁹ I use the word leaders instead of theologians, because their theology, most of the time, is not in written form, as in conventional theology.

¹⁰ Also known as the Aladura

According to the preliminary findings of this study, members of the Zionist Christian Church regard sin as an act that results in physical evil such as accidents, illness, harmful inter-human relations and death (Van der Merwe 1989: 200-201). He also discovers that certain specified diseases are considered to be the direct consequences of certain types of sins (see van der Merwe 1989: 201).¹²

Another way in which this idea is reflected among the AIC's, is through their emphasis on the ritual of confession of sins. This ritual is performed whenever a person is suffering from a disease or any ailment or problem that is believed to be the direct result of a sinful act committed by the sufferer. It is believed that, only when the sinner confesses all the sins, can the healing take place or the problem be solved. This belief comes out of the conviction that sin leads to the evils of sickness, or to problems that make one's life a living hell.¹³ In the next section, we look at how the fact that sin leads to evil is reflected in African Evangelical Theology.



4.2.1(d) African Evangelical Theology

African theologians who come from an evangelical background also believe firmly that sin is that from which evil comes. According to them, this is the only relationship that exists between sin and evil as far as the Bible is concerned. This view corresponds with this group's strong belief in the individual responsibility for sin which, according to them, is the only truth that the Bible or the "Word of God" teaches about sin.

Byang Kato (1936-1975), a world renowned African Evangelical theologian from Nigeria, who in a very short lived career managed to stand out as the main spokesperson of Evangelical Theology in Africa, is very significant in this regard. In his criticism of the

¹¹ For more information on the beliefs and doctrine of this church see Peel (1968: 114-156).

¹² For more information on sin as the cause of certain diseases, see Becken (1972: 37), Martin (1964: 116), and Oosthuizen (1991: 17).

¹³ For more information on confession of sin including activities involved in this ritual in African Independent Churches see Oosthuizen (1968: 191), Van der Merve (1989), Turner (1967) and Haselbarth (1966: 11)

Jaba's (his clan's) belief system and of African Christian Theology on the issue of sin, Kato (1974: 15, 1975), completely rejected any view, which takes the social aspect as the point of departure in understanding the issue of sin. He observed that this is a trend in both the Jaba concept of sin and in African Christian Theology (also see Bediako 1992: 388). With regards to the relationship between sin and evil, he made it very clear that all human problems are the direct result of sin. Commenting on the human crisis, he argued that human miseries such as exploitation, disease, abject poverty, deprivation of life and sickness, are the results of sin. He then goes on to say that human efforts like the provision of basic human needs and political liberation, are not the final answer for man's (sic) root problem, which lies in sin (see Kato 1974: 15-16).¹⁴

4.2.1(e) African Pentecostal Theology

African Pentecostal theologians have always believed that evil that takes the form of human suffering and problems is the direct outcome of sin. One may argue that this conviction has to do with this trend's origins in the world-wide Pentecostal movement. African Pentecostals believe that problems such as drunkenness, smoking, adultery, uncertainty, hunger, unemployment, boredom, homelessness, indifference and hopelessness, are the direct results of being away from the Lord. Their entire theology is based on this belief. In accordance with this conviction, they believe that once a person allows Jesus Christ who offers Himself graciously and forgives the sins, to enter into one's life, such person's problems will diminish and that the sinner will become free of all the problems associated with his or her sinfulness. Filled with the Holy Spirit, a sinner goes through a process of regeneration, a process that restores the sinner to his or her original perfection. Sin in this context seems to be mainly understood in terms of being separated from the Lord. In South Africa, most Pentecostal African theologians or leaders such as Elias Letwaba, Edward Mutaung, Engenas Lekganyane, Job Chiliza, Nicholas Bhengu, Richard Ngidi, Frank Chikane and Mosa Sono, are known for their ability to heal the sick and help people with different problems. All these leaders believed that the

¹⁴ Also see Kato (1975), and Muli (1997: 31-50).

sufferer should allow Christ to dwell inside him or her and forgive the sin before he or she can be saved from sickness and other forms of evil (see Anderson 1992: 36-55).

Walter Hollenweger, one of the most respected scholars of Pentecostalism alive today, confirms this in his analysis of the Pentecostal doctrine of justification. He also confirms that in this regard, African Pentecostals share this view with their Pentecostal counterparts from all over the world (see Hollenweger 1972: 315-320, 1995: 246-257, 1997: 247-257).¹⁵

4.2.2. Evil as the source of sin

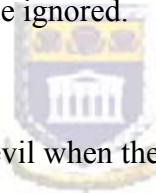
4.2.2(a) Introduction

That evil is the product of sin is not the only way in which the relationship between sin and evil is understood in African Christian theology. It happens that evil can also be regarded as that which from time to time can produce sin. African Christians across the spectrum either share this belief or are aware of its existence. For example, in Africa it is very common to hear people referring to a sinful incident as the work of the devil or of the evil forces, or to hear them saying: "*uSathana uyabasebenzisa abantu bakaThixo*". This means, "The devil is using God's poor people". Those who share this view, believe that there are evil forces that can possess someone and cause him or her to act in ways that are beyond his or her control. For example, they believe that some mysterious force can possess a person and cause him or her to commit sinful acts such as incest, rape or murder. In South Africa, especially among the Xhosas, this is known as "*ukubulawa*", which means to be killed. To be killed means that the person is totally under the control of the evil force. This can happen even if someone is a devoted member of the church. For example, if a supposedly good man rapes a child, or a woman, and this is exposed, it is possible that a verdict may be that the whole incident was the work of an evil spirit. In

¹⁵ One would note that in this chapter I discuss Pentecostal theology separately from African independent church theology or The Zionist theology. Also, I no longer make the distinction I made in Chapter Three. The main reason I am doing this now, is that, when it comes to their understandings of sin and evil there are huge differences between Mission Pentecostals, Independent Pentecostals and Spirit-type Pentecostal churches, widely known as the Zionist churches.

a case like this both the rapist and the raped are the victims of this evil force. The perpetrator would remain a sinner but the evil force is regarded as the main cause of his sin. It might happen that the aims of the evil one were either to harm the reputation of the rapist or to destroy the future of the rape victim. This may also be the case with a young man or woman whose behaviour is regarded as antisocial. All his or her crimes could be regarded as the plans of the evil spirit. In cases like these, evil does lead to sin, because in both cases, the victims are not aware of their actions. If you are not aware you are also not responsible for your sins. Something else is, in this case, the evil spirit, which causes people to sin.

However, this view is not as dominant as the previous one, because those who share it are usually careful of being seen as either defending themselves or those who are close to them. Nevertheless, the truth is that this view does exist within African Christian Theology and for that reason cannot be ignored.



People think of sin as the product of evil when they believe that some evil force is behind the sinful act that has been committed. Also, they are more likely to think in these terms when the previous reputation of the sinner does not correspond with the nature of the sinful act, which he or she has committed. The classic example of how African people think of sin as the product of evil is when they try to make sense of the nature of witchcraft. I choose witchcraft because for most Africans witchcraft is the greatest of all sins, while the witch is the greatest of all sinners. Before doing that let us briefly look at what is meant by witchcraft.

i) Witchcraft

Witchcraft¹⁶ is any human endeavour that is aided by mystical powers in order to harm or to manipulate events according to the liking of a witch (Mbiti: 1979: 202). In other words, for an act to qualify as witchcraft, its doer has to receive help from some form of a mystical power. Hence Africans regard sorcery and magic as just another form of witchcraft. Through witchcraft, witches can make people sick in many different ways. Bewitched people suffer from all sorts of diseases but the most feared ones are *amafufunyane*, *amadliso*, *ukubekelwa*, *ibulawo*, and *ukuxhuzula*. People suffering from *amafufunyane* become schizophrenic. Those who are diagnosed with *idliso* usually suffer from fatal stomachaches. If a person is diagnosed as *ubekelwe* he or she suddenly feels pain in the foot or a leg. To qualify as *ukubekelwa*, the pain has to be life-threatening to such an extent that one's leg may even have to be amputated. *Ibulawo* is something that makes one unable to function in a normal way. For example, if someone is unable to conform to the rules of the society and nothing can be done about it, that person is regarded as *ubulewe*.

Apart from making people sick, it is believed that witches can also kill people through poisoning their food (victim's food) and mysteriously inflicting them with deadly diseases. In Africa many deaths are attributed to witchcraft. Even today there are people who seem to be convinced that witches who are jealous because of other people's successes, can cause HIV/AIDS.

Through their powers witches can manipulate the outcomes of an event. For example, children of a witch can quite possibly become students who obtain A grades without putting in the required effort. Witches can make people fall in love with them. Because of their bad reputation, those who are involved in witchcraft are not welcome in most societies. To conclude, it is important to note that witchcraft involves two things, that is, a mystical power and the destruction of relationships and the well-being of the society.

¹⁶ Nowadays, people use the word witchcraft to refer to any form of a mysterious action. Sometimes they use it metaphorically and humorously in conversations (Mbiti 1969: 192-193). In this thesis this word only refers to what people consider to be evil and anti-social.

Hence people label as witchcraft any thing that is mysterious and destructive¹⁷ to society. Let us then look at the origins or the nature of witchcraft.

Most Africans believe that witchcraft originates from the evil within human beings. They argue that evil human beings do everything in their power to acquire the mystical power, which they use to effect their evil desires, such as to cause chaos in society, and to harm and kill other human beings.¹⁸ In this case the human being (*the witch*) takes charge of what is going to happen. He or she decides who has to be taken care of and when. All the victims are his or her enemies and the mystical power is just there to help him or her to do those things that are humanly impossible, such as turning him or herself into an animal or a snake (see Bucher 1980: 121-123). In this type of witchcraft the witch is the main sinner. He or she usually receives the most severe punishment, preferably death. Nevertheless in most cases members of the community chase the culprit out of the community to find a place to live somewhere else.¹⁹ Hence among the Xhosas of South Africa the "irhanuga", meaning a stranger, is always viewed with some suspicion, for it may happen that such a person left his or her place of birth because he or she is a witch.

Apart from this, some people believe that not all witches are merciless evil monsters who simply rejoice in other people's miseries. Instead they believe that some witches are merely victims of some mystical powers,²⁰ which are inherently evil. It is believed that there are some evil powers that possess people and use them as tools to do their (the evil forces) evil works (Gelfand 1967: 17-22, Bucher 1989: 106-107, Lewis 1971: 112-113, Bosch (1987: 45-47). It is also believed that some witches pass their powers to whomever they like, usually their own children, in order to continue their legacy. Such a person consequently becomes a witch against her or his own will. In this case a witch is viewed differently compared to the previous case. For example, while some may be angry due to the extent of the damage caused in the society, others may sympathise with the witch, acknowledging that there is an evil force behind the witch, who is the main culprit. In

¹⁷These days, anything that is destructive to society is labelled as witchcraft. For example a rapist, or a corrupt politician or a child molester may be regarded as a witch.

¹⁸ There are also other reasons that make people want to be witches. For example, some people merely want to have dignity because of the aura around witches, while others want it so that they may become rich, (see Bucher 1980).

¹⁹ The diviner or the prophet is the one who informs the community about someone's witchcraft status.

other words, even though no one denies that the witch is evil or sinful, some would suggest that something out there has made him or her sin, in this case an evil force. It is this view that resurfaces in the way African people understand the relationship between sin and evil within their present Christian context.

Three factors may contribute to the existence and the continuation of this view within the circles of the Christian church in Africa.

ii) Lack of exposure to the Christian doctrine of sin

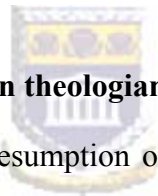
One of the factors that may be contributing significantly in making people to presume that evil can lead to sin, is a lack of exposure to the Christian doctrine of sin. It is a fact that some Christians in Africa have never been introduced to the basic Christian doctrine of sin. This means that they are not aware of some of the core arguments within this tradition. For example, such people would not know the significance of certain expressions within the Christian doctrine of sin, such as, *bondage of the will*, *original sin*, *total human responsibility for sin*, *total depravity* and *God's grace*. Not knowing the position of the Christian doctrine of sin, Africans simply bring into their Christian faith their traditional African way of explaining the mystery of sin, which takes into account the African conviction that human beings are inherently good, and therefore cannot be responsible for sin. What we see in a position whereby people see evil as the source of sin, therefore, is an unchallenged rebirth of a traditional African understanding of the nature and origin of evil. It is unchallenged in the sense that Africans who follow this position are not exposed to the Christian doctrine of sin, which is the only Christian tradition that has the endowment to challenge any form of a dualistic approach to the issue of sin and evil. This view may also be linked to a prevalent lack of theological education among the leaders of the church in Africa²¹

²⁰ These powers also include witches, as they are also seen as the embodiment of evil that can possess human beings.

²¹ See Oosthuizen (1968: 255-263)

iii) Inability to differentiate between sin and moral issues

The second factor that leads to the presumption that sin leads to evil within African Christian Theology, is that most African Christians and African Christian leaders are unable to distinguish between sinning as understood in Classical Western Christian Theology, and breaking the moral codes of the society. For example, for most African Christians, to sin is equal to stealing, drinking alcohol, incest, having an extra marital relationship, not respecting one's husband, smoking, etc. In most communities in Africa, smoking is more sinful than breaking all ties with God, pride, self-appraisal or excessive love for money. This inability to distinguish between sin and the breaking of moral codes has not only reduced God to the level of a judge whose role is to punish those who break the moral codes, but it has also made it easy for people to remain within their traditional framework of understanding the relationship between sin and evil. In addition to that, such a moralistic view of sin can also lead to a moralistic view of the gospel.



iv) A lack of communication between theologians and the laity

The other reason that sustains the presumption of the idea that sin leads to evil is that some African Christian theologians²², including church ministers and pastors who have at least been exposed to the classical Christian doctrine of sin, are not always successful in communicating what they know about the doctrine of sin to the laity. In such cases no one provides guidance on how the issue of sin is to be understood in the context of the Christian faith. Unlike Europeans and Americans, African lay people are not used to doing their own theological investigations. With regard to that, they rely entirely on their ministers and pastors (Oosthuizen 1968: 255-261).

The remaining part of this section reveals how the view that sin is the result of evil forces features in different trends of African Christian Theology.

²² By African theologians I mean those theologians who are either academics or involved in some scholarly work.

4.2.2 (b) African Inculturation Theology

As it has been indicated in the previous section, African inculturation theologians strongly emphasise the individual's responsibility of sin. Pobee made it clear that evil forces do not absolve man (sic) of his responsibility for sin. However, the fact that there are Christians in Africa who think of sin as that which originates from evil, is not unknown, or completely rejected within the circles of African inculturation theology.

Firstly, most theologians who follow this trend are church ministers. As church ministers, they know that they, together with other church ministers, have failed, and continue to fail, to communicate any of their knowledge of the classical doctrine of sin, which teaches that sin is alienation from God to the laity. They also know that there are churches that are led by people who are completely unfamiliar with the traditional Christian doctrine of sin. These are people whose knowledge of what sin is depends entirely on reading the Bible, which they read without doing proper biblical exegesis. African inculturation theologians also know that without a proper exposure to the Christian doctrine, people are bound to make inappropriate interpretations especially when it comes to issues that involve the Christian doctrine of sin. *In addition to that, most of these theologians are fully aware of the significant role which evil spirits play in African Independent Churches.*

Apart from that, Pobee also confirms this when he says "in Africa, witchcraft beliefs continue to hold their ground and to some extent account for the popularity of the spiritual churches, which are sometimes also called 'witchcraft eradication movements' because that appears to be the their major concern and preoccupation. So with no apology, one can speak of sin as captivity by the forces of evil..." (Pobee 1979: 118). Up to this day, no other theologian has challenged Pobee on this statement. This can only mean one thing, namely that African inculturation theologians are partly in agreement with the view that evil can lead to sin.

4.2.2(c) The theology of the Zionists

The view that sin is the product of evil is definitely affirmed among the followers of the African independent churches or the Zionist churches. This is reflected through the emphasis that these churches put on the impact that evil spirits have on human lives and the society at large. For example, followers of these churches believe that evil spirits, which possess human beings with the aim of using them to effect their (evil spirits') evil deeds, may cause certain forms of behaviour. It is believed that this interference by evil spirits in human lives can be reflected in all forms of what is not expected from a human being. That includes such things as failing one's loved ones and community in all means possible, cruelty, rebellion, pride, selfishness, irresponsibility, as well as stupidity. Sin, which is usually understood in terms of disturbing harmonious communal relationships also, falls within this category of what is not expected from a human being. If viewed from this framework, therefore, sin becomes the product of evil. Also, in accordance with this framework, a sinner is not necessarily responsible for his or her sins, for he or she is sick from evil. Hence healing through exorcism plays a major role in the Zionist church.²³ This view of sin and evil reflects a continuance of a traditional African anthropology and worldview within the Zionist churches. Hastings (1976: 72) argues that this continuity with the past is "in the concerns they respond to and the complex of rituals and social therapy they employ rather than in any final religious interpretation. They do not for a moment deny the presence of spirits to be cast out, witchcraft spells to be loosed but faced with them they assert the power of God to free and to restore". He further states that, "there are parts of Rhodesia where people who think themselves; bewitched or their child killed by a witch are today as likely to go to the Zionist prophet as to the traditional nganga" (Hastings 1976: 75). Bucher (1980: 156) also argues that within the context of the Zionist churches, the prophet substitutes as a divine healer.

When the Zionists speak about healing, they do not only refer to healing physical sicknesses. To the contrary, they are also talking about psychological sicknesses or mental disorders such as antisocial behaviour. This means, in this context a criminal may

²³ See a discussion by Daneel (1992: 195-236)

easily be referred to as sick. If a man does not want to take responsibility for his children, such a man might be referred to as sick. It is also important to note that most forms of sicknesses are always seen to be originating from the "evil one" or the demons. Hence exorcism becomes the most important aspect of healing in the Zionist churches.²⁴

4.2.2(d) African Liberation Theology

African Liberation theology also affirms the fact that sin can be a product of evil. African liberation theologians identify such evil in perpetrators of oppression and in various social structures that are designed to oppress and humiliate the weak and the poor Gutierrez (1973: 232). For example, in South Africa during the time of apartheid, various aspects of the government such as its laws, its policies, its officials,²⁵ and its institutions, were regarded as the embodiments of evil. Maimela (1982: 50) refers to these as powers of enslavement. Dwane (1977: 10) argues that such enslaving powers can be socio-political, cultural, and psychological or spiritual. All these forms of evil are regarded as partly responsible for the sins of many South Africans who suffered under the apartheid government in South Africa. A classical example of how this form of evil can be responsible for sin is a lack of trust in God, which many Africans have after they became suspicious of Christianity and the Bible on grounds that it was used by Europeans to effect their evil intents. Black theologians from South Africa, for example, would argue that their theology seeks to show to the poor and oppressed that God is not the enemy of people, instead He is on their side. It is on these bases that sin becomes the product of evil in African liberation theology.²⁶

4.2.2(e) African Pentecostal Theology

That sin can be a product of evil also features in an African Pentecostal theology of sin. African Pentecostal theologians express this view in their understanding of the doctrine of the devil and demons. Pentecostal churches teach that sin is the work of the devil that

²⁴ For more on healing in the Zionist churches, see Turner (1967: 141-158), Oosthuizen et, al (1989: 69-241), Ndiokwere (1981: 114-122), and Daneel (1992) in Oosthuizen and Xexham (1992: 195-238).

²⁵ These include many black government officials as well.

sends his agents (the demons) to possess some people and use them as tools to do his dirty work. In addition, these churches teach that the world is being taken over by the devil and all those who are not saved are working for him. In some churches this has completely overshadowed the traditional Pentecostal emphasis on the individual's guilt for sin. Because most of the time the blame is put on the devil and the demons, people such as those who are HIV-positive are made to believe that the devil and the demons have inflicted their sicknesses on them. Church members with dysfunctional families and relationships are taught that their partners are being controlled by the devil, or they are possessed and only if the demons inside of them are removed will they be able to act rationally again.²⁷

4.2.2(f) African Evangelical Theology

That evil can lead to sin in a way that is reflected in our previous discussions is not affirmed in African evangelical theology. As it has been indicated in 4.1.2(d), African evangelical theologians refuse to look at this relationship in any other way than that of sin as the origin of evil. However, when it comes to communicating their knowledge of the Christian doctrine of sin to the laity, African evangelical theologians are not different from African theologians from other trends of African Christian theology.

4.3. Four contrasting positions classification

4.3(a) Sin as the source of evil - evil as the source of sin

According to this position, the relationship between sin and evil is understood mainly in terms of sin, as that which leads to evil and partially in terms of evil as that which leads to sin. In other words, this position, recognises both the first and the second position of the *two position's classification*, albeit on different levels. African inculturation theologians represent a typical example of this position. For example, if asked what the

²⁶ Also see Cone (1979: 187-191)

²⁷ Messages such as these came up in almost every sermon that I listen to when I visit a Pentecostal congregation. One can also pick up these views on train sermons and in church pamphlets or in a simple conversation with a member of a Pentecostal church.

relationship between sin and evil is, most African inculturation theologians would probably respond by saying that sin leads to evil, but if someone else answers differently, they would not challenge that either.

4.3(b) Evil as the source of sin – sin as the source of evil

According to this position, the relationship between sin and evil works the other way around. According to this position, it is mainly evil that leads to sin, and only in exceptional cases sin that leads to evil. One has to note though that the fact that the other position is less emphasised does not mean that it is denied. The main representatives of this view of the relationship between sin and evil are the followers of African Independent Churches or Zionist churches and African liberation theologians, albeit in different ways. In African Independent churches especially in the Zionist churches, this is affirmed through a strong belief in evil spirits that can control and manipulate human beings into doing things they would not have been able to do if they were not possessed. In Liberation Theology, this is confirmed by a view that the evil embodied in structures such as an oppressive government, labour policies and various structures put in place by the rich and powerful, cause people, mainly the oppressed, to behave sinfully. Usually this is seen as some form of retaliation or rebellion.

4.3(c) Sin as the source of evil, and equally the product of evil

According to this position, both the first and the second position of the first approach are equally emphasised. In other words, according to this position, sin is the product of evil as much as evil is the product of sin. Those representing this position are the followers and theologians of the African Pentecostal churches. African Pentecostals have a strong belief in the individual's guilt for sin. This implies that humans are fully responsible for their sins, and not some external force. Also within the context of Pentecostal Theology there is an equally strong emphasis on the role of the devil that works through his agents, the demons. African Pentecostals teach that the demons possess people and use them for

their evil purposes, which implies that a person can do something, not out of his or her own will but through being manipulated by the devil.

4.3(d) Sin as the exclusive source of evil.

This position follows only the first position of the *two-position approach*. As far as this position is concerned, sin can only lead to evil and not the other way around. The main representatives of this position are theologians from the evangelical churches. Evangelical theologians are completely against any view that gives human beings a scapegoat for their sins. For these theologians, human beings are solely responsible for their sins.



5. Conclusion

Now that we have come to the end of our discussion on how the relationship between sin and evil is understood in African Christian theology, it may be helpful to offer a brief summary.

In this thesis, I have argued that, if one looks at the surface of what takes place in African Christian theology, one would immediately discover that there are two basic positions in which the question of the relationship between sin and evil is understood within African Christian theology. Those are, 1. *Sin is the source of evil.* 2. *Evil is the source sin.* At the same time, I also argue that if one looks closer, one discovers that there are in fact four different positions from which this relationship is understood in African Christian theology. According to the first position, people are more comfortable with the view that sin is the source of evil, even though they do not completely deny the fact that evil can also be the source of sin. According to the second position, people tend to be more fascinated by the fact that evil is the source of sin, even though at the same time they do not dismiss that sin may be the source of evil. Within the third position, people, tend to see sin and evil as two components that are mutually dependent on each other. In other words, those who belong to this position, hold the view that sin is the source of evil as much as evil is the source of sin.

In Chapter One I looked at how an investigation into the issue of the relationship between sin and evil in African Christian theology, becomes relevant in the African context, whereby ubuntu and inherent human goodness, are emphasised amidst constant incidents of civil wars, corruption and human rights violations. In the light of this, I then argued that a paradox such as the affirmation of ubuntu and incidents of corruption at the same time, call for an investigation into the way African Christian theologians and African Christians in general, understand the relationship between sin and evil.

In Chapter Two I focused on how the issue of sin and evil has developed throughout the centuries in Western Christian theology. I began this discussion by looking at how the doctrine of sin developed during the patristic period. I looked at various contributions from the Apologists, the Greek fathers, the Latin Fathers, Augustine and Pelagius.

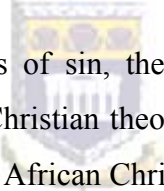
After that, I looked at how the doctrine of sin developed in the Middle Ages. Here, in particular, my focus was on the views of Thomas Aquinas, especially with regards to his doctrine of sin, doctrine of grace and doctrine of justification. Following this, I then looked at the doctrine of sin in the Modern Period. Here I touched on how the doctrine of sin suffered a major setback during the time of the Enlightenment in the 18th and the 19th century. I focused on how the thinkers of the Enlightenment criticised the doctrine of sin by targeting certain aspects within this doctrine, which they thought did not give an authentic picture of what human nature was all about.

Still on the doctrine of sin, I took a brief look at how the doctrine of sin developed in the 20th century. Here I mentioned the contributions of prominent 20th century authors such as Karl Barth, Søren Kierkegaard, F.R. Tennant, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, G.C. Berkouwer, Wolhart Pannenberg, Ted Peters, Christof Gestrich and others.

After discussing how the doctrine of sin developed through the centuries in Western Christian theology, I shifted my focus towards the questions that are typically addressed within the doctrine of sin. Here I looked at questions such as; what is sin? What is the nature of sin? Where does sin come from? How can human beings know sin? What are the results of sin and how serious is it, as well as what the relationship between sin and evil is, as understood by Western Christian theologians.

In Chapter Three I offered a very brief overview of African Christian theology. My discussion began by looking at a definition of African Christian theology. Drawing from the likes of Mbiti, Mugambi, Parrat, Muzorewa and Oduyoye, I stated that "African Christian theology is Christian theology expressed orally, symbolically and in writing, by Africans using their African thought forms, concepts, and worldviews".

I then went on to discuss the origins and the formation of an African Christian theology. I explained that African Christian theology emerged out of a general concern by African Christians theologians, that Christianity in its western format did not reflect the understanding and experience of African people. Here I mentioned how ideas of an African Christian theology emanated in the thoughts of figures such as Kimpa Vita, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Holy Hames Johnson and Edward Blyden. I also mentioned how African Christian theology was born in 1966 in Nigeria. While I was still on the origin and birth of African Christian theology, I also looked at various factors that contributed towards the development of this theology. Here I paid special attention to two factors, namely, the views of authors such as Edward Blyden, Placide Tempels and Leopold Senghor, and the emergence of African nationalism and pre-independence political parties, including the role of the emergence of new independent states from former colonial territories.



Following the section on the origins of sin, there is a section in which I looked at different approaches which African Christian theologians followed, and proposed for an authentic realisation and pursuit of an African Christian theology. Here I made references to concepts such as adaptation, incarnation and others. Finally, I briefly discussed various trends, which exist in African Christian theology. Here I referred to four trends of African Christian theology, namely, African inculturation theology, African evangelical theology, African liberation theology and African Pentecostal Theology.

The main argument of this thesis is found in Chapter Four, where I offered a more detailed analysis of the way the relationship between sin and evil is understood in African Christian theology. Here, I looked at the two classifications mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, namely, the two contrasting positions on sin and evil and the four contrasting positions on sin and evil. After analysing each classification, I looked at how the positions within each classification are reflected in different trends that exist within African Christian theology. For example, according to the first classification, which consists of two contrasting positions, namely, sin as the source of evil, and evil as the

source of sin, I took each position and looked at how it is reflected for example in African inculturation theology or in African evangelical theology. In the case of the second classification, which consists of four contrasting positions, I tried to find out which trend is represented by a particular position that I was discussing. Not only that, I also tried to provide reasons as to how and why a particular position from a specific classification is reflected or represented by a certain trend.

One has to note however that the purpose of this study was one of classification, in order to discern the state of the current debate on the relationship between sin and evil in African Christian theology. Therefore, it does not offer constructive views on how the relationship between sin and evil should be understood. Nevertheless, in this last chapter I wish to offer a few brief comments in this regard. Notwithstanding the state of argument in African Christian theology with regards to issues of Christian doctrine, in general, I nevertheless think that Africans should at least be introduced to basics of the classical Christian doctrine of sin. A classical Christian doctrine may be helpful for a number of reasons.

I began my discussion on the issue of sin and evil in African Christian theology by making two, important observations with regard to the methodological problems that immediately face any form of an investigation to the subject of sin in African Christian theology. As this observation indicates, there is still more work to be done when it comes to this subject. For example, the way people understand the question of sin and evil is closely connected to the broad theme of ethics. Secondly, the issue of sin becomes more important when it comes to reconciliation and human development. For example, for an authentic reconciliation to take place between Africans and their white counterparts, Africans need to understand that as human beings, they are partly responsible for some of the problems that are facing the vast African continent. Also, for a healthy development of Africans in areas of personal growth and economic growth, Africans need to learn to take responsibility for their own mistakes and failures. Instead of attributing every failure to the evil spirits, they need to start from a fault within themselves. Lastly, and most

importantly, a proper knowledge of the relationship between sin and evil and of the subject of sin in general, can also solve the problem of a moralistic gospel, that is, a gospel which promotes respectable individuals instead of righteous ones. Further research, therefore, needs to be done especially on the effects of a moralistic view of sin in African Christianity in general.



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