

A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN AFRICA

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The aim of this modest essay is to highlight theological perspectives in Africa of the 20th and early 21st centuries. But the undertaking is not as simple as it appears because Africa is not a monolithic entity that lends itself to simplistic categorisations.¹ One's understanding of Africa depends on spatio-temporal indicators, and these indicators have coloured perspectives in Catholic theology on the African continent.

From the point of view of space, the African continent is made of a large number of ethnic nationalities of linguistic and cultural diversity. One could speak of maghrebian Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, or southern Africa. Adding to the diversity is the fact that western colonialism created anglophone, francophone, lusophone and hispanophone countries in Africa.

From the point of view of time, one may speak of three moments of Africa's encounter with Christianity. The first encounter could be dated 62-1500 AD.² The apostolic era, the patristic era and classical Ethiopian Christianity defined this first

¹I had made this point in "Tillich's Method of Correlation and the Concerns of African Theologians" in *Paul Tillich: A New Catholic Assessment*, eds Raymond Bulman and Frederick Parrella (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1994), 189.

²Read John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: Paulines, 2009), 19-39.

encounter. The Pentecost narrative lists African nations among those present on the day of Pentecost. It was the era of a flourishing school of theology in Alexandria, the epicentre of the Christological controversy. Alexandria produced great contributors to theology such as Origen, Clement, Athanasius, Cyril, without leaving the unorthodox Arius. Arius' denial of the divinity of the Son of God necessitated the convocation of the Council of Nicaea and the landmark definition of the dogma of *homousios*. The doctrinal achievements of African theologians in the early Church cannot be overlooked. Apart from the men of Alexandria, Latin fathers like Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Augustine of Hippo, to mention but these, helped in the crystallisation of Christian doctrine in the areas of Trinity and incarnation—two doctrines that make Christianity distinct among world religions—ecclesiology, sacramentology etc.³ The invasion of the Arabs and the advent of Islam might have triggered the decline of the early Church in Africa. But the richness of the contribution of these theologians of the early Church in Africa benefitted the Church as recently as the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) in that Council's recourse to Patristic ecclesiology.

Africa's second encounter with Christianity lasted from 1500-1800.⁴ Little is known of the theological contribution of Africa during this era. However, while there was no notable theological school like Alexandria, the existence of quite a good number of

³Read Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* vol. 1 *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature from the Apostles' Creed to Irenaeus* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1995), 'Introduction'; Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning To Read the Fathers* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985) ch. 1; Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology: An Introduction to Its Sources, Principles, and History* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 200-209. Read also Aloys Grillmeyer, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* (451) (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965); Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1993).

⁴Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 41-97.

indigenous African priests in this era who were trained in Lisbon, Portugal, would point to some theological activity.⁵ Lisbon had the first training facilities for African priests in 1508. About a century later, seminaries were founded in Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Luanda. The first African seminarian, probably from Senegal, appeared in Portugal in 1447, that is, 400 years before the first modern African seminary opened in Dakar. Among the African priests of this era stood out Antonio de Couto. A Congolese priest from Sao Salvador, de Couto studied at the University of Coimbra and became a Jesuit. His work under the title *Sufficient Instruction of the People of Angola in the Mysteries of our Faith*, which appeared in 1642 was, in the words of Baur, “for centuries the only theological work written by an African priest and served as a catechism in Angola.”⁶

Africa's third encounter with Christianity began in the 19th century, and Christianity in Africa of the 21st century is a beneficiary of that third encounter. The interest of this essay is principally in the theological perspectives in this era. These perspectives have been shaped by cultural alienation occasioned by the dichotomy between western Christianity and African culture; political oppression occasioned by colonialism, neo-colonialism, and military dictatorship; economic deprivation occasioned by mismanagement and misappropriation of Africa's enormous economic wealth; and, in very recent times, doctrinal, ecumenical and inter-religious concerns occasioned by the emergence of Pentecostalism and a militant and intolerant Islam. These perspectives will now be considered under the subheadings of inculcation and liberation, and doctrinal and systematic explication.

⁵*Ibid.*, 96-97. Baur notes: “The Portuguese Africanist Brasio has gathered from his large collection of documents some 207 names of priests born in Africa between 1549 and 1899. The majority of them from Angola, but there must have been many, unknown ones, from Kongo, Sao Tome and Cape Verde.” *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶*Ibid.*, 97.

Inculcation and Liberation

Tracing the history of theological activity in Africa, Ngindu Mushete identified three major currents, namely, missionary theology, critical African theology, and “black theology” of South Africa.⁷ By his own assessment, missionary theology reflected the aim and goal of missionary activity, namely, the salvation of souls or conversion to Christianity, and the founding and growth of new local Churches.¹⁸ Ngindu attributed its inspiration to the missiological school of Münster with T. Ohm and K. Muller as exponents. He remarked that this theology was dualistic in its anthropology, making it incapable of differentiating between universal revelation and its historical and particular expression and reception, and incapable of recognising anything positive in local African cultures. In its zealous pursuit of the objectives of the missionary enterprise, indigenous traditions were erroneously considered to be wholly and entirely “pagan” and diabolic.

What has just been said largely explains why the Portuguese missionary enterprise in Benin Kingdom collapsed during Africa's second moment of contact with Christianity. Inspired by the theology of implantation, it sought to establish the Church in the lands of peoples thought to be pagan, diabolical and of inferior culture. The newly established local Churches were formed to bear the marks of western Christianity.⁸ H. Maurier describes this as “implanting the Roman Church, its doctrine, its liturgy, its discipline, its organization, and its outlook”.⁹ Ngindu perceives varying shades of the theology of implantation in the periodical *Eglise Vivante* of J. Bruls and J. Frisque published in Louvain, and in the *Revue Nouvelle de Science Missionnaire* of J. Beckman and W.

⁷Cf. Ngindu Mushete, “The History of Theology in Africa: From Polemics to Critical Irenics,” in *African Theology en Route*, eds K. Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1977), 23-24.

⁸Mushete, “The History of Theology in Africa,” 25.

⁹H. Maurier quoted by Mushete, “The History of Theology in Africa,” 25.

Bühlmann. But, without much precision, he asserted that the third school of thought in missionary theology is the theology of the local Church of Vatican II.¹⁰ By my own assessment, the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council cannot be said to have the weakness of the theology of implantation of missionary theology so described, that is, the desire to replicate a Christianity of western expression with little or no positive outlook vis-à-vis the emerging local Churches in Africa.

The conciliar ecclesiology in *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* presents the Church as a communion of local Churches. In the nature of a sacrament, that is, sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among human beings, the Church at the Second Vatican Council understood herself as the new people of God. All peoples either belong to her or are in some way related to her. As for those in full communion with her, “All the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit so that ‘he who dwells in Rome knows those in most distant parts to be his members’ (*qui Romae sedet, Indos scit membrum suum esse*)”. The church that is thus presented is a communion of local Churches with distinctive traits.¹¹ In this Church, communion does not abolish diversity, while diversity does not obliterate communion. Hence, the young Churches “borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdom, teaching, arts and sciences of their people everything which could be used to praise the glory of the Creator, manifest the grace of the savior, or contribute to the right ordering of Christian life.”¹² The theology of the local Church at Vatican II was able to avoid the pitfall of what Ngindu calls

¹⁰Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 13 and *Ad gentes*, chs. 2 and 3, especially 19 and 22.

¹¹On the Church as community of Churches, read J.-M.-R. Tillard, *Eglise d’eglises. L’ecclésiologie de communion*, Cogitatio Fidei, no. 143 (Paris: Cerf, 1987). For a rich explanation of theology of local Church, read Tillard’s *L’Eglise locale. Ecclésiologie de communion et catholicité* (Paris: Cerf, 1995).

¹²The Second Vatican Council, *Ad gentes*, 22.

missionary theology because of its rootedness in the New Testament and Patristic ecclesiologies. Going back to the sources (*ressourcement*) ensured a retrieval of the rich ecclesiological insights of patristic theologians like Cyprian, Augustine, Ignatius of Antioch, to mention but these. The lack of precision in Ngindu’s assessment, to which I have just referred, can be explained by the fact that the history he traced overlooked the Patristic sources of Vatican II’s theology of local Church.

The year 1956 marked a turning point in the history of theology in Africa. It was the year of publication of the collective work entitled *Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent*.¹³ In reaction to the shortcoming of missionary theology, its failure to take Africa’s culture, religion, and civilisation seriously, a group of African theologians opted for a theology of adaptation.¹⁴ Much credit goes to the editor of this work, the Congolese Vincent Mulago. His life and work embodied a theology of adaptation which sought to express Christian doctrines and liturgy in terms and categories derived from the beliefs, rites, symbols, gestures, and institutions found in African ancestral religions.¹⁵

Ngindu describes what was represented in this approach as the theology of “stepping stones” which sought to use whatever was

¹³Vincent Mulago et al., *Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent* (Paris: Cerf, 1956).

¹⁴Cf. Ngindu, “The History of Theology in Africa,” 27-28.

¹⁵Among the numerous publications of Vincent Mulago, see his *Un visage africain du christianisme. L’union vitale bantu face à l’unité vitale ecclésiale* (Paris, 1965); “La conception de Dieu dans la tradition bantoue,” *Revue du Clergé Africain* 22 (1967): 272-299; “Le Dieu des Bantu,” *Cahiers des Religions Africaines* 2 (1968): 23-64; “Le problème d’une théologie africaine revue à la lumière de Vatican II,” *Revue du Clergé Africain* 24 (1969): 277-314; “Symbolisme dans les religions traditionnelles africaines et sacramentalisme,” *Revue du Clergé Africain* 27 (1972): 467-502; *La religion traditionnelle des Bantu et leur vision du monde* (Kinshasa, 1980); *Traditional African Marriage and Christian Marriage* (Kampala, 1983).

Note also that the proponents of the theology of an adaptation were largely inspired by Placide Tempel’s writings, particularly *La philosophie bantoue* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1949).

judged to be compatible with Christianity in African traditional religions and cultures as stepping stones to Christianisation. This theology had its merits and demerits. As far as its merits were concerned, according to Ngindu, the theology of adaptation affirmed that the Gospel message is able to bear an African, not only European, expression. In that respect, it was able to influence the Africanisation of Christianity in the areas of personnel, catechesis and liturgy. As far as its demerits were concerned, it bore a tendency to concordism, that is, equation of the Christian revelation with its historical European expression. It failed to identify and isolate the European expression of Christianity before seeking to adapt it. It has led to what Hurbon has called “a process of nativizing the Roman church”¹⁶

The need to distinguish between the western European expression of the Christian revelation and the sources and content of revelation itself led to the emergence of a “critical African theology.”¹⁷ In an attempt to know the sources and content of revelation, important works were published in fundamental, historical, and biblical theology.¹⁸ In an attempt to elaborate a theological discourse before an African audience, Ngindu observes that much attention was given to the theology of the local Church, the theology of the laity, and the theology of non-Christian religions in the theological study weeks of the Catholic Faculty of Theology in

¹⁶L. Hurbon, *Dieu dans le vaudou haïtien* (Paris: Payot, 1972) 3, quoted in Ngindu, “The History of Theology in Africa,” 28.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸Here are some examples given by Ngindu: for a work on fundamental theology see T. Tshibangu, *Théologie positive et théologie positive. Position traditionnelle et nouvelle problématique* (Louvain: L'Université; Paris: Beartrice-Nauwelaerts, 1965); in the area of historical theology see K. Ntedika, *L'évocation de l'au-delà dans la prière pour les morts. Etude de patristique et de la liturgie latines*, IVe-VIIe S. (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts; Paris: Beartrice-Nauwelaerts, 1971); in the area of biblical theology and exegesis see. D. Atal, *Structure et signification des cinq premiers versets de l'hymne johannique au Logos* (Louvain-Paris, 1972) and L. Monsengwo Pasinya, *La notion de nomos dans le Pentateuque grec* (Rome, 1973).

Kinshasa, the periodicals published on the continent such as *African Ecclesial Review*, *Cahiers des Religions Africaines*, *Revue Africaine de théologie*, and the writings of scholars like John Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti, Laurent Mpongo, Bimwenyi Kweshi, Bénézet Bujo, to mention but these.¹⁹

However, what Ngindu described as critical African theology has itself been judged as insufficiently critical. This judgement came from Cameroonian Dominican Eloi Messi Metogo.²⁰ In his observation, since the 1956 publication of *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, with its intention of incarnating Christianity in Africa, two questions have not been accorded the attention they deserve: “Which Africa? Which Christianity?”²¹ For him, instead of a veritably critical African theology, what obtains is a theological discourse inspired by an outdated anthropology itself mediated by the négritude movement. This movement is itself European in inspiration in so far as the studies that shaped it have been shaped by western scholars. These scholars searched for African cultural values which would compare with the cultural values of the West. They recognised the humanity of Africans, which their ancestors denied, by using western culture as criterion of African culture. As a result, says Messi, “The Africanism of Africans was born of the Africanism of non-Africans.”²²

¹⁹See L. Mpongo, *Pour une anthropologie chrétienne du mariage au Congo* (Kinshasa, 1968); John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London, 1969); *Concepts of God in Africa* (London, 1970); *New Testament Eschatology in an African background: A Study of the Encounter Between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (Oxford, 1971); Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru/Zimbabwe, 1984); K. Bimwenyi, *Discours théologique négro-africain. Problème des fondements* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981); Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology and its Social Context* (Nairobi : Paulines, 1992).

²⁰See Eloi Messi Metogo, *Théologie et ethnophilosophie. Problem de method en théologie africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985).

²¹See Metogo, *Théologie et ethnophilosophie*, part 1.

²²See *ibid.*, 18.

There was also a misconception of Christianity. Like Ngindu, Eloi Messi points out that the Christianity whose incarnation was sought by African theology was the missionary Christianity “received from a tradition of Counter-Reform and the anti-modernist struggle.”²³ One observes, however, that Eloi Messi did not pay attention to the writings of Tshibangu, Ntedika, Atal, or Monsengwo, to mention but a few.²⁴ That weakens his critique of “critical African theology”.

Perhaps in response to Ngindu Mushete's critique that the theology of adaptation needed to be complemented by studies in fundamental, systematic and biblical theologies, Ukachukwu Manus, Justin Ukpong and Theresa Okure, three of the highly revered founding members of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN), attempt to develop a version of intercultural hermeneutics to be at the service of African Christologies.²⁵

²³*Ibid.*, 65.

²⁴Tshibangu's *Théologie positive et théologie speculative* is a classic which provides a solid epistemological foundation for theological pluralism. Mention must also be made of his *La théologie comme science au XXe siècle* (Kinshasa: PUZ, 1980).

²⁵See Ukachukwu Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003). I have had cause to point to an ambivalence in Manus' hermeneutical project.

On the one hand, he rules out the use of an hermeneutical perspective foreign to Africa when he wrote: “It is no longer sensible for Africans to continue reading the Bible from alien perspectives. Though many an African biblical scholars has brought home western methodologies and taught them in African seminaries and universities, the time has come to re-focus the curriculum on the African cultural and religious heritage.” Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 1.

On the other hand, he follows J.W. Voelz who is not an African. “Manus proposes a hermeneutical procedure to be used outside ecclesial horizon. It's like the Church, the primary recipient of the word of God, has nothing to say as to how it is to be interpreted. One can therefore see how a hermeneutical procedure that bypasses the Church produces a Christology that is silent on the faith of the Church.” Anthony Akinwale, “African Theology and the Dogmatic Responsibility for the Christian God,” in *God, Bible and African Traditional Religion*, Acts of SIST International Missiological Symposium 2009, ed. Bede Uche Ukwuije (Enugu: Spiritan International School of Theology, 2010), 241.

Whatever might be said by way of critique, this fact must be stated: since the publication of *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Catholic theology in Africa has witnessed the establishment in 1957 of the flourishing Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa (now Université Catholique de Kinshasa) in the Congo. The Kinshasa school for many years was the avant-garde of theology in Africa. It has been joined since 1979 by the Catholic Higher Institute of East Africa in Nairobi, Kenya (now Catholic University of East Africa), the Catholic Institute of West Africa in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, l'Institut Catholique d'Afrique l'Ouest in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (now L' Université Catholique d'Afrique de l'Ouest). The Kinshasa inspiration finds a loud echo at the Spiritan International School of Theology in Attakwu-Enugu, Nigeria in the latter's intellectual labour to give birth to an African Christianity.²⁶

The theological effervescence that has since been generated in Africa gave rise to the exuberant liturgies of many of the local Churches on the continent today. *Le Rite Zairois* brought large numbers of European and North American tourists to Sunday Mass in Kinshasa, especially to L'Eglise St Alphonse. What began in the Congo was soon replicated in other dioceses across sub-Saharan Africa.

The description of the Church as family of God in Africa at the First Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa which took place in 1994 can be described as an achievement of inculturation theology in Africa. In this imagery, African theologians, prelates and *periti* at the Synod, used a mode of

²⁶An example of the fruit of this school is Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996). A rich synthesis of its perspective can be derived from almost all the essays presented at the SIST International Missiological Symposium of 2009. See Bede Uche Ukwuije, ed., *God, Bible and African Traditional Religion*. Acts of SIST International Missiological Symposium 2009 (Enugu: Spiritan International School of Theology, 2010).

relationship that connotes strong and harmonious relationship in African cultures to express what the letter to the Ephesians described as the “household of God”. In so doing, African inculturation theology provided a category apt for a reception of Vatican II ecclesiology of communion.

So much has been said of inculturation theology in Africa. But one must not ignore the liberationist school in Africa either. Africans, like Latin Americans, have been victims and agents of political repression and economic deprivation. While inculturation theology confronted the problem of cultural alienation, the need to complement cultural affirmation with political and economic empowerment inspired the writings of the Cameroonian Jean-Marc Ela among others. Whether or not one agrees with his presuppositions, assumptions, analyses, conclusions and recommendations, his book *African Cry* could be described as an African equivalent of Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation*.²⁷ In the family of African liberation theology is to be found the writings of Black Theology. Originating in North America through the pioneering efforts of A. Cleage and James Cone, this theology emerged as an attempt to give a Christian response to racism. It found its way into South Africa during the 1970s. The writings of South African Dominican Albert Nolan are to be situated in this genre. Mention must also be made of the contributions of African Catholic women theologians like Teresa Okure and Rose Uchem who offered their theological reflexions in the quest for the promotion of the dignity of the African woman.²⁸

²⁷Jean Marc Ela, *African Cry* (New York: Orbis, 1984). See also his *My Faith as An African* (New York: Orbis, 1988); Id., *From Charity to Liberation* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1984).

²⁸Cf. Theresa Okure, “Women in the Bible,” in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology: Reflections From Women’s Commission of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians*, eds Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988); Rose Uchem, *Overcoming Women’s Subordination: An Igbo African and Christian Perspective: Envisioning an Inclusive Theology With Reference to Women* (Enugu: Snaap, 2001).

It was not just theologians who addressed the issue of political and economic empowerment. Pastors were not left out. Interventions of the episcopate in Africa on the social and political challenges facing the continent and its peoples deserve to be mentioned. In countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, to mention but these, Catholic Bishops' Conferences have been prophetic voices. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, which holds its plenary meeting twice a year, has not limited its role to simply teaching doctrines of faith. Rather, since the publication of its first letter to Nigerians on October 1, 1960, the date of Nigeria's political independence, it has consistently offered incisive analyses and recommendations on the social, political, and economic situation of the country.²⁹ In making these interventions, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has been guided by the tradition of Catholic social doctrine bequeathed in papal encyclicals. There are clear attempts to apply the principles of promotion of human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity.³⁰ It is a well-known fact that the Conference of Bishops in Nigeria has been a credible voice of conscience crying in the wilderness during the dark days of military

²⁹For a collection of interventions of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria see Peter Schineller, ed., *The Voice of the Voiceless: Pastoral Letters and Communiques of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria 1960-2002* (Abuja: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2002).

On the occasion of the golden jubilee of Nigeria's Independence, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria published *Growing a New Nigeria*. Joint Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria on the 50th Anniversary of Nigeria's Political Independence (Abuja, March 13, 2011).

³⁰Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged this fact in his address to Nigerian Bishops on *ad limina* visit in February 2009. In the words of the Holy Father: “Your dedication to derive from Catholic principles enlightened comments on current national problems is greatly appreciated.By promoting Catholic Social Doctrine you offer your loyal contribution to your country and assist in the consolidation of a national order based on solidarity and a culture of human rights.”

rule in Nigeria and since the return to democratic rule on May 29, 1999. Its organ, the Justice Development and Peace Commission, has always participated commendably in election monitoring.

Doctrinal and Systematic Theology

More than half a century after the publication of *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, a new generation of African theologians is coming alive. Their theology has to be different from what obtained in the past without ignoring the objectives and achievements of the past. While working for the achievement of the objectives of African inculturation theology, there is need to avoid the temptation to reduce theology to cultural anthropology. Without repudiating the agenda of an African liberationist theology, there is need to avoid the tendency to reduce theology to a socio-political discourse. Emergent Catholic theology in Africa must face the challenge of a neo-Pentecostal theology that tends to reduce Christianity to an instrument of upward socio-economic mobility in a syncretistic alliance with African traditional beliefs.³¹

To avoid a double misconception—of what is Christian and of what is African—the need has become clearly evident that two methodological challenges must be faced. The first is a careful retrieval and prudent appropriation of indigenous cultures and religions that avoids self-incarceration in a museographic complex. The second is the challenge of paying adequate attention to the functional specialties of doctrines, foundations, dialectic, history and research in view of an adequate retrieval and reception of apostolic tradition. Evidence of this need is seen in the attempts of famous African theologians to do Christology as if the Christological councils never took place, and/or hermeneutics without reference to the Magisterium.³² This is largely because Patrology is yet to be

Read Anthony Akinwale, "The Jubilee Year and Theological Method," *West African Journal of Ecclesial Studies* 5(2000): 22-35.

Sed contra cf. Vatican II, "Dei verbum – Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," n.10; Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994).

given the attention it deserves in the curricula of theology in many African seminaries and theological institutes. While African liturgies are being lauded, it has to be said that liturgical inculturation cannot be achieved without paying adequate attention to Patristic texts. Therefore, to attend to this need, theology has to be done with and like the Church fathers who saw theology as a meeting point of spiritual, intellectual and pastoral concerns.

What is true of liturgy is true of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. Catholic theology must be done with the desire for Christian unity in mind. But, as can be seen in many joint statements of ecumenical partners today, there is an increasing recognition of the need to include the Church Fathers in ecumenical dialogue. For there can be no attainment of a common comprehension of apostolic faith without the guidance of the Fathers. In the same vein, if Catholic theology in Africa is to be profitably involved in inter-religious dialogue, it will need the Christology of the Fathers and the Councils. In fact, given Africa's contribution to Patristic theology in the early Church, Catholic theology in Africa today must pay due respects to Patristic theology.

The importance of retrieving apostolic tradition and the need to appropriate the achievement of Patristic theology even in inculturation and liberation theologies call for a theological method in two phases.³³ This is what the emerging theology school at the

³³Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) chs 1 and 5. According to Bernard Lonergan, theology takes place in two phases—theology *in oratione obliqua* and theology *in oratione recta*—at the four levels of conscious intentionality, thus yielding eight functional specialities. The first phase facilitates the theologian's encounter with the past, while the second assists the theologian to confront the problems of the present. In words, "If one is to harken to the word, one must also bear witness to it. If one engages in *lectio divina*, there come to mind *quaestiones*. If one assimilates tradition, one learns that one should pass it on. If one encounters the past, one also has to take one's stand toward the future. In brief, there is a theology *in oratione obliqua* that tells what Paul and John, Augustine and Aquinas, and anyone else had to say about God and the economy of salvation. But there is also a theology *in oratione recta* in which the theologian, enlightened by the past, confronts the problem of his own day." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 133.

Dominican Institute in Ibadan, Nigeria is striving to accomplish. In the first phase, theology retrieves and interprets what is found in Scripture and apostolic tradition, in the Church fathers, and Thomas Aquinas. This is not a case of remaining in the past but of remaining with the past. To remain in the past is to fail to acknowledge that there might have been misunderstanding and misreading of the past. To remain with the past is to learn from the wisdom and imperfections of the past. In this respect, neither canonising nor jettisoning everything Aquinas has written, he is seen as a teacher worthy of emulation who laboured to bring about a synthesis of Scripture, patristic thought, philosophical thought and the insights of natural sciences available at his time. What he has done in his time today's theologian must do for his own time. In the second phase, what is retrieved and interpreted is explained and communicated in confrontation with Nigerian and African questions. Theology is envisioned as having the task of providing a bridge between doctrine and life. Hence, it must address the Nigerian questions of today by meditating on and proclaiming the faith that comes to us from the apostles. The means of attaining this objective is not only knowledge of general and particular properties of African culture, but also an adequate knowledge of the deposit of faith. The overall objective of theology so envisioned is both kerygmatic and doxological. Theology is done to proclaim the good news, and proclamation of the good news leads the audience to praise God in a liturgical life that leads back to theology.³⁴

The Dominican school, consistent with the charism of the Dominican Order, strives to keep a relationship between theology and preaching, and it is preaching thus understood that truly liberates. Faced with an aggressive neo-Pentecostalism that promotes Biblical literalism and immediacy of God's intervention in the preaching of prosperity Gospel, and the reduction of religion to faith plus emotions minus reason; faced with a militant Islamic fundamentalism that refuses to respect freedom of worship or that exercises its freedom of worship in ways that violate the freedom of

others; faced with innumerable social, political and economic crises confronting modern day Nigeria and Africa, this school saddles itself with the task of elaborating a theology that is at the service of preaching by taking doctrinal responsibility for apostolic faith.³⁵

Two Schools of Thought

I have endeavoured in this brief commentary to describe a movement towards two schools of thought in Catholic theology in Africa. One school represents inculcation and liberation, while the other represents doctrinal and systematic explication. I shall offer a Nigerian illustration of this movement by using acronyms, I call the first the CIWA-SIST school, and the second the DI school. CIWA stands for the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, SIST stands for the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, while DI stands for the Dominican Institute, Ibadan. The CIWA-SIST school of thought is enormously interested in inculcation theology and the social, political and economic problems of Nigeria. It can pay greater attention to history, doctrines and systematics.

The Dominican school, younger than the first two, on the other hand, insists on the accurate retrieval of apostolic tradition in Scripture, the Church fathers, and Thomas Aquinas, and uses what is retrieved in its confrontation with Nigerian and African questions. It seeks to address the Nigerian questions of today by meditating on

³⁵For samples of the theological option of this school, read Joseph Kenny and Anthony Akinwale, eds, *Preaching in Contemporary Nigeria* (Ibadan: Michael Dempsey Centre for Religious and Social Research, 2001); *Tradition and Compromises: Essays on the Challenge of Pentecostalism*, Aquinas Day Series, no. 2 (Ibadan: Michael Dempsey Centre for Religious and Social Research, 2005). See also Anthony Akinwale, "The Theology of Conversion and the Conversion of Theology," in *CATHAN: A Searchlight on Saint Paul*, Proceedings of the 24th Conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria, eds Cyril Obanure and Mary Sylvia Nwachukwu (Makurdi: Religio, 2010), 203-211.

and proclaiming the faith that comes to us from the apostles. The DI school is founded on the conviction that success or otherwise of inculturation should be measured by its proximity or distance to its goal. That presupposes a number of issues—a well-defined goal, ability to recognize and get acquainted with its means, ability and willingness to make good use of the means. The goal of African inculturation and liberation theology must be an African instantiation of apostolic tradition. Anything short of that is less than successful. The means of attaining the objective is not only knowledge of general and particular properties of African culture, and of the social, political and economic challenges of contemporary Africa, but also an adequate knowledge of the deposit of faith contained in scripture and tradition and mediated through the writings of early Church fathers and their disciples.