

# INCULTURATION AND AFRICAN THEOLOGY

## The Paradoxes of the Paradigm Shifts

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African Christian theology as we know it today began as a theological reflection on the meeting of the Gospel with African reality. Its focus was on the meeting of the Gospel with African religious-cultural and ancestral heritage. African inculturation theology grew out of African authors' criticisms of the old missionary adaptation in vogue in the continent during the heydays of the nineteenth century missionary expansion up to the Vatican II. Beginning from the mid-1970s, inculturation was the most discussed trend of contemporary African theology.<sup>1</sup> Today, however, there are three main trends of African theology, namely, inculturation, liberation and reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> The meeting of these three trends in the writings of African authors has raised the question of new hermeneutics and paradoxes for the paradigm shifts in African theology.<sup>3</sup> It has challenged not only the dominance of inculturation theology in the writings of African authors but also has put into question the relevance of inculturation itself in African theology today. The paradigm shifts, however, has helped to bring out the central place of inculturation in African theology.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, we shall make an overview of the meaning of inculturation in the writings of African theologians vis-à-vis the on-going debate between exponents of inculturation-liberation and those of reconstruction trends of African theology. The aim is to bring out the uniqueness of inculturation in African theology while advancing the question of new hermeneutics for the theology. Our topic shall be discussed as follows: 1. Inculturation in the Writings of African theologians, 2. African liberation theology, 3. African theology of reconstruction, 4. The Contribution of African Women theologians. Finally, we shall conclude with the question of new hermeneutics for the future of African theology.

### 1. Inculturation in the Writings of African Theologians

It was at the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) held in Accra (Ghana) in 1977, that African theologians appropriated the term "inculturation". This Conference brought together, for the first time, Catholic and Protestant Francophone and Anglophone African theologians. The Conference placed the theme of "liberation" in its theological agenda. However, at the end, its new concept of theological unity came to be

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. F.A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, Leberit Press, Rome 2005 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. KARAMAGA, *Problems and Promises of Africa: Towards and Beyond the Year 2000*, AACC Publications, Nairobi 1991; J.N-K. MUGAMBI, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi 1995.

<sup>3</sup> See A.E. OROBATOR (ed.), *Theological Re-imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 2014; E. KATONGOLE, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, W.B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T.S. MALULEKE, "African Theology", in D.F. FORD – R. MUERS (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA (USA) 2005, 496.

expressed in the term "inculturation".<sup>5</sup> So that it could be said that when Father Arrupe, Superior General of the Jesuits defined the term in 1978, inculturation had already become a popular term among the African theologians.<sup>6</sup> The theme of inculturation is at the heart of African theology, as we know it today. Thus in the Final Communique of the above named Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians (December 17-23, 1977, the theologians declared:

We believe that African theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African people to shape a new future...from the African situation...defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.<sup>7</sup>

It is from this background that one of the organizers of this Conference, Appiah-Kubi says:

That the Gospel has come to remain in Africa cannot be denied, but now our theological reflections must be addressed to the real contextual African situations... "How can I sing the Lord's song in a strange land," in a strange language, in a strange thought, in a strange ideology? (cf. Ps. 137, 4). For more than a decade now the cry of the psalmist has been the cry of many African Christians. We demand to serve the Lord in our own terms...The struggle of African theologians, scholars, and other Christians in ventures such as this consultation is to find a theology that speaks to our people where we are, to enable us to answer the critical question of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Who do you (African Christians) say that I am?"<sup>8</sup>

However, when the theologians began to reflect on the encounter of the Gospel with African cultures, they started first, with the theology of adaptation in vogue at the time. In fact, for many authors, theological reflections in contemporary Africa began with the debates on the role of adaptation in missionary activities. For instance, Alphonse Ngindu Mushete says that theology in Africa has developed in two stages, which he terms "the theology of adaptation" and "critical theology", which has helped to pave the way for a better appreciation of the process of inculturation today.<sup>9</sup> Inspired by Placide Tempels' work on Bantu philosophy,<sup>10</sup> some African theologians sought for African philosophical categories to articulate a systematic way of

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1993, 67ff.

<sup>6</sup>Father Arrupe defines inculturation as "the incarnation of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a *new creation*"; P. ARRUPE, "Catechesis and "Inculturation", in: AFER, 20(1978), 97-134; see also id., "Letter du T.R.P. Pedro Arrupe" (14.05.1978), in: *Telega*, 17(1979), pp.42-43. However, for more information on the history and development of the term (inculturation), cf. A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 10ff; P. Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 5ff.

<sup>7</sup>K. APPIAH-KUBI & S. TORRES (eds), *African Theology en Route* (Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1979, 193.

<sup>8</sup>K. APPIAH-KUBI, "Preface", in K. APPIAH-KUBI & S. TORRES (eds), *African Theology en Route*, viii.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. A.N. MUSHETE, "The History of Theology in Africa: From Polemics to Critical Irenics", in K. APPIAH-KUBI & S. TORRES (eds), *African Theology en Route*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. P. TEMPEL, *Bantu Philosophy*, Présence Africaine, Paris 1959. (Originally published in French under the title: *La Philosophie Bantoue*, Elizabethville 1945).

presenting the Gospel to the Africans.<sup>11</sup> The method was influenced by the Scholastic theology.<sup>12</sup> However, this first attempt has been criticized for its *concordism* and lack of scientific vigour.<sup>13</sup> This is because for the contemporary African theologians, adaptation is a missionary theory employed to transplant a Christianity developed elsewhere into Africa, as if Africans have no cultures of their own on which the Christian faith could anchor.<sup>14</sup> Inculturation, in the new dispensation, became the new accepted theological category among African scholars in the effort of incarnating the Gospel in Africa. But if the former (*adaptation* theology) was an effort to make Christianity a truly African religion, inculturation, on the other hand, has come to express that same reality of making Christianity a truly African religion, however with emphasis on the importance of the local cultures as the instrument and the means for realizing the incarnation process of the Christian religion.<sup>15</sup> In spite of this neat developmental distinction, the differences between adaptation and inculturation, if they exist, are really differences of emphasis rather than method and goal. It is probably more accurate to regard the shift from adaptation to inculturation as progressive development in theological thinking before the same problem, the encounter of the Gospel with African cultures.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, after Vatican II, there started the shift from adaptation to inculturation theology in the writings of the African scholars. The theologians began with anthropological approach. Inspired by the Vatican Council II's teaching on the role of cultures in evangelization, on human promotion,<sup>17</sup> and on autonomy and communion in the *Church Family*,<sup>18</sup> the African theologians began to use cultural categories to interpret the Christian message and to demonstrate that Christianity is the true religion for the Africans.<sup>19</sup> They also started to make ethical judgement on

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<sup>11</sup>For such early attempts, cf. the doctoral theses of the two pioneer African theologians - Vincent Mulago and Stephen Ezeanya, in T. FILESI, *L'immagine dell'Africa (nelle tesi di laurea della Pontificia Università Urbaniana (1935-1981))*, Urbaniana University Press, Roma, 1981, pp.7-8; see also AA.VV., *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Cerf, Paris, 1956.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. T. TSHIBANGU, "Vers une théologie de couleur africaine", in: *Revue du Clergé Africain*, 15(1960), 346.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. MUSHETE, N.A., "An Overview of African Theology", in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology*, SCM Press, London – Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1994, 18.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. L. BOKA di MPASI, "Quand l'Africain dit "inculturation", in: *Telema*, 63-64 (1990), pp.45.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. J.M. WALIGGO, "Making a Church that is Truly African", in AA.VV., *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, St. Paul Publications-Africa, Nairobi, 1986, p.12.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. OBORJI, F.A., *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, Leberit SRL, Press, Roma 2005 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), 68.

<sup>17</sup>The issue of culture in relation to faith and evangelization is treated extensively in the Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965 (hereafter referred to as GS), 53-62: AAS 58 (1966), pp.1025-1115. The document, nn. 64-90 takes up the issue of socio-economic and political development of man (Human Promotion).

<sup>18</sup>Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964 (hereafter referred to as LG), 1,4: AAS 57 (1965), pp.5-71.

<sup>19</sup>Inspiration came also from POPE PAUL VI's Message to the Peoples of Africa *Africae Terrarum*, 29 October 1967 (hereafter referred to as AT): AAS 69 (1967), pp.1073-1102; and from the same Pope's "Address to African Cardinals and Bishops" (31 July 1969): AAS 61 (1969), pp.573-578. During the inauguration of SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) at Kampala, Uganda, where this address was given, the Pope made two historic statements which Africans have since taken as a challenge: "By now, you Africans are missionaries to yourselves,

the African situation on the basis of their Christian conviction.<sup>20</sup> The method being used is functional analogy. The result of this approach is the two trends, *inculturation* and *liberation* - which constitute the core of contemporary African theology until the emergence of the African theology of reconstruction.<sup>21</sup> The most recent result of the African inculturation theology and its anthropological approach is the evaluation of the image of the "Church-as-Family" which found great reception among African Bishops at the 1994 Synod for Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Inculturation and liberation trends in African theology take seriously the historical (past and present) contextual reality of the continent. African inculturation theology has an immediate link with the liberation trend in African theology. For on the one hand, the aim of inculturation is to facilitate an in-depth evangelization of a particular socio-cultural context or milieu in the meeting of the Gospel and the local culture. On the other hand, liberation theology seeks, through the Gospel, to address the oppressive elements in a traditional culture, and focus on political and economic situation of the particular cultural context so as to liberate the people from the forces of sin and death, reinforce their identity, and give a new orientation to their advancement. This clarification of the two terms implies that for political and economic liberation to be authentic, it must be inculturated. It is futile to seek political and economic liberation without evangelizing in depth the cultural context which constitutes the world of meaning and values, and therefore the essential condition and framework of all human projects.<sup>23</sup>

Today, the theology of reconstruction has come to challenge the two trends, inculturation and liberation in African theology, to be socially transformative oriented. Advocates of the African theology of reconstruction have called for a stop to the theology of identity and cultural consciousness (inculturation) and of critique of past colonial and neo-colonial socio-political and economic activities in Africa (liberation). Time had come to make a shift from inculturation and liberation to reconstructive transformation of Africa. Inculturation and liberation theologies were seen as not sufficiently adequate to address the new social and political situation in Africa. In the view of the theologians of reconstruction, both inculturation and liberation responded to a situation of ecclesiastical and colonial bondage, which no longer obtains. In place of the

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and...you may, and must, have an African Christianity", see specifically nn.1-2. The theologians were also inspired by the contributions of the African Bishops at the 1974 Synod on Evangelization; cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, "Declaratio Patrum Synodaliū", in G. CAPRILE, "Il Sinodo dei Vescovi (3a Assemblea Generale, 27 Settembre-26 Ottobre 1974)", Roma: *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1975.

<sup>20</sup>For important pioneering continental conferences of this second stage in the development of African theology, cf. K.A. DICKSON & P. ELLINGWORTH (eds), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Papers from a consultation of African theologians, January, 1966, Ibadan, Nigeria), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1969; K. APPIAH-KUBI & S. TORRES (eds), *African Theology en Route* (Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1979.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. J.C. OKOYE, "African Theology", in K. MÜLLER et al. (eds), *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspective*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1997, 9.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Special Assembly for Africa, *Relatio Post Disceptationem* 3: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1994.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. E.T CHARLES, *From Adaptation to Incarnation: A Study of the Theology of Inculturation in the Teachings of the African Catholic Bishops (1969-1994)*, PUG, Rome 1996, 311.

inculturation – liberation paradigm, which was mainly “reactive”, we should install a “proactive” theology of reconstruction. Instead of being preoccupied with the ascendancy of liberation over inculturation or vice versa – a matter which is still of great debate in African theology, advocates of theology of reconstruction call for an innovative transcendence of both.

All this shows that African theology is still facing hermeneutical problem. With the three trends (inculturation, liberation and reconstruction) on board, one should not be under the illusion that the crisis in the hermeneutics of African theology is now over. Rather what has become increasingly obvious nowadays is the continued question of hermeneutical issue and the continued paradigm shift from one trend to the other in the writings of African theologians. This is the focal point of the debate initiated by the exponents of reconstruction theology on why the reconstruction trend should replace inculturation and liberation trends in African theology. This debate points to a deeper problem, namely, the search for a new key theological methodology for African theology. For the exponents of African reconstruction theology, African theologians should leave behind the questions of anthropological and cultural identity (inculturation), and the past and neo-colonial socio-political and economic situations (liberation) of Africa to embrace the new paradigm of reconstruction in the style of post-exilic motif of Nehemiah in the Old Testament and the post-Easter Christian experience of the believing community. However, the question is, would Africans have to forgo their history and culture as a people in order to reconstruct in the new Promised Land? Would this not amount to missing an important aspect of a key methodological approach for the African theology itself, namely, the historical contextual reality of Africans?<sup>24</sup>

### **What is Inculturation for African Theologians?**

African theologians did not just appropriate the word "inculturation", but also offered their definitions of it. Peter Sarpong for instance, defines it as a way of evangelization which embraces the whole of Christian life and thinking. Sarpong argues that inculturation is not just a question of liturgical adaptation or innovation, much less of the use of drums or materials. Rather, it involves "concepts, symbols, and a whole new way of thinking and doing things (demanding) imagination, courage and initiative".<sup>25</sup> In the same spirit, Jose Antunes da Silva points out that inculturation implies that Christianity can only take root in the new culture if it assumes those cultural forms. However, he quickly adds that, "there is need for a critical symbiosis. The faith criticizes the culture, and the culture enriches the Christian faith".<sup>26</sup> For John Mary Waliggo, inculturation is that movement which aims at making Christianity permanent in Africa by making it a people's religion and a way of life which no enemy or hostility can ever succeed in supplanting or weakening. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly "feel at home" in the cultures of the people.<sup>27</sup> Justin Ukpong has eloquently described all that is entailed in the inculturation process:

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. T.S. MALULEKE, "African Theology", in D.F. FORD – R. MUERS (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA (USA) 2005, 496.

<sup>25</sup> P.K. SARPONG, "Evangelism and Inculturation", in: *West African Journal of Ecclesial Studies*, 2(1990)1, 8.

<sup>26</sup> J.A. DA SILVA, "Inculturation as Dialogue", in: *AFER*, 37(August 1995)4, p.203.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. J.M. WALIGGO, "Making a Church that is Truly African", 12-13.

In this approach, the theologian's task consists in re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu. It is the task of confronting the Christian faith and African culture. In the process there is inter-penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation contained in Scriptures and tradition are critically re-examined for the purpose of giving them African expression. Thus there is integration of faith and culture, and from it is born a new theological reflection that is African and Christian. In this approach therefore, African theology means Christian faith attaining cultural expression.<sup>28</sup>

Some of the theologians emphasize the prophetic role of inculturation to cultures. For instance, Efoé-Julien Pénoukou says that inculturation implies that cultures need to be opened to the Gospel and converted to Christ, and the Gospel also needs to be opened to African culture so that it may attain fullness of meaning.<sup>29</sup> In the same manner, A. Shorter begins by defining it as "the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. Morefully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and culture or cultures".<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Shorter says that the fact that Jesus died and rose points to the fact that inculturation involves challenging cultures to a new life.<sup>31</sup> Here, Shorter has identified the close link between the Incarnation (inculturation) and the Paschal mystery. As the Fathers of the 1994 Synod for Africa, tell us, inculturation must be founded on the whole aspects of the mystery of Christ if it is to challenge and transform the culture.<sup>32</sup> In the same vein, C. Geffré, cautions that inculturation must ensure that the Gospel message penetrates into and assumes or influences every culture without compromising its identity.<sup>33</sup> It must also endeavour to engage the whole culture, with all its values and defects, in order to transform it from within with the Gospel values. In this way, inculturation ought to bring about mutual enrichment which usually occurs when the Gospel engages the culture.<sup>34</sup>

Many more reflections on the meaning and significance of inculturation by African theologians could be mentioned, but much has been said already. Therefore, it suffices to say that inculturation theology is indeed very much alive in Africa.

In its African context, inculturation theology is an attempt by the African Christian theologians to reflect on the meeting of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the African cultures and people. It is the effort of the African Christians themselves to interpret the Christian message and to provide models from their own cultural heritage for an African reading of the mystery of Christ, the church, liturgy, Christian morality, spirituality, and so forth. Rooted in the common faith in Jesus Christ, his Gospel message, and in communion with all the local churches of the universal Church-Family, with the Chair of Peter as the centre of communion (for the Catholics), the theology is an attempt by the Africans to reflect on the Christian faith which has come down to them. It is also an effort of the African authors to make their own contributions to the

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<sup>28</sup>J.S. UKPONG, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*, 30.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. E.J. PÉNOUKOU, *Églises d'Afrique: Propositions pour l'Avenir*, Desclée, Paris 1994, 10ff.

<sup>30</sup>A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 11.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 84-87.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Special Assembly for Africa, *Message* 9, 14 & 16; *Propositio* 28-30; *EA* 60-61.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. C. GEFFRÉ, *The Risk of Interpretation*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, New York 1987, 236.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. RM 52.

development of the common Christian patrimony and to illumine the Christian faith in the continent with African thought-patterns, cultural heritage and traditions.<sup>35</sup>

### **Inculturation: Previous Terms**

The preceding discussing shows that it would certainly be wrong to assume that the use of the word "inculturation" in missiological discourse began with the African theologians.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the word "inculturation" was already in use among missiologists before it was appropriated by the African theologians. Before that, they were using different terms, for example, "adaptation", to describe the encounter between the Christian message and African cultures. Now that the emphasis has shifted to a new term, one may need to ask, "Is this passage from "adaptation" to "inculturation" a mere change of terminology or a real paradigm shift in the theologians' understanding of the Church's evangelizing mission?" To answer this question, I wish to consider next, though briefly, some previous terms used by the African theologians and how they came to appropriate the new term "inculturation."

"*Adaptation*" as already indicated, was the first term used by the African theologians in this effort of the meeting of the Gospel with African culture and reality in general. According to Peter Schineller, even though this term has more recently been criticized as inadequate, in principle, it refers to a more creative method of pastoral activity, by which the missionary tries to adapt the Christian message and liturgy to the customs of those he works among.<sup>37</sup> Several documents of the Vatican Council II speak positively of the necessity of adaptation in describing the same reality which the word "inculturation" today addresses.<sup>38</sup> However, one specific occasion where adaptation was called into question was in 1974 Synod of Bishops on Evangelization. Here the African Bishops declared "completely out of date the so-called theology of adaptation".<sup>39</sup> The new strategy to be adopted was incarnation of the Gospel into African culture. This declaration infused new spirit into the African theologians as they began to reflect on a more profound process of incarnating the Gospel in Africa.

Another popular term used by the theologians was "*indigenization*", often used alongside "*Africanization*" and "*Localization*". For example, Emmanuel Martey writes that in an effort to express the Christian message with African idioms and conceptual tools, expressions such as "*indigenization*", "*localization*", "*Africanization*" and so forth have been employed.<sup>40</sup> Peter Schineller notes that most of these expressions are used interchangeably.<sup>41</sup> According to Patrick Kalilombe, "*indigenization*" means the effort "to Africanize Christian doctrine, cult, pastoral

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. OBORJI, F.A., *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, ix.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Charles was the first theologian to use the term in an article he published in 1953 ("Missiologie et Acculturation", 15-32).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, Paulist Press, New York, 1990, 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963 (hereafter referred to as SC), 37-40: *AAS* 56 (1964), 97-134.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, "Declaratio Patrum Synodaliū", in G. CAPRILE, "Il Sinodo dei Vescovi (3a Assemblea Generale, 27 Settembre - 26 Ottobre 1974), Roma: *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1975, 146.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 14-24.

practices and art, basing them on African culture and religious tradition".<sup>42</sup> However, in practice indigenization meant the gradual replacement of foreign missionaries with African personnel and to give an "African face" to ecclesiastical structures, so that the Church may appear less foreign. During the struggle for political independence in the first part of this century, the Church was accused of collaboration with Western colonialism.<sup>43</sup> Thus, indigenization was intended to show that the Church was at home in Africa and that Christianity was truly an African religion. However, like adaptation, indigenization did not go beyond adaptation of peripheral matters in the liturgy, such as translation of liturgical texts, dancing, drumming and colourful vestments.<sup>44</sup>

Another term is "*contextualization*", used mainly by the Protestant theologians and among the Catholics of Southern Africa. For the latter, "contextualization" is synonymous with "inculturation". It is "a weaving together" of the Gospel with every particular situation. It does not speak of cultures but of contexts or situations into which the Gospel must be inculturated".<sup>45</sup> According to B. Haushiku (of Namibia), "a true *contextual* theology must of necessity be an inculturated one".<sup>46</sup> Therefore, contextualization is part of the process of inculturation.<sup>47</sup>

There is also the term "*acculturation*". This term is not common in the writings of the African theologians. It is found mainly in the works of anthropologists and sociologists. Here it denotes the "culture contact", or the interaction which results when two or more cultures come into contact. The related word, "*enculturation*" is used by anthropologists "to describe the manner in which an individual achieves competence in his culture."<sup>48</sup> Used analogically in theology, acculturation refers to the process of insertion of the Gospel in cultures. In this context, it is much closer in meaning to inculturation, because it emphasizes the two-way process in the encounter of the Gospel with cultures. The Gospel always encounters a culture in an inculturated form, and between the evangelizer and the evangelized there has to be some form of acculturation if there is to be effective evangelization.<sup>49</sup> Thus, inculturation theologians have much to learn from the cultural anthropologists' elaboration of the term "acculturation".<sup>50</sup>

Finally, there is the term "*incarnation*". Inspired by the Vatican Council II's teaching on the Incarnation as the theological basis for understanding the different cultures and philosophies of people,<sup>51</sup> African theologians now speak of the *incarnation* as the model for inculturating the Gospel in Africa. It is often used interchangeably with inculturation. Justin Ukpong notes that

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<sup>42</sup>P.A. KALILOMBE, "Black Theology", in D.F. FORD (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Basil Blackwell, New York/London 1989, 202.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. P. K. SARPONG, "Christianity should be africanized, not African Christianized", in: *AFER*, 17(1975), 322-328.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. E.T. CHARLES, *Inculturating the Gospel in Africa: From Adaptation to Incarnation*, 10-11.

<sup>45</sup>IMBISA (Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa), *Inculturation*, Mambo Press, Gweru, Zimbabwe 1993, 45.

<sup>46</sup>B. HAUSHIKU, "Being authentic Christians and authentic Africans", in: *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly English Edition), 27 April 1994, 14.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. E.T. CHARLES, *Inculturating the Gospel in Africa: From Adaptation to Incarnation*, 11.

<sup>48</sup>M.J. HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Works: The Science of Cultural Anthropology*, Knopf, New York 1960, x-xi.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. G.A. ARBUCKLE, *Earthing the Gospel*, Op. Cit., p.17; P. ROSSANO, "Acculturazione del Vangelo", in AA.VV., *Evangelizzazione e Culture: Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia* (5-12 Ottobre 1975, Roma), PUU, Roma 1976, 104.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 22.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. AG 10.

*incarnation* is preferable because it involves "immersing Christianity in African culture so that just as Jesus became man, so must Christianity become African".<sup>52</sup>

The basic argument of the theologians is that just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God became *incarnate* in a human culture, in the Jewish milieu, the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be allowed to be inculturated (or incarnated) in an African culture and context (Matt.5,17; Acts 10,34). In this context, Edward Tamba Charles explains that the term "incarnation" is used by the African theologians in two senses. In the first sense, it means the process of mutual penetration of the Gospel and culture so that Jesus Christ may be present "today" in every culture. In this particular sense, the event of the incarnation continues in time; it happens each time the Gospel is made to penetrate a cultural milieu so that the people could welcome Christ in their midst as their Saviour.

The second sense refers to the unique event of Bethlehem, when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1,14). It is the primordial inculturation of the Word of God in human flesh and history, and therefore the foundation and the model for all subsequent inculturation.<sup>53</sup> Tamba Charles sums up the two senses thus:

Incarnation means, in the broad sense of the term, the general, universal aspect: God became man, who belongs to a particular people, and shares all their peculiarities; he became this man in this people. The general side of incarnation insists upon "man like all men", while the "inculturation" side points to the differences and peculiarity: a man unlike all men, because he belonged to a particular people and culture. Like the incarnation, inculturation does not take place in the abstract: it happens in a concrete cultural space.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, it is in terms of analogy that one could say that the Gospel should be inculturated or incarnated in a culture just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God (took flesh and lived among us (John 1,14), became incarnate in a human culture. Analogy is a great word which involves drawing of similarities and differences between two or more realities. Analogy does not mean total identity between the realities so compared. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is a mystery. It is a divine act, a unique and entirely singular event. The mystery of the incarnation points to other realities beyond the issues of inculturation. Therefore, its usage by the theologians should be understood in terms of analogy. This is a basic clarification that one should always bear in mind with regard to relating the "*incarnation*" to the process of inculturation.

Some of the terms discussed above still appear in the writings of the theologians, with different nuances which must be determined by the context in which they are used. But none of them has been used so frequently by the African theologians as the word "*inculturation*."

All this shows that the shift from adaptation to inculturation (incarnation theology) is indeed a progressive development of the theological thinking before the same problem: Gospel - African cultures. With the new development,<sup>55</sup> theologians became more aware of the fact that the

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<sup>52</sup>J.S. UKPONG, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*, Gaba Publications, Eldoret, Kenya 1984, 27.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. E.T CHARLES, *Inculturating the Gospel in Africa: From Adaptation to Incarnation*, 12.

<sup>54</sup>E.T. CHARLES, *Inculturating the Gospel in Africa: From Adaptation to Incarnation*, 73-74.

<sup>55</sup> It is a new development inspired by the Vatican II mission theology, which promotes theological investigations in various cultural contexts for the sake of proper incarnation of the gospel in the area. The bottom-line in the Council's theology of mission is the emphasis on cultural diversity in the Church and the role of local Churches (in communion with the universal Church), for the work of evangelization through inculturation in various cultural contexts. Another side of it is the Council's recovery of the theology of reciprocity. In addition to assuming all that the Church has acquired in its earthly pilgrimage, each local Church is

mystery of incarnation is the model and theological foundation for the process of inculturation. In this case, the incarnation theology has given the term "*inculturation*" a new significance, beyond its anthropological use. The term "*inculturation*", over and above being a process of rooting the Gospel among any given people and their culture, has also become one of the ways through which the church expresses more forcefully, the Vatican Council II's teaching on the church communion and the diversity of cultures.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the incarnation theology itself brings out the dynamism in the process of inculturation. Inculturation is a continuous process; it must go on as the culture continues to evolve.<sup>57</sup>

What all this means in effect, is that the term "inculturation" augments or rather complements the inadequacies found in the theology of adaptation of the old. Moreover, it implies that for any meaningful inculturation to take place, theological investigation is needed.<sup>58</sup> Theological research helps to develop a new cultural language for the word of God and a new cultural form for the Christianity that will emerge in the process of inculturation.<sup>59</sup> In other words, theological investigation helps to establish the main ground and rules for inculturation, and to clarify the principles, concepts, and symbols to be utilized.<sup>60</sup> For inculturation is not limited to some particular area of Christian life and mission. Rather it involves all aspects of being a Christian.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, inculturation, even though it aims at the evangelization of a particular cultural-context, yet it must emphasize compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, no matter how effective inculturation may be, it will never be the same as the first incarnation of the Son of God.

Furthermore, African inculturation Christology, when compared to other efforts in African theology, is more widespread, more developed, and exhibits more originality and variety of method.<sup>63</sup> For a good number of the theologians, the "African ancestor" is a most appropriate cultural concept for an African Christian theology. This is the view of the 'Ancestorship Christologists', such as Bénézet Bujo<sup>64</sup> and Charles Nyamiti,<sup>65</sup> among others.<sup>66</sup> Theologians of African inculturation employed the ancestor model in providing an African reading of the

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challenged through inculturation to contribute something from its cultural-setting to the patrimony of the universal Church (cf. LG 13; AG 22).

<sup>56</sup>Cf. LG 4, 13; GS 53-62.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Special Assembly for Africa, *Instrumentum Laboris* 65. For various aspects of inculturation emphasized by the African Bishops, cf. ID., *Message* 18-19.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. AG 22.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. T. GROONE, "Inculturation: How to Proceed in a Pastoral Context", in N. GREINACHER & N. METTE (eds), *Christianity and Culture (Concilium 1994/2)*, SCM Press, London/ Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1994, 126; D. TRACY, *The Analogical Imagination*, Crossroad, New York 1989, 132.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Special Assembly for Africa, *Message* 56.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 23.

<sup>62</sup>John Paul II calls on the Bishops, as guardians of the "deposit of faith", to take care so as to ensure fidelity and to provide discernment, for a deeply balanced approach to inculturation; cf. RM 54.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. C. NYAMITI, "Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions", in R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology*, SCM Press, London 1994, 64-65.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll New York 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. C. NYAMITI, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Mambo Press, Gweru, Harare 1984.

<sup>66</sup>Cf. C. NYAMITI, "African Christologies Today", in R.J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, SCM Press, London 1992, 11.

mystery of Christ, the Church, Morality, Spirituality, and in developing African forms of liturgical celebrations.<sup>67</sup>

## 2. African Liberation Theology

African liberation theology has a broader perspective and exhibit variety of method. The theology endeavours to integrate the theme of liberation in the rest of the African cultural background and socio-political and economic spheres. It discusses the oppressive socio-cultural structures inherited from traditional society, the colonial and neo-colonial socio-political and economic systems, and emancipation from other forms of oppression such as disease, poverty, hunger, ignorance, and the subjugation of women. It is a theological and ethical judgement inspired by the gospel, of those society's oppressive mentality and structures of dominance of the powerful over the poor and marginalized. At its early beginning, the following were identified as currents of the theology of liberation in Africa: African Liberation theology (as developed in the then independent part of Africa before the demise of Apartheid in South Africa and political independence of former Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola, etc.), African Women's liberation theology, and South African Black theology. Advocates of African theology of liberation include, Jean-Marc Éla, Engelbert Mveng, and Elochukwu Uzukwu, Kwame Bediako, among others. For lack of space, our analysis of African liberation theology in this essay is limited to Éla's theology since he could be regarded as the most representative of theologians of the liberation theology. A Catholic Priest and theologian from Cameroun, among his most important works on this theme are his two Magnus opus: *African Cry*<sup>68</sup> and *My Faith as an African*.<sup>69</sup> The starting point of Éla's theology is on the relationship that should exist in works of inculturation and liberation in Africa. Hence, he is critical of an African theology that bases its concern mainly on anthropological and cultural problems (inculturation theology), as if African society and churches "can achieve their identity by considering only anthropological and cultural problems." In his view, such pre-occupation with cultural identity could be a dangerous alibi, so as to ignore the more burning issues in contemporary Africa. What is needed instead, according to him, is an inculturation which is relevant to the culture that is being born out of daily struggles of Africans for survival. In a sense, Éla is advocating a mid-way between inculturation and liberation theologies in Africa. This is why it is not all that correct to group him among authors of African theology of liberation. In fact, he belongs to both sides or rather transcends them.

In his theology, Éla begins his reflection with what he calls the tensions that mark the life of ordinary African Christians. He asked the fundamental question: "After over a century of missionary work in the continent, how many Africans feel really at home in the church?" He contends that many ethnic groups in Black Africa embraced the Christian faith after a long and somewhat muffled resistance. "What is certain is that in many African countries Christians are defined above all as people who had to abandon their traditional customs. In fact, a person exists as a Christian in a "Church", which, despite its catechism and sacraments, really amounts with no real influence on social problems. Because the Christianity of missionaries supplies no answers to the difficulties of daily life, Christians continue to follow the traditions of their villages or

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. F.A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, see specifically, chapter 4.

<sup>68</sup> Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1986.

<sup>69</sup> Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1995.

districts.” This ambivalence, Éla contends, is the source of many tensions that mark the people. Such situations have consequences, including the proliferation and strong influence of sects among young people confused about the future, and the polite indifference of African intellectuals who view Christianity as an out-of-date religion in a world come of age. In the opinion of Éla, these factors should force the church to re-examine its faith and its presence in African society, or else Christianity will be seen as a religion only for women and children.<sup>70</sup> In any case, Éla’s criticism is directed toward the forms of disembodied spirituality that the according to him, the Christian churches in Africa tend to promote by focusing their mission on the salvation of souls, a situation he compares to the distribution of “visas to eternity”. It is not that Éla thinks that the church should not understand itself in sacramental and spiritual terms. The issue is that “in Africa where domination, hunger, exploitation ... form an integral part of the collective memory, one cannot shut Christianity up within the limits of a religion of the beyond.”<sup>71</sup> As E. Katongole puts it: “The root of the problem is that Christianity in Africa has failed to become a way of life, but has remained a spiritual affair.”<sup>72</sup>

However, in the thinking of Éla, this is the scenario the local church in Africa is called upon to address today in its missionary endeavours. In other words, the urgent need to rethink the local church’s social role for Africa’s regeneration arises not so much out of a ready-made solution or theories, but from what Éla himself calls the “shock” of the gospel in Africa”: the “co-existence of the gospel in Africa with the *Veritable Empire* of injustice and hunger.” For Éla, the *shock*, which the local church might have experienced through its pastoral experience, was the realization that even though a greater part of *Africa* is a deeply and massively Christian region, “it tends to remain a veritable empire of hunger.” He asks the question: how could the local church co-exist with such a situation without “shocking” it with the gospel? In his writings, Éla captures various angles of this “shock” as he describes the frustration, the apparently meaningless existence, the extreme and paralyzing poverty, the violation of basic human rights, the colonial and neo-colonial violence, the multinational exploitation, as well as hunger experienced by the people. It is this “rough ground” that, according to Éla, provides the unique context and challenge for Christianity and theology in Africa today: “our practice of Christian faith faces a major challenge from African men and women who agonize over where their next meal is coming from.”<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, the problem, as Éla notes, does not arise out of lack of commitment by rural populations, which can be easily addressed through moral and spiritual motivation. Rather, the problem has to do with a social system “which has not been restructured from bottom up to respond to the social needs of the majority.” Elsewhere he notes, “Food shortages result not so much from natural calamities as from the policies of an economic model that is (totally) oriented toward the outside world and abandons the most important part of the population.” Similarly, the health, medical, and educational systems are set up in such a way that only an elite minority benefit. As a result, a gulf grows between the living standard of the comfortable minority of the “haves” and that of the disinherited majority of the “have-nots.” He notes: “We must be aware of health problems in a context where African leaders dream of matching the pomp and luxury of

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 7, 31.

<sup>71</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 38.

<sup>72</sup> E. KATONGOLE, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2010, 107.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. J.M. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African*, xvii.

the “Élysée” in France, while their people are sinking in the misery of huts and make-shift housing. On national holidays barrels of champagne are drunk in African capitals while millions of families lack drinking water and are condemned to live with parasite diseases that weaken their constitution and slow down agricultural development.”<sup>74</sup>

Given this background, one might imagine that Éla’s response would be to call the church to engage in more advocacy to help improve the economic and political institutions, which itself would be a bold suggestion. This, however, is not the direction in which Éla’s theology moves. Instead, he is primarily concerned with the church’s own existence and ministry among the people who have become the victims of such a history. According to Emmanuel Katongole, Éla’s theological reflection is not so much directed towards fixing the national political and economic systems as it is directed against the church itself, its own self-understanding, history, and mission. Éla invites the church to rethink its social mission so as to embody an alternative, more hopeful history than is proffered through the nation-state. The challenge of the gospel, for Éla, is one of “re-thinking the whole question of understanding and experiencing faith.”<sup>75</sup> For Éla this task requires nothing less than an honest and critical look at the current models of church and Christian practice in Africa.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, Éla notes that the root of the problem is the Western legacy by which the church in Africa is reduced to a spiritual sphere in which its institutional existence and “security is promised by the powers that be on condition it accepts the privatization and marginalization of the Christian faith.”<sup>77</sup> Such a history, however, only succeeds in rendering the church apolitical, thereby reducing Christianity “to a relationship with the supernatural”, a relationship that “wafts above the everyday ... [with] no impact on social, economic, political, and cultural realities.”<sup>78</sup>

In fact, in the thinking of Éla, to the extent the church in Africa fails to question and supplant this foreign history, the African church itself, just like African politics and economics, will continue to reproduce the same alienating stagnation and paralyzing confusion as the other neo-colonial institutions. This is the reason why, Éla notes, the churches in Africa tend to lack creativity and initiative and are instead, characterized by mimicry and smug conformism, a situation that means that even the “so-called young churches are born with symptoms of early senility.”<sup>79</sup> The crucial challenge therefore, according to Éla, is for the African churches to face this foreign heritage and thus reinvent new styles of presence and activity different from Western-inspired models of disguised apolitical and dematerialized spirituality. Unless such a challenge is faced, the danger is that the church itself as well as its practices (such as the celebration of the Eucharist) will become “locus of our daily alienation.”<sup>80</sup>

In a book co-authored with R. Luneau, entitled, *Vioci le temps des Héritiers: Eglises d’Afrique et voix nouvelles*,<sup>81</sup> Jean Marc also speaks of African concepts of time in relation to African history. According to him, history is about “yesterday”, “today” and “tomorrow”, at the same time. Such a double “regard” or “view” of the past and the future requires fidelity to the past, to our

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<sup>74</sup>J.M. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African*, 71.

<sup>75</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African*, xvii.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. E. KATONGOLE, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, 106.

<sup>77</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 52.

<sup>78</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 48, 91.

<sup>79</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 108.

<sup>80</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Karthala, Paris 1981.

“dangerous” memories (J.B. Metz)<sup>82</sup> and our pathetic and heroic memories. It also involves creativity to make new paths into the future with hope and optimism. This creativity is what Éla calls the “ethics of transgression” for the sake of epistemological rupture.”<sup>83</sup> Such creativity led him to articulate theologically his pastoral experience with the Kirdi people of Tokombèrè village in northern Cameroun and turn it into a theological paradigm. He extrapolated from it a theology of revelation that takes seriously God’s self-communication in history and a theology of salvation as liberation in the name of God’s kingdom of peace and justice.<sup>84</sup> With that Éla was able to create a new story, an African story in Christian theology and pastoral praxis. As I had discussed elsewhere, he triumphed over the warning of what the Nigerian author and novelist, Chimamanda Adichie calls “The Danger of a Single Story.” According to Chimamanda Adichie, the modern history of Africa is always replete with a single story. The African poverty is the single story. A single story of catastrophe: “In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to their *foreign counterparts*, in any way. No possibility of feeling more complex than pity. No possibility of a connection as human equals.” But it is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another, but to make it the definitive story of that person, the simplest way to do it is to tell the single story over and over again. A single story creates stereotypes. But one major problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. The single story robs people of dignity; it makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar. But assuming that you start the start from the bottom up, you will have a different story. What the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls “a balance of stories.”<sup>85</sup>

What is apparent in all these is the fact that Éla himself is not simply calling for the enculturation or Africanization of the church. A mere adoption or introduction of a few African elements and practices within worship or other church practices is not enough to reverse this alienation of an institution grounded in neo-colonial imagination. Rather he is calling for our rethinking the entire structure of church life from the perspective of African history. Unless this is done, the quest for enculturation (or Africanization, or indigenization) will simply turn into “a vast entertainment project, whose purpose is to distract the exploited masses from the struggles of the present.”<sup>86</sup> The challenge facing African Christianity is therefore not simply one of inculturation, or one requiring “deeper evangelization” as the case may be, or one of devising new doctrines or more adequate methodologies and strategies for intervention. It is the challenge of confronting the history in which Africa has been cast and the need to overcome this history with a different history. The mission of the church in Africa, Éla notes, must be placed in the context of the search for another history. For him, the search for another history is not a search for another grand narrative of Africa. It is, rather, a concrete praxis, that involves everyday realities like food, security, vegetables, drinking water and housing. All of which must be placed within the context of a struggle for another society, another humanity, another system of

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. J.B. METZ, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, A Herder & Herder Book, New York 2007, especially chapter 6.

<sup>83</sup> See his article “The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ”, in Y. TESSAI (ed.), *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1994, 17-35.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. J.M ÉLA, *African Cry*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1986; ID., *My Faith as an African*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1988, See also, B. MAYEMBA, “The Promise of a New Generation of African Theologians: Reimagining African Theology with Fidelity and Creativity,” 158.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. C. Achebe, *Home and Exile*, Anchor Books, New York 2000.

<sup>86</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 129.

production, another style of living together, both within the family and society as a whole.<sup>87</sup> “We must struggle against alienating forces and, at the same time, give back to people their responsibility for themselves and their bodies, teaching them to challenge anything that smacks of chance and destiny.”<sup>88</sup>

Particularly very striking is the fact that such search for an alternative history is neither initiated by, nor grounded in, the politics of inculturation theology or that of liberation which seeks to contribute its moral and ethical pronouncements for the fixing of the existing structures and systems. Neither is such a search for an alternative history grounded in the politics of the nation-states and its ideologies (globalization, new world order, etc.), to which the church can contribute its social pronouncements or spiritual inspiration. For Éla, these are the very ideologies whose top-down structure perpetuates patterns of alienation and dependency. Thus, the search for alternative history takes place at the grassroots in communities of faith and in the ordinary realities of everyday life. The challenge therefore is whether the church in Africa is part of this everydayness and part of search for an alternative history, another society, another humanity, another system of production, and another style of living together. For this to happen, Éla suggests, the church in Africa would have to reinvent itself. As he puts it, “In the churches of Africa ... The time has come to reinvent Christianity, so as to live it with our African soul.”<sup>89</sup>

If advocates of inculturation theology helped us to see the incarnation of the gospel values in African culture as the most crucial task of the church for the future of African Christianity and society, Jean Marc Éla, now makes it clear that such a task for inculturation requires the church in Africa, first of all, to reinvent itself. Such a task requires courage, since it calls for thorough revision of church theology and practice. Thus, while on one hand, Éla’s theology may on the surface appear antithetical to the theology of inculturation, on the other, it is a recognition of the enormous work that await advocates of African inculturation theology in the task of reinventing Christianity for the future of the church in Africa.

### **3. African Theology of Reconstruction**

If Jean Marc Éla has assigned a new task of reinventing the African church to the inculturation theology for the sake of the future, it is not so with the advocates of African theology of reconstruction. In fact, for authors of the reconstruction theology, both inculturation and liberation trends in African theology have served their purpose and therefore no longer relevant for the African church and society come of age. Advocates of African theology of reconstruction called for the reconstruction of Africa based, not on the inculturation and liberation motifs, but on the biblical motifs of Old Testament post-exilic era of Nehemiah and the New Testament Resurrection-Event, – the building of a new society, based not on the logic of market economy, but on the logic of Christological-Resurrection-Event of Jesus Christ.<sup>90</sup>

The theology of reconstruction is a new trend in African theology. It is still in its infancy stage. With the fall of Communism in 1989 and the end of Apartheid regime in South Africa in

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. E. KATONGOLE, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, 109.

<sup>88</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African*, 84.

<sup>89</sup> J.M. ÉLA, *African Cry*, 120.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. KÄ MANA, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and Building a New African Society*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 2004, 64ff.

the early 1990s, a new orientation in African theology among the Protestants was launched. As noted at the introductory part of this essay, the theology of reconstruction got institutional backing and orientation in its early development from the continental Conferences organized under the auspices of All Africa Council of Churches as well as at the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) meetings. It was launching of a theology that puts special emphasis on social transformation of the continent.

The beginning of the 1990s was characterized by positive changes both at the African and international levels. It was the end of the Cold War in which African countries had been caught up for decades. The end of the Cold War marked the end of communism. Before that, Africa had been a battlefield where the capitalist bloc and the communist bloc were fighting for geopolitical strategies and control of African natural and mineral resources. It was also the end of Apartheid in South Africa and the independence of Namibia, Zimbabwe as well as Mozambique and Angola. The fall of communism and the beginning of democracies in Africa was welcomed as a time for *African renaissance*. This international political situation called for a new theological response in Africa. Prior to 1990 African theology was mainly motivated by a struggle for African cultural identity and liberation from Western colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of the continent. With the new wind of change, the African Church felt the call to positively respond to this new situation which was for many a sign of hope. Also the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in South Africa was significantly important for Africa. Mandela had been in prison for 27 years. He was released on February 11, 1990.

In November (9-16, 1991), the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) met in Mombassa (Kenya) to reflect on the adequate response of the church in the post-apartheid era. The Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, then President of the AACC, asked the Kenyan theologian Jesse N.K. Mugambi to reflect on the theological implications of African the changing situation in the Southern part of Africa and in Africa in general. The Mombassa meeting issued a document: *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*. Mugambi became the architect of this shift in African theology. As Innocent H. Maganya noted, it can be questionable if one should speak in terms of shift from previous theological emphases to the reconstruction paradigm. As the themes of inculturation and liberation come back often in the writings of the proponents of the theology of reconstruction. It would be better to speak of a “new liberation theology” or a new awareness of the role of theologians in the transformation of the society.<sup>91</sup>

### **Advocates of African Theology of Reconstruction**

Apart from Mugambi, another theologian that presented a paper at the Mombassa Conference was Charles Villa-Vicencio (of South Africa). Moreover, among the guests of the Mombassa venue was Kä Mana (from the Democratic Republic of Congo), who also has written a lot on the reconstruction. Mugambi, Villa-Vicencio and Kä Mana are so far the leading

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<sup>91</sup>Cf. I. H. MAGANYA, “African Christian Theology of Reconstruction” (unpublished work) 2014, 1.

theologians in the field of reconstruction. In what follows, we shall attempt to articulate, though briefly, their individual perspectives of African reconstruction theology.

The theology of reconstruction of Mugambi, was first articulated into a book: *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*. This book was published in 1995. Since then Mugambi has received some constructive remarks, which brought him to publish another volume on reconstruction under the title: *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi 2003). Charles Villa-Vicencio (of South Africa), reflecting on the meaning of the events in the context of South Africa, proposed a theology of reconstruction based on the respect of laws and human rights. He called the church to take part in the building of a new South Africa. Villa-Vicencio later published these points in his book: *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*.<sup>92</sup>

Although Villa-Vicencio's work was published first, Mugambi had already been propagating the idea of a theology of reconstruction in the early 1990s in the context of AACC consultations. It was, of course, *perestroika* (reconstruction), which inadvertently led to the break-up of the old USSR, which helped to popularize the notion of reconstruction. For Mugambi, both the inculturation and liberation paradigms within which African theologies had been undertaken are no longer adequate frameworks for doing African theology after the Cold War. Both inculturation and liberation responded to a situation of ecclesiastical and colonial bondage which no longer obtains. In place of the inculturation – liberation paradigm, which was mainly 'reactive', we should install a 'proactive' theology of reconstruction. Instead of calling for the ascendancy of liberation over inculturation or vice versa – a 'game' well rehearsed in African theologies – Mugambi calls for an innovative transcendence of both.

In other words, when Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio first proposed the theology of reconstruction, they assumed that the time of resistance, characteristic of inculturation and liberation movements was over. Mugambi questioned the relevance of liberation theology and the methodological approach of African theologians. He says that inculturation and liberation paradigms emphasized the negative role of Western missionaries and western negative influence on Africa. In his view, the object of inculturation and liberation movements was to fight against external forces. His aim was to move forward and take distance from what he calls a reactive theology to a constructive theology.<sup>93</sup> Hence, he called for self-critique. This critique includes the methodology used so far as well as the academic formation of African theologians:

The African Church will come of age when it becomes self-critical, and grows out of self-congratulation. Likewise, African Christian theology will begin to make a strong impact in other regions when its theologians begin to interact introspectively among themselves, learning from one another and critically evaluating the North Atlantic intellectual heritage in which they have received their academic formation. This critical evaluation should include a thorough critical method.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. I. H. MAGANYA, "African Christian Theology of Reconstruction", 3.

<sup>94</sup> J.N.K. MUGAMBI, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, AACC Publications, Nairobi 1991, 23.

Mugambi insists that with the end of the Cold War over, inculturation and liberation had no *raison d'être*. The Exodus motif of the liberation was irrelevant for him. Time has come to look for motifs which would inspire the reconstruction movement. Together with Charles Villa-Vicencio, he proposed the Post-Exilic motifs as suitable for a nation-building theology of reconstruction. But while Mugambi challenges the previous theological models, his theology seems to be essentially based on African cultural and religious heritage. Was it not the same objective that the proponents of inculturation had in mind, namely to recapture the value of African cultural and religious identity? Mugambi calls for the re-mythologisation of African myths and symbols in order to revitalise the African cultural values. Even though he criticizes the liberation movement as a reactive movement, his theology of reconstruction still accuses somehow the Western missionaries. Nevertheless, the strong point of his reflection is that reconstruction is an ecumenical project. All forces, like in the time of Nehemiah, are to be mobilised in the project of rebuilding Africa. How could it have been otherwise as the reflection on theology of reconstruction was initiated by the All Africa Council of Churches which is an ecumenical body? The ecumenical aspect will be perhaps one of Mugambi's great contribution to the reconstruction of the continent. This is in keeping with the Second Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops (2009). The collaboration with other Christians is very important.<sup>95</sup> Mugambi argues that the churches have to play the role of catalyst as they did in Europe at the end of the medieval time. Indeed the Church has been very instrumental in accompanying the political changes of the early 1990s. They largely supported this new wind of change on the African.<sup>96</sup>

In his theology, Mugambi insists very much on the physical reconstruction of Africa and does not deal with the victims of the different crises. Nor does he speak of reconciliation and forgiveness as ways of reconstructing the shattered human lives of many Africans. We acknowledge at this stage that we have not yet come across African theologians who think reconstruction from the point of view of the victims of the conflicts on the continent.<sup>97</sup>

Villa-Vicencio, on his part, argues that the task of liberation theologians had essentially been to say *No* to all forms of oppression. He agrees with Mugambi that Africa needs a theology that is more than a theology of resistance. According to him, time had come for the African Church to move from the prophetic 'No' to the prophetic 'Yes.' This 'Yes' is 'Yes' to options for political and social renewal.<sup>98</sup> This new era is no longer an era of vindication and violent struggle, as it was the case during Apartheid time. Now Apartheid is over, the new era is that of peace and justice. Villa-Vicencio says that the Church should take up her responsibility:

The task of the Church, whose theological responsibility is to restore justice and affirm human dignity within the context of God's impending reign, is to join with others to

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, II Special Assembly for Africa, *Lineamenta*, 129.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. I. H. MAGANYA, "African Christian Theology of Reconstruction", 4.

<sup>97</sup> The topic of reconciliation from the point of view of the victims, is one of the major issues I discussed in my recent book. Cf. F.A. OBORJI, *Mission and Reconciliation: Theology and Pastoral Challenges of Social Violence*, Aracne Editrice, Ariccia, Rome 2015, 137ff.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. C. VILLA-VICENCIO, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, University Press, Cambridge 1992, 1.

ensure that ‘new’ which emerges in those region where renewal now seems possible, is qualitative improvement of the old.<sup>99</sup>

Villa-Vicencio’s theology is based on the conviction that in a post-apartheid era, South Africa needed a different type of liberation theology based on human rights, justice and the respect of the law. According to him they are the basis for a social renewal. In his view, Religion and Law are the vital point at which theological growth should take place.<sup>100</sup> He calls for the home-coming of all South African to build a new society based on justice and human rights. But as Innocent H. Maganya has noted: How can people who still bear the scars of the wounds of the past be able to work together? Villa-Vicencio seemed to be in a haste in calling for reconstruction based on human rights prior to some pre-conditions. Like Mugambi, he does not take into consideration the victims of the Apartheid system.<sup>101</sup>

Among the many books of Kä Mana on the theme of African theology of reconstruction, it suffices to mention, *L’Afrique va-t-elle mourir: Bousculer l’imaginaire africain. Essai d’éthique politique.*<sup>102</sup> Kä Mana starting point is lucid critical analysis of the African reality. For this, he shares the same methodological approach with Mugambi. His main thesis is that the African crisis is to be situated at a profound level, that is, at the level of the social *imaginaire* of the Africans with their magico-religious mentalities. In his view, the concept of reconstruction is a political issue which project is to mobilize the creative forces of the individuals, of churches and African societies for a deeper transformation, in all the areas and at all levels, that is at the political level, social, economic and cultural levels.<sup>103</sup> The reconstruction is in fact the beginning of a process of restructuring the mentalities, societies and attitudes.<sup>104</sup>

Kä Mana proposes a model of reconstruction of Africa based on the theology of resurrection and salvation in Christ. He appeals to the model of the Egyptian mythology of *Isis* and *Osiris* – their struggles for life and rebuilding of existence, and of the model of the life-death-resurrection of Christ event. From these two distinct backgrounds, Kä Mana proposes a new society that passes from political ethics to Christological ethics and politics. The Christians of today are called to articulate in public domain, Jesus Christ as the horizon of our existence or as he before whom one is to reconstruct the humanity. The theology of reconstruction comes with the challenge of what to do between the place of the logic of market economy and the logic of love as manifested by Christ. In this regard, the reconstruction of Africa must begin with the principles of structuring of our social consciousness: The dictatorships of the belly, of alienation and powerlessness, are the arena from which the struggle for the future must begin. What is at stake, is changing these realities and introducing a new way of thinking, to promote an “Africa”

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<sup>99</sup> C. VILLA-VICENCIO, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, 3.

<sup>100</sup> C. VILLA-VICENCIO, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. I. H. MAGANYA, “African Christian Theology of Reconstruction”, 5.

<sup>102</sup> Cerf, Paris 1991.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. KÄ MANA, *Théologie africaine pour temps de crise, christianisme et reconstruction de l’Afrique*, Karthala, Paris 1993, 57-61.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. KÄ MANA, *La Nouvelle Évangélisation en Afrique*, Karthala, Paris 2004, 163.

which is responsible for its own destiny. It is neither optimism nor pessimism but a desire for hope in the building of a new society.<sup>105</sup>

Mugambi, Villa-Vicencio and Kä Mana are so far the leading theologians in the field of Reconstruction. But since then others have studied their works and have brought constructive remarks to the development of this new paradigm. Among these figures is Tinyiko Maluleke. He questions the wisdom of advocates of reconstruction theology of asking Africans to forget their past history and culture in order to face the new challenges? For Maluleke, authors of theology of reconstruction appear to jump too quickly from Egypt to Canaan, from exile to post-exile, skipping the meandering and the long journey in the wilderness. African continent and peoples have spent a long time in the wilderness since the beginning of the modern era. Any African theology that skips this experience or that asks the African people to forget their past and historical experience in the rush to reconstruct and rebuild in the emerging realities miss an essential point in the contextual reality of Africans as well as a key methodological.<sup>106</sup>

#### **4. The Contributions of African Women Theologians**

Not forgotten in this search for a new hermeneutics for African theology are the contributions of African women theologians, who are indeed charting a new path in African theology itself. “Women’s issues” have been on the agenda of the EATWOT and many churches organizations since 1980s. However, it is a serious indictment of African male theologies that women’s issues have not received immediate and unreserved acceptance. From its inception, EATWOT has always had a strong contingent of women in its ranks. But the women felt that “our voices were not being heard, although we were visible enough ... We demand to be heard. The result was the creation within EATWOT of a Women’s Commission.”<sup>107</sup> A significant consultation of Third World women took place under the auspices of EATWOT in 1986 at Oaxtepec, Mexico. One of the results of this event was the publication of *With Passion and Compassion*.

On the African continent, however, African women theologians gathered for the first time in August 1986 at Yaoundé (Cameroun), to deliberate on themes they considered important for the development of African theology. The following themes were listed, among others: a) Woman and the Church, b) Woman and the Bible, c) Woman and Theology, d) Woman and Christology, e) Woman and Struggle for liberation, f) Woman and Spirituality. For the participants at the Yaoundé conference, the spiritual experience of life shows that God gives and *reveals* himself in a way known to him alone to each human person, without discrimination. Because of this, the African women theologians at the conference invited the church to give the woman her right place, also within the ecclesial structures. According to the women theologians, African anthropology considers the human being as bi-dimensional: man and woman, male and female; a man without a woman is not a complete person, but simply a project; the same thing is of a woman without a man.

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. KÄ MANA, *Christians and Churches of Africa*, see specially, chapter 12.

<sup>106</sup> T.S. MALULEKE, “African Theology”, 496.

<sup>107</sup> V.M.M. FABELLA and M.A. ODUYOYE (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1988, x.

The human person complements one another: male and female God created us. All the structures: political, economic, cultural or religious, are institutions at the base of which there is complementarity of our being created, male and female by God. In this case, the complementary nature of human beings, male and female, comes to be interpreted in terms of its role and functions.

From 1986 onwards, African women theologians have had other occasions of meeting together, especially, under the auspices of the so called, *Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, which was started by Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana. They have expressed themselves in various meetings and congresses on the theme of African woman from the perspective of culture and religion. Leading voices among the African women theologians are: Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Bernadette Mbuy Beya, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Teresa Okure, Theresa Souga, Elizabeth Amoah, Luise Tappa, among others. The Circle of Concerned Women in Theology, with its Biennial Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, was established in 1989 in Accra, Ghana. Some of the papers read at the Accra meeting were published in the book *The Will to Arise*.<sup>108</sup> Since then, a continent-wide multi-religious women's organization called the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians (CIRCLE) was formed – initially under the leadership of Mercy Oduoye of Ghana, succeeded by Musimbi Kanyoro of Kenya, and more recently with Isabel Phiri of Malawi at the helm. One specific objective of the CIRCLE has been the production of African women literature and their output in this regard has been impressive. And it would be a mistake to limit the influence of the CIRCLE only to those publications linked directly to their consultations. What the CIRCLE has managed to do is to create space and inspiration for African women to dialogue and to publish.

Whereas authors of different trends of African theology have for the past half-century argued for the *validity* of African Christianity and the *legitimacy* of African culture, African women theology is charting a new way. This theology is mounting a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways that previous African theologies have not been able to do. From these African women theologians, we may learn how to be truly African and yet critical of aspects of African culture. African women theologians are teaching us how to criticize African culture without denigrating it. As some have argued, the prediction is that the twenty-first century will produce an even more gendered African theology. “All theologians and African churches will be well advised to begin to take heed.”<sup>109</sup>

## 5. Towards a New Hermeneutics for African Theology

It is interesting to see that there is nothing on the theme of theology of reconstruction from the side of Catholic theologians, except one of the last works of Jean-Marc Éla, *Repenser la Théologie Africaine*.<sup>110</sup> As we saw earlier on, his work is not directly dealing with the theme of reconstruction but joins Mugambi in the sense that there was a crisis in the hermeneutics of African theology which was calling for a new way of doing theology in the continent. Valentin Dedji from Cameoun, in his study of works of leading proponents of African theology of

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<sup>108</sup> Co-edited by M.A. ODUYOYE and M.R.A. KANYORO (eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1992.

<sup>109</sup> T.S. MALULEKE, “African Theology”, 494-495.

<sup>110</sup> Karthala, Paris 2003.

reconstruction, has made some constructive remarks, showing that African theology is facing a new hermeneutical problem. In a work with the title: *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Dedji is critical of the contribution of the following “Reconstructionists”: Mugambi, Kā Mana, Éla and Bediako. He finds that all these four African theologians have a common interest. Dedji’s work is interesting. He says that the crucial issue today in Africa is that of gospel and justice rather than gospel and culture. Dedji calls for a theology of reconstruction which gives priority to biblical motifs such as reconstruction, forgiveness and repentance. Though Dedji does not develop these themes in link with reconstruction theology as such, however, he has brought out important themes for Africa of today which are lacking in the works of Mugambi, Kā Mana and Villa-Vicencio as well as in the early works of proponents of both inculturation and liberation trends of African theology.<sup>111</sup>

The themes of reconciliation, justice and peace received some attention in the two volumes recently edited by a Nigerian Jesuit theologian, A.E. Orobator. The volumes are: *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: The Second African Synod* (2011), and *Theological Re-imagining: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa* (2014). The first volume was a collection of essays on the theme of the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa which was held in Rome in 2009. The essays published in this volume depict not only how the theme of reconciliation, justice and peace have started to take a central place in the pastoral concerns of the African Bishops but also in the writings of African theologians as well. The second volume is a collection of papers given at the Year 1 (2013/14) African Theological Colloquium held at Hekima College, Nairobi, on the theme: “African Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Identity and Profile, Contexts, and Models.” In his introduction to this volume, Orobator speaks of a new way of doing theology that is emerging today in Africa.

In these two volumes, references were often made to the conversational and communicative styles in African cultures, which are recently been captured in the writings of some African scholars with the word, *palaver*. The term palaver was recently introduced into philosophical, ethical, and theological discourse by Francophone African scholars as a model to discuss and seek solutions to challenging issues, especially in the areas of reconciliation, justice, peace, and forgiveness. For the African scholars, palaver means the art and discipline of public discourse within a participative assembly in a public space, in an open courtyard or under a tree. It involves the use of simple words in order to tackle problematic issues touching on all areas of life and to seek relevant and workable solutions. Palaver takes the name “African palaver model” to depict that communicative community spirit, the interactive dialogue that animates many African community’s affairs for holistic interventions on issues of life and the maintenance of relationships within the entire hierarchy of existence. The palaver model has been and is still the medium and process where individual and community life issues are discussed, researched, cultivated, nurtured and actuated in many African communities. It is an appropriate community model to resolve contradictions among people and strengthen mutual links of solidarity among all members of the community. Through the word, the African traditional communities are able

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<sup>111</sup> Cf. V. DEDJI, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Acton Publishers, Nairobi 2003, 48.

to discuss public affairs, resolve conflicts and create judicial acts that are efficacious in confronting present and future community problems.

For Orobator, African palaver seems the most theological fertile for the theological re-imagination already on the way in the continent. This is because, according to Orobator, African theological enterprise has since shed its self-imposed innocence and *naïvete* that once reduced it to merely aping theological models and answers fabricated for overseas context and consumption. If one needs proof of Africa's theological maturity, he simply goes to compare his notes with those from overseas contexts. However, with the emerging theological palaver conversation among the African theologians themselves, that era of doing theology in Africa by proxy seems to be coming to an end. And as this essay has shown, the works of African authors which we have studied demonstrate the creativity of theological imagination in Africa with theologians themselves asking their own questions and discovering their own answers. This is the result of African palaver style of theologizing which, on its own, has started characterizing the journey of theological reflection in the continent today.

Speaking on the same theme of the need for a new hermeneutics for African theology, Emmanuel Katongole, a Catholic theologian from Uganda (whom we cited earlier on), adds the dimension of “story and imagination” in theological discourse. For him, African theology today should concern itself with the question of stories and their role in social regeneration of the continent. At the heart of Katongole's theory of story as a new hermeneutics for African theology is a conviction that the course of social regeneration of Africa and the role of the local church in that regard must not ignore the fact that all politics are about stories and imagination. Katongole appears to be in agreement with Jean Marc Éla, that African theology should not ignore grassroots community-based theologizing. For Katongole, however, it is at this narrative level of stories that a fresh conversation about the Christian theological social engagement in an African context must take place.<sup>112</sup> The new conversation for African theology is about stories and imagination, specifically, the story about the regeneration of the continent and the role of the local church to that effect. The question is, what sort of difference, if any, can Christian story and African story in theological discourse make in relation to Africa's regeneration? Reflecting on the role of stories in Christian social ethics and politics in their African context in general, Katongole notes:

Stories therefore, are not simply fictional narratives meant for our entertainment; stories are part of our social ecology. They are embedded in us and form the very heart of our cultural, economic, religious, and political worlds. This applies not only to individuals, but to institutions and even nations. That is why a notion like “Africa”, names not so much a place, but a story – or set of stories about how people of the continent called Africa are located in the narrative that constitutes the modern world.<sup>113</sup>

Contributing to this debate is Bievenu Mayemba, a Congolese Jesuit Priest. According to Mayemba, a story tells us about the past, supports us in the present, and prepares us for the future: “It involves the memory of the past and the memory of the future. ... It also involves a promise and

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. E. KATONGOLE, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> E. KATONGOLE, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, 2-3.

tells us we should not move forward without looking back.”<sup>114</sup> Since our African memory is future-oriented despite John Mbiti’s phenomenological interpretation of African concept of time,<sup>115</sup> we look back to the past, to the myth of our ancestors for the sake of the future and future generations. This is an essential task, especially in an African context that is a classical example of colonial dispossession of the continent’s cultural heritage.<sup>116</sup> This implies that even though the stories we breathe and live may on the surface, appear invisible, yet it does not mean that their hold on us is less powerful. On the contrary, to the extent that the stories which form our imagination remain invisible, they hold us more deeply in their grip. This is what makes the story of the institution of African nation-states even more powerful than has been acknowledged.

## Conclusion

The current debate, whether it is about the call for a new hermeneutics or for African theologians and churches to recognize the paradigm shifts which were occurring before their own eyes and effect some paradigms themselves, is a welcome sign that African theology and African Christianity are not about to die. This wave of theological creativity in African churches indicate that African Christian theology is a dynamic, growing, multifaceted, and dialectical movement built diachronically and synchronically upon contextualization and constant introspection. In order for African theology to grow and effect meaningful paradigm shifts, careful note of the ground already captured must be made. This may prevent an unbridled manufacturing of an infinite number of supposedly ‘new’ and ‘projective’ African theologies which are not always thoroughly informed by what has been done before. Kwesi Dickson made the same point more than a decade ago, warning that, “again and again contributions made at conferences have not been such as to build upon the insights which have already been gained into the subject.”<sup>117</sup> Construction, innovation, and contextualization in African theology and Christianity should not be left entirely in the hands of each new generation of African theologians, as if African theology was a frivolous and merely cerebral activity which is unconnected either to African Christian life or previous theologies.

Today, African theology faces new challenges in a fast changing world. The adverse effects of globalization and political and economic instability of African nation-states loom very large. It is our conviction that over the past fifty years African theology, in all its varieties, has laid a solid basis on which to tackle the challenges of the future. Also in the past fifty years, African inculturation theology has remained the bedrock upon which other trends of African theology were born and nurtured. It is still the identity of African theology as we know it today, the lens through which other trends of African theology are discussed and often evaluated. In other words, advocates of both liberation and reconstruction trends have continued to profit and depend on the works of authors of the inculturation theology of the past for their reflection and vision for the African Christianity and society. If this is so, what is required is collaboration among the theologians, since all of them appeared to have common interest, namely the transformation of Africa through the

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<sup>114</sup> B. MAYEMBA, “The Promise of a New Generation of African Theologians: Reimagining African Theology with Fidelity and Creativity”, in A.E. OROBATOR (ed.), *Theological Re-imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 2014, 158.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Heinemann, Oxford 1989, especially chapter 3.

<sup>116</sup> C. ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann, London 1958, v.

<sup>117</sup> K.A DICKSON, *Theology in Africa*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1984, 8.

gospel values of the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus Christ and from the authentic matrix of African cultural heritage.<sup>118</sup>

It is in the light of this that, today, African theologians are urged to minimise the conflict which exists between the proponents of the three dominant trends, namely, inculturation, liberation and reconstruction. They are invited to a new theological hermeneutics that takes seriously the whole of African reality and history while respecting the emerging challenges. This is in keeping with the theologians' idea of an integrative African theology. Using the words of Martey, it is about an integrative vision. It is about a holistic implication of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a gospel of religio-cultural, socio-political and economic liberation.<sup>119</sup> Viewed from this perspective, even the theology of reconstruction in spite of its criticisms of inculturation-liberation movement of African theology is not only about a shift from one trend to the other. It is also about the change in methodology. Time is for practical orientation of the theological thinking. The era of beautiful and intelligible theoretical elaboration in theology without any practical application to the concrete situation of the people of Africa is dismissed.<sup>120</sup>

Theology is now called to provide guidance and leadership in this work of social transformation and reconstruction. As we noted at the opening introduction of this article, the 1977 Pan-African meeting of theologians in Accra had already called for a new theological methodology that is accountable to Africans.<sup>121</sup> It is a theology that pays attention to issues of social transformation of Africa as it grapples with the question of faith commitment in the continent. Viewed from that perspective, the strength of African theology lies on the fact that it seeks to match theoretical and academic elaboration with social and practical commitment. This is what is going to make the difference in the future.

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<sup>118</sup> T.S. MALULEKE, "African Theology", 496-497.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, 141.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. I. H. MAGANYA, "African Christian Theology of Reconstruction" 7.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. K. APPIAH-KUBI & S. TORRES (eds), *African Theology en Route*, 193.