

MISSIOLOGY IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

Towards a New Language¹

Francis Anekwe Oborji

Introduction

It is no longer news that the Church in Africa is increasingly growing into maturity. Equally evident is that the young Churches of Africa have started sending their sons and daughters as missionaries to various parts of the world. The strength of the Christianity in Africa is also best seen in the active participation of the African laity and their generous contribution for the growth of the Church both at home and abroad, indeed wherever they live. And so, it is important that a scientific reflection on missiology in an African context be made at the beginning of the new century. Equally necessary is that African clergy and religious who bear a special responsibility to think and teach about the Christian faith must themselves be doing some serious reflections on missiology so as to explore ways for greater contribution to the cause of the Christian mission in the continent and in the world so deeply in need of Jesus Christ and the salvation he has won for it.

In the present paper I have chosen to address the question of missiology in an African context. This question indicates that we are discussing of a continent in search of a model for mission theology and the praxis of evangelisation. But the formulation of a model or models for an African missiology depends to a large extent on the answers one gives to the following questions: What has been the prevailing missiology in Africa? What can Africans say about missiology in the new century? And finally, what kind of contribution can African theologians make in order to promote the inculturation of the Christian faith and of human promotion in the continent?

These questions are closely interrelated, for our knowledge of the prevailing missiology in Africa, to a large extent, will determine our new vision for Christianity in the continent. This, in turn, raises questions such as: What should be the role of individual local churches and theologians for the promotion of a really authentic inculturation of the Gospel in Africa? Have Africans something to contribute in missiology or should they continue to be consumers of the mission theology and the version of Christianity developed overseas? Can African church be fully participant in the evangelisation of the continent and of the world?

In exploring these issues I have chosen to emphasize the importance of a new language for missiology in Africa.² I am convinced that the prevailing language of missiology has prevented us from recognizing the potentials of the local churches and the people of Africa in the mission of the church. I contend that in developing models for missiology in an African context, priority should be given to the question of rethinking the way Africa has hitherto come to be conceived in the minds of many people since the 15th century foreign invasion of the continent. For in spite of the seemingly adjustments in the use of some terminologies, the missiology developed in that era about Africa is still very much with us and is not about to go. Unfortunately this missiology comes out of superstitious beliefs that were based on the foreign descriptions of Africa.

Secondly, I will like to emphasize in this paper that there is a need also for new language in African theology. The way African theology is developing today, commendable as it may be, still needs a rethinking. Like any other authentic theology, African authors started well with “critical approach”, examining the praxis of the theology of mission that was used in the evangelisation of the continent. But it may be time to move from criticism to construction. Unless we construct we shall continue to lack the requisite for building an authentic African Christianity (the type Paul VI

¹ This paper was originally given as a talk to the Association of Igbo Priests and Religious in Rome, March 25, 2001, under the title: “Missiology in an African Context: The Igbo Orientation.”

² Tite Tiénou has also spoken of the need for language learning in training missiologists for an African context (cf. Tiénou 1996, 93ff).

challenged the African bishops with (in his Address at the closing session of the Symposium of African Bishops, Kampala, Uganda, 31, July 1969). Unless we construct and build, the Church in Africa shall continue to be a burden to the universal Church. In other words, we need a new language for missiology in Africa if we mean to achieve some level of self-reliance and gain some self-respect in the universal Church-Family and in the community of nations. We need a language of construction to build a house for Jesus Christ who has found “a new home land in Africa” (*Nova Patriu Christi*). This is the basis for the call for language learning for missiology in Africa.

With the foregoing in mind, I have chosen to approach the topic in the following order:

1. Mission Trends in the Evangelisation of Africa
2. Present Trends of Mission in Africa
3. Towards a New Language for Missiology in Africa
4. The Role of African Theologians

1. Mission Trends in the Evangelisation of Africa

Christian mission (beginning from the 15th century)³ came to Africa when there was no developed theology of mission. In fact, during the two centuries (15th & 19th) missionary expansions in Africa there was no Council convoked or rather there was no major theological shift similar to the one that took place when Christianity encountered the Hellenistic world (Bosch 1993, 190ff). What then was the language of missiology used in the evangelisation of Africa especially during the 15th and 19th missionary expansions in the continent? What changes came from the Vatican II mission theology?

a) The 15th century Mission Trend in Africa

During the 15th century Christian expansion in Africa, the language of missiology depended heavily on the so called theology of the *curse*. Subsequent trends in mission theology have to build on this. The theology of the curse is based on the European myth that Africa is “the land of the deepest, darkest, heathen night” inhabited by dark-skinned backward people, the poorest of the poor, unintelligent, without culture, language, religion, civilization, and etc. (cf. Carey 1891, 63). This theology perceived Africa as target *par excellence* of mission. This trend was also reflected in the *padroado* (papal privileges of patronage), which empowered the Portuguese sovereigns, explorers and the missionaries who sailed around the coast of Africa to enslave, subdue and convert to Christianity the perceived children of Ham that inhabit the dark continent (cf. Gibellini 1994, 3). So much so that it was said that during the Vatican Council I, the famous missionary and founder of a missionary Institute, Daniel Comboni, had to request the Council Fathers to lift the curse on the children of Ham. It was believed that through this curse the Almighty had been punishing the sons and daughters of Africa with a cruelty unknown in the history of the human race (cf. Coulon 1988, 596-608). But Engelbert Mveng has argued that no such a curse was addressed against Africans; rather the Bible shows Yahweh taking the side of Moses and his African wife (cf. Mveng 1971, 46-47). According to Elochukwu Uzukwu, medieval Christian belief sustained such a curse, and the prayer for the conversion of Africa (composed after Vatican I), which was recited in many Churches of Africa before the Vatican Council II suppressed it, proves the continued presence of such a belief (cf. Uzukwu 1996, 22). It was this theology that informed William Carey’s book on Christian mission in Africa and elsewhere (Carey 1891, 63). Since Carey’s book was first published in 1792, we have been using the same language in missiology about Africa. G.T. Basden’s description of the Igbos in his famous book, *The Niger Ibos* (1938), was based on this theology.

The great thinkers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Comte Joseph de Maistre, among others, developed theories based on the theology of the curse. In a blunt tone, G.W.F. Hegel

³ We limit our present study to the arrival of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, leaving aside the Church in Africa whose origins are traced back to the apostolic times (cf. Oborji 1998, 48).

postulated that the Africans are unruly and “savage”, and that there is nothing in Africa which really deserved the name “human” (cf. Ayisi 1992, 39). David Livingstone, the famous explorer and missionary was under the urge of this theology when he alerted the West about the discovery of the Great Lake of East Africa and the missionary demand there. The British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery was acting under this theology when he drew up plan to make Africa a continent ruled by Whites after a secret visit there in 1947. In the opinion of Montgomery, the “African is a complete savage and quite incapable of developing the country himself”. For him, the African was hopeless and needed to be ruled by Whites who could make Africa more productive. Montgomery claimed the survival of Britain depended on this. And so he hailed the Cecil Rhodes spirit, based on the apartheid emerging in South Africa (cf. Dowden 1999, 72).

Therefore, the theology of the curse which remained prevalently active until the 19th century, paved the way not only for the Western Christianity penetration of Africa but also for the growth of the European power and commerce in the continent. The latter process was officially sanctioned by the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, at which the European powers partitioned and divided up the continent of Africa (in a system of divide and rule). The colonial boundaries have continued to be a source of tension and fighting in post-independent African states, and in the actualisation of ecclesial communion in African local Churches (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa* 49). Another side of the aftermaths of the theology of the curse and the foreign invasion of the continent is the feeling of inferiority complex which have been engendered on the African who now tends to look down on anything associated with the black race, especially, his language and culture. In the teaching of John Paul II, the trauma of these past incidents, have weakened the ability of the Africans to resist and to respond to situations: “An injured person has to rediscover all the resources of his own humanity”. To achieve this, the Pope speaks of the theology of the Good Samaritan, asking that Africans need an understanding presence and pastoral concern: “They need to be helped to recoup their energies so as to put them at the service of the common good” (*Ecclesia in Africa* 41).

b) The 19th century Mission Trend in Africa

Towards the end of the 19th century, a notable development occurred in the African mission: a change in the missionary juridical system from *padroado* to *ius commissionis*. The Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* issued the *ius commissionis* by which mission territories were allocated to particular missionary institutes to evangelise and administer. In principle, the Pope himself, represented by the *Propaganda Fide*, had the primary responsibility for evangelisation and not a monarch as it was the practice in the *padroado*. Many missionary institutes were founded in Europe during this period, specifically for the conversion of Africans to Christianity (cf. Oborji 1998, 53). It was at this period that Josef Schmidlin and Pierre Charles, among others, developed their mission theories of the saving of souls and implanting of Churches, which included building of schools and hospitals, and other forms of social services.⁴ However, many missionaries interpreted the implanting of Churches literally, and tried to reproduce in Africa carbon copies of the Churches in Europe, especially in terms of architecture, organisations and devotions. Again, many missionaries continued to judge the cultures of Africa very negatively.⁵ This development was accompanied by establishment of a chair or department of mission studies (missiology) in the universities and faculties of theology. This, however, was largely, as a result of pressures from missionaries and students (particularly in the United States), and in a more concrete way as a result of requests from

⁴ The German Josef Schmidlin (of the Münster school) who is regarded as the father of Catholic missiology is associated with the theory which states that the goal of mission is the conversion of non-Christian individuals (*salus animarum*). Schmidlin borrowed a lot of his ideas on the goal of mission from Gustav Warneck (who is regarded as the father of the Protestant missiology). Pierre Charles of the Louvain school of missiology promoted the theory that the aim of missionary activity is the implanting of a Church in non-Christian countries (*plantatio ecclesiae*). Vatican Council II adopted the views of these two schools as the primary aim of mission (cf. AG 6).

⁵ Though some authors are very critical of the mission trends of the 19th century Christian expansion, however, many Africans regard the missionaries of this phase as the real founders of Christianity in modern Africa and they are remembered with deep gratitude and admiration (cf. Parratt 1995, 7-8).

governments as happened in Germany. David Bosch argues that when missiology was first introduced in theological faculties, its primary goal was to serve the colonial needs. The issue of proper incarnation of the Christian faith was secondary (cf. Bosch 1993, 492).

Thus, the missionary work was still seen as the Church's bounded duty to bring the true faith to pagans, or to save souls that were in darkness. Christianity was intended to civilize and to save Africans from idolatry, immoral marriage (polygamy), and the devil. Again, there was still negative attitude towards African spiritual values and culture (cf. Kalilombe 1981, 55). This tendency initiated the debate in the theology of adaptation. In principle, adaptation is the missionary effort whose primary objective is to translate the Christian faith into African conceptual apparatus. However, for critics of this theology, adaptation is a missionary theory that was 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 (cf. Boka di Mipasi 1990, 45). In his *An Overview of African Theology*, Ngindu Mushete identifies three mission theories inherent in the theology of adaptation. These are: 1) the theology of the salvation of souls in darkness; 2) the theology of the implanting of the Church (among people considered to have neither culture nor civilization, the theology of *tabula rasa*); 3) the theology of the search for "stepping-stones" (the theology of the *semina verbi and of the praeparatio evangelica*). The contention of Mushete is that since these were the popular mission theories that governed the 15th and the 19th centuries' evangelisation of Africa, they might account for the slow pace in the incarnation of Christianity in the continent. In any case, Mushete asserts that the modest contribution of the theology of adaptation is that it has helped in clarifying the process of inculturation (cf. Mushete 1994, 13ff). This was the situation of mission theology up to the Vatican Council II.

c) The Vatican Council II Mission Theology

One of the hallmarks of the Vatican Council II is its rediscovery of the theology of reciprocity (cf. LG 13, AG 22). This theology is based on the Gospel image of the sowing of the Good News and on the Council's theology of the local Churches that are established in every place. This theology informed the Council's missionary juridical system of *mandatum* which replaces the *ius commissionis*. The conciliar system of *mandatum* empowers the local bishops as fully responsible for evangelisation in their dioceses. The missionaries are to enter into contract with the bishops in whose diocese they wish to serve.

Again, the new awareness is centred on the Council's theology of mission as reciprocal activity between sister churches. This new theology of mission applies universally to all the Churches, even while not denying their differences (cf. AG 6). Thus, the Council's mission theology should not be confused with the prevailing missiology in the evangelisation of Africa (cf. Dupuis 1994, 276). The bottom-line in the conciliar mission theology is the emphasis on cultural diversity in the Church and the role of local Churches (in communion with the universal Church-Family) in the work of evangelisation and implanting of the church in their various cultural contexts. This is a theology of reciprocity. In addition to assuming all that the Church has acquired in its earthly pilgrimage, each local Church is challenged to contribute something from its cultural-setting to enrich the patrimony of the universal Church-Family. In other words, the Council developed a theology of co-responsibility in evangelisation and of trust on the local Churches.

The foregoing discussion underscores the importance of the Vatican Council II theology of mission, particularly, the rediscovery of the local Churches as the primary agent of mission. This awareness has led to a fundamentally new interpretation of the purpose of mission and the role of missionaries and mission agencies. However, the Council still affirms, and rightly so, that in the midst of these new circumstances and relationships there is still need for formation of experts or rather trained missionaries. But the missionaries are to recognize that their task pertains to the whole Church, and they are to appreciate that they are sent as ambassadors of one local Church to another local Church (where such a local Church already exists), as witnesses of solidarity and partnership, and as expressions of mutual encounter, exchange, and enrichment (cf. AG 26).

I have chosen to highlight the above aspects of the conciliar mission theology so as to help us evaluate and see for ourselves the pros and cons not only of the language of the previous mission trends but also of the actual language of missiology in Africa. We are now in a position to show whether the practice of mission in Africa today is following the Vatican Council II theology or whether it is still rooted in the out-dated phenomenon already discussed.

1. Present Trends of Mission in Africa

There are two main trends in the present-day language of missiology in Africa which still bear some traces of the old beliefs before the Vatican II. These are: a) the *mission-charity* trend; and b) the “*on the way*” or the “*still-learners*” trend.

a) *The Mission-Charity Trend*

This trend is based on the linkage of mission with *charity*. As a result of this theology, foreign mission agencies and charitable organizations have recruited workers for Africa on the basis of the continent being the target of mission *par excellence* which in turn is the expression of the phenomenon mentioned above. Some have risen to the status of hero in the West because of their African experiences. Yet all their efforts seem to have availed little for the continent. Africans are still poor and languishing. Indeed, Africans themselves have been aware of their own vulnerability for sometime. And as Tiénoú puts it: “Is Africa good only for promoting outsiders to hero status?” (Tiénoú 1996, 95). The impasse here rests on the fact that many people easily associate material deprivation, technological simplicity, skin colour, with spiritual needs. Since Africans are the poorest of the poor (the third world of the third world in the words of an American Journalist (cf. Morrow 1992, 30-32), since Africa is inhabited by dark-skinned backward people, it must follow that Africans are most in need not only of *missionizing*, but also of philanthropists’ invasion and of foreign occupation. Moreover, since Africa has the highest number of the world’s poorest countries, it must follow logically that it is the place where the unreached are found. When missiologists are convinced of this, an inevitable link between mission and charity develops. Mission and charitable works become synonymous.

Furthermore, the theology of charity has brought about an unholy alliance between the press, the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and the missionary agencies. These organisations engage in the propaganda of damage to the African image in the name of seeking donations to help the poor people of the *dark* continent. Take up the *rivista* (journal) of any of the foreign missionary agencies, NGOs or agencies operating in Africa and you need not be told what their image of Africa is all about. Christopher Clapham has recently drawn our attention to the fact that the arrival of the NGOs engendered a change in the content of the external world’s relation with Africa, in ways which reduced the normal state-state relation, and increased that of charitable and civil-right organizations. In addition, Clapham affirms that the NGOs broadly represent the privatisation of North-South relations. In Africa they come with strongly held Western values which encompass the full range of often contradictory attitudes and sentiments that the continent evokes (cf. Clapham 1996, 258ff).

In the same vein, Peter Sarpong contends that the role of the foreign media in Africa has assumed ideological and political strategy, designed to demoralise and discourage the Africans from believing that they are of equal partners with the rest of the world. For the media and most of the charitable organisations, Africa is synonymous with “poverty, AIDS, sexual promiscuity, tribal wars, refugees, hunger, disorderliness, disease, ignorance, etc. In fact, in many cases, the media is used to poison the minds of Africans and to propagate crimes, violence, falsehood, and immorality. What is more, only rare do news items that are not derogatory to Africa appear in the media in Europe or North America. Sarpong insists that if we are to promote the dignity of human person, created in the image and likeness of God, the media must balance their presentation of Africa so that people of good will can have an accurate image of the continent (cf. Sarpong 1996, 225).

b) The “on-the-way” or “still learners” Mission Trend

Another tendency in the actual language of missiology in Africa is what we have termed above as the theology of the “*on-the-way*”. This tendency is another expression of the phenomenon already described. Its theology is based on the conception that Africans are still on the way, that they are still learners or rather that they are helpless children or junior members of the human race and in constant need of benevolent care. The “*on-the-way*” theology does not see Africa as a continent just like any other continent of the planet. It does not perceive Africa as a continent of people, just people, not some strange beings that demand a special kind of treatment. This theology does not feel that Africans have capacity for beatific vision and ontological reality. It does not recognize the fact that becoming a good Christian does not depend on place of birth but on one’s response to faith in Jesus Christ. One may be born in Africa but responds to faith in Jesus Christ more than the person born in any of the so called Christian nations (cf. Oborji 1999, xii).

Furthermore, from the “*on-the-way*” theology we can now see why some people are angry when they see an African living in a decent building, riding a good car, or doing higher studies. In the psyche of these people, Africans are not born for such advanced luxury and studies. This is also why many religious orders in the North would prefer closing their communities and convents to inviting their counter parts in Africa for helping in the work of the new evangelisation in Europe (cf. Nzuzi 2000, 241). It is for this same reason that missionaries from Africa are not received in Europe and America on the basis of equality and in the spirit of Pius XII’s encyclical *Fidei donum*. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gives a classical description of this theology. When asked about the idea that a bishop from Africa or Latin America might take his place on the papal chair, the learned cardinal replied thus: “No. Everyone, at least in the College of Cardinals, could imagine us electing an African or someone from non-European country. To what extent European Christians would swallow that is another question. For despite all the declarations of racial equality and all the condemnation, there is still a certain European self-consciousness that comes to the surface at critical moments”. Thus the theology of the “*on-the-way*” shows that missionary endeavour is still characterised by a curious paradox in that, while preaching equality of all before God, it nonetheless elevates White Christians into superior beings, thereby keeping alive that racism is a way of life even in the Church.

In addition, when asked if Africa will be part of the new impulses that will shape the future of the Church in the new century, Cardinal Ratzinger says: “There is a strong consciousness that the Africans are still on the way, that they are still learners” (Ratzinger 1996, 262). This is the crux of the matter. Will a student ever become a master? Africans have been students for the past 500 years or so since its encounter with the West and the Arab world. During these years, Africans have been enslaved, colonized, Islamised and Christianised. They have been *capitalismized*, *communismized* and *apartheidized*. They have been polarised by the Organization for Islamic Conferences (OIC). At present they are studying in the schools of the NGOs, the Multinationals, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These are departments in the current university of Globalisation. Africa! When will you graduate?

This question is important because no people become a nation under bondage. A servant can never be greater than his master. Nor can a student be the master of his teacher. Moreover, no one becomes somebody through begging. A beggar is generally, a *despised person, without a voice and often forgotten and excluded in decision making body*. A beggar has no self-respect. As John Paul II teaches, “in the midst of an all-pervading despair, how is the Christian message Good News for the African? Where lie the hope and optimism which the Gospel brings?” Moreover, “in a world controlled by rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected” (*Ecclesia in Africa* 40).

This has been an important aspect of missiology under which the evangelisation of Africa is being executed. Some have argued that the theology is based on the *dependency program*, the

system of control: The unhappy desire to keep Africa for as long as possible under foreign tutelage (cf. Parratt 1995, 8).⁶

4. Towards a New Language for Missiology in Africa

It is now evident that the prevailing language of missiology in Africa is a cultural problem. The historical unhealthy relationship that has been existing between Africans and people of the North has its origin in the myth that informed the theology of the curse: the peculiar and strange way in which the continent is still perceived, despised and marginalized. The tragic events of the past and of the present are committed on the ground of cultural and racial bias. On the basis of this, the new language for missiology in Africa must be centred around the effort to give a new and an admirable identity to the Africans based on their cultural values, tradition and the Gospel message:

a) *A new language for missiology in Africa* will come from the retrieval and modernization of our African cultural matrix pursued from the point of view of the daily struggles of the Africans themselves for survival. The attainment of a degree of self-esteem for the Africans depends on their identifying themselves with their own culture and rediscovering deeply rooted traditional values in the light of the Gospel. John Paul II challenges the African Church thus: “Today I urge you to look inside yourselves. Look to the riches of your own traditions, look to the faith which we are celebrating in this assembly. Here you will find genuine freedom – here you will find Christ who will lead you to the truth” (*Ecclesia in Africa* 48).

b) *The new language for missiology in Africa* must be that of admiration and appreciation of Africans as normal and full members of the human family. In the light of the Vatican Council II mission theology, the new language should be based on the fact that Africans will grow and do better in admiration and not in sympathy. That Africans will do well when they are offered hope and not demoralization (cf. Oborji 1998, 198). Indeed what Africa needs is not necessarily foreign aids (which often come with strings); but change of attitude and mentality of the people of the North in speaking, studying and dealing with the continent. What Africa is asking for is the purification of memory and evangelisation of the superstitious beliefs which have hitherto informed the external world attitude and relationship with the continent.

c) *The new language for missiology in Africa* should also address the Africans themselves on the spirit of cooperation (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa* 49). The naked truth is this: “Why is it that it is the black communities or countries worldwide that are most disunited, fractionalised, disorganised and strife prone. Why is it that it is the black communities or countries that you have the largest number of tribes, ethnic, dialects, and language groups. Why are Africans backward as communities, groups and nations? Why is it that the most stable countries in Africa are those where the resources are firmly under the control of one boss, and often, however greedy he is, he is not challenged? Why is it that the state in Africa is the personal fiefdom of whoever is in power? It may be easy to suggest that the reason for all this, is because Africans suffer from the above named forces of division or from “inferiority complex and mental slavery” caused by their sickening underdevelopment and insurgence of the foreign powers. It may also be easy to blame only the African leaders and accuse them of being incapable to rise to the demands of good governance and responsibility as indeed some have them (Achebe 1983, 1). But the fact remains that all human beings share the same attributes irrespective of race. Every race has its own share of the good and the bad (of lazy and hard working, of honest and of thieves, of corruption, of embezzlement, of bribery and rigging, etc). Therefore, Africans are not inferior in respect to all God given attributes. At the individual level, given reasonable opportunity, Africans are comparable to the “others”. This is evidenced by the large number of thriving Africans in all areas of human endeavours (albeit most may be in Diasporas).

⁶ However, these are still open problems which are debatable. But at least they furnish us with the language in the mission theology used in the evangelisation of Africa. Based on that one can make proposals for a new language leaning for missiology in an African context.

The issue is that the people may not quite get the rulers they deserve but there must be a connection between the rulers and ruled. The dictators, even the jump-up sergeant who seizes power with the gun and rules by repression and whim, emerge from society. There is no loyalty to the state itself, let alone to development of the people. Wars occur not where life for the masses is intolerable but where there is competition for resources. Owing the state is the only true ambition of many African leaders. (Dowden 1999, 72-73). Why all this? According to Ayinmode: “*The answer is that blacks find it difficult to work as a “group”*” (emphasis mine). But it will be wrong to say they are incapable of working as a group. It is this individualism or intolerance for group cooperation and defence that is probable responsible for the break-up of Africans into incredibly large number of ethnic nationalities. It is also probable that this same factor, as well, made and still makes Africans vulnerable to external forces of *divide and rule*. It may therefore also probably explain why they were (and still are) the ones most susceptible to external forces and oppression as suggested by historical and contemporary facts discussed already (cf. Ayinmode 2001, 2). It is in the context of this absence of spirit of cooperation among the Africans that I highlight *cooperation* as a new missiological language in the continent (*Nuntius* 24-25).

5. The Role of African Theologians

Chinua Achebe in his novel *Things Fall Apart* laments: “He has won our brother and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the thing that held us together, and we have fallen apart”. Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* describes a Pentecost kind of event in Igboland in particular, and Africa in general. This novel, though published many years ago is yet to be read and taught to African children with prophetic vision. In their Message at the 1994 Synod, the African bishops took hold of the vision in the *Things Fall Apart* in these words: “The culture which gave its identity to our people is in serious crisis”. For the bishops, the way out of this crisis is “for prophets to arise and speak in the name of the God of hope for a creation of a new identity. Africa has need of holy prophets” (*Nuntius* 15). In the light of this search for prophets in Africa, I propose the following as ways through which African theologians can make their own contribution for the reconstruction of their continent:

a) *African theologians* should take the lead in the process of re-education of our people. If the Church championed education in Africa during the colonial era, it is now the turn of the African theologians and intellectuals to educate their people, using the available resources God has blessed them with. African theologians must prepare themselves not only for assignments in higher institutions such as the university or diocesan chancery, but also for teaching in secondary, primary and nursery schools as well as in the small Christian communities. They must also be prepared to take up assignments in the remotest part of their dioceses without grudges. The Pentecost has happened, the disciples of Jesus Christ wasted no time building up the Christian community with the existing structures. Later, the Churches founded in Greece and Rome under serious persecutions, did not have to wait for an outsider to come and set up for them the structures they might need to worship the true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. With full confidence on the power of God who has raised Jesus Christ from the death, these early Christian communities began constructing their Churches, theologies, liturgies and so forth, making use of whatever good, God has blessed them with in their land and culture. It is now the task of African theologians to do the same in their continent and local Churches no matter the condition they may find themselves.

b) *African theologians* must do this work of re-education of their people with great sense of responsibility based on the love of God and neighbour. They need to appreciate ourselves first, love their brothers and sisters before they can expect others to appreciate and love them. Let them make their people their friends. The greatest gift one can give to a friend is not money, not car, etc., but oneself and Jesus Christ. Let the African theologians donate themselves to their people. When Moses began the long and rigorous work of liberating the people of Israel from slavery, his first task was to make them love one another (cf. Exodus 2, 13-14). In other words, African theologians need

to develop the all important spirit of cooperation and inculcate the same to others. They need to re-educate themselves and the people on how to stop the fighting or seeking ways to destroy one another. Since individualism and intolerance have been identified as the major weakness of contemporary Africans, the re-education must aim to correct the too much intrigue and antagonism that is often the lifestyle of many today.

c) *African theologians* in this work of re-education of the people must tackle the question of eradicating the dependency syndrome that has eaten deep into the fabric of their continent. The forefathers of Africa are not known as beggars. But today, the Church in Africa is a mendicant (begging) Church. This is largely due to the fact, that the structures they have at present are foreign made. And to maintain these foreign made structures they need foreign money. That is, African Christians and Church leaders must come to the White man and beg him to help them maintain the Church in Africa whereas they have the means and human resources to do so. The greatest resources are the people. Obviously, the African people want to come out from the situation that has reduced them as objects of foreign charity. This implies, that from now, seminaries and houses of formation in Africa must stress self-confidence, hard work, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, and uprightness, along with intensive spirit of collaboration.

d) *African theologians* will not interpret the word *construction* in this context to mean building a four-wall structure. The existing structures they have at present in Africa are over enough to take them to the Promised Land. Take for instance the issue of establishing a theological faculty or research centre in one cultural zone. There is no cultural zone in Africa that has not gotten at least one state-owned university. What problem has the local Church there in approaching the state-owned university for an establishment of a faculty or a department of theology which we can be shared by Catholics and the Protestants? To obtain recognized degree in sacred theology the Africans must come to the West or go to America. Take Italy for example or any other countries of Europe all the major provincial state-owned universities have faculties of theology (in addition to the ones established by religious orders serving in the locality). The degrees they give are recognized as valid by the universal Church. Why can't each African nation (cultural/ethnic group) do the same? The existing sub-continental regional institutes such as CIWA (Catholic Institute for West Africa) which were established by the *Propaganda Fide* for the Catholics will continue their indispensable role of promoting regional cooperation and cultural exchange in theological scholarship among the member Churches. But in addition to that, it is very necessary to point out that we can not build a new language for a local Church (in liturgy, theology, catechism, etc.), unless we have a theological faculty established for that purpose and located within the geographical area of the cultural group in question.

e) *Among the African theologians* (of some cultural and language groups) there are experts who can take up for instance, the translation and redaction in the local language of some basic texts we use in theology, liturgy, catechism, etc. This must not be a personal work. It must be done by a group of local experts on that field who will be prepared to cooperate among themselves for the common good. The Igbo (of Nigeria) have a saying, *Ndi-Kwe, Ndi-Ekweghi* (deliberate rejection of coherence in opinion). In fact, it will appear that a lot of things about Africa boils down to *Ndi-Kwe, Ndi-Ekweghi*. Here I will like to highlight the true interpretation of the Igbo traditional republican system of *igbo enwe-eze* (Igbos have no King) as it applies to the general African situation. The Igbo traditional republican system of *igbo enwe-eze* makes allowance for consultation and discussion before carrying out any serious project. It is republican as well as communitarian. In its societal organisation, every public functionary has a well defined role and is accountable to the community at large. No decision is to be taken which has no approval of the greater number of members of the community who are represented by their *ndi-ichie*. The *ndi-ichie* are members of the parliament. In some communities, an age-grade is appointed by the elders to this function. They elect one of their ranks as the premier and another as the speaker. And so are the other functions distributed even to those outside the *ndi-ichie* circle. The day to day governance of the community rests with this class of *ndi-ichie* (equivalent of the British Lower House or America's House of

Representatives). After this ruling class of *ndi-chie*, there is the upper class (who are the eldest class or age-grade in the community). The kind the British call House of Lords (or the Americans refer to as House of Senate). They serve as advisers and counsellors and work closely with the *Igwe or Eze* (King). They are the custodians of the tradition of the community. They are regarded as honest and truthful class. Their words and judgement are final in matters affecting tradition and the common good. The *Eze-muo* (priest) works very closely with this class of *ndi-ichie*, to ensure that the will of God is always carried out.

The Igbo traditional republican system is complemented by another cultural concept, *di* (master): *di-mgba*, *di-nta*, *di-mu*, *di-anyi*. The *di* concept reflects the emphasis the Igbos place on charisms, natural gifts and competences (Mbefo 1996, 87). In other words, the Igbo traditional society had an *Eze* (King), a prime minister, house of parliament and a *Eze-muo* (priest). It had allowance for the recognition of gifts, charisms and competences and for their use for the common good. Therefore, it is historically wrong to assert that Africans (Igbos) are not known for obedience to authority (cf. Dowden 1999, 73). The Africans have *di* and *eze*. And in African traditional society the spirit of cooperation reigned supreme.

f) *The African theologians*, challenged by the above mentioned aspects of their cultural heritage, are requested to come together and form professional groups or associations that will serve as a model to their people for cooperation (among brothers and sisters). Such professional associations for instance, can take up the project for the translation and redaction in local languages of texts on theology, liturgy, catechism and so forth. They can also engage themselves with writing, publishing and documentation of the salvation history of their people (*heilsgeschichte*).⁷ One major advantage of this project is that through the professional associations the local Church will be kept alive and informed of any new development in theological studies and research.⁸

African theologians, I will like to add, should also promote the study of missiology in the continent. At present there is no Catholic Higher Institution or University in Africa that offers graduate and post-graduate degrees in missiology. Apart from the University of South Africa in Pretoria (which is Protestant) the continent is crying out for a chair in mission studies. The shift in modern theology has placed missiological studies at the centre of gravity: evangelisation, Christology, contextual theology, inculturation, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism, human promotion or liberation, globalisation, and so forth. Unless we begin in Africa specialisation studies in missiology the continent shall continue to be behind the world in these new areas of theological investigations.

g) *African theologians* should also take up the issue of getting a publishing house in their various countries for local production of major works of high scholarship in theology and other ecclesiastical disciplines. Here, I will like to return to my initial argument. In many African

⁷ Olauda Equiano, an Igbo ex-slave in London gave himself one task when he gained his freedom through the rigours of hard work. Equiano undertook to write the ethnography and history of the Igbos. By so doing he became the first documented Igbo historian and ethnographer. He wrote his autobiography. In that autobiography he proceeded to answer the question of Igbo origin by insisting that *Ndi-Igbo* are among the lost tribes of Israel. Equiano went on to confirm his conviction by appealing to the many identical cultural and religious elements practical among the Jews and the Igbos (cf. Equiano 1969 ed.). In the same perspective, Uche P. Ikeanyibe (an Evangelical pastor and biblist), recently published two small volumes in which he discusses the same issue of the biblical origin of Igbos and offers answers to the question of Igbo boldness and courage. The findings of these authors have also been confirmed by the Israelis archaeologists and Embassy in Nigeria when they visited in 1996, the Igbo historical towns of Aro-Chukwu, Aguleri, Igbo-Ukwu, Nri, etc. (cf. Ikeanyibe 1999 19ff). These are the oral traditions, the archaeological evidences and biblical testimonies about the migration and settlement of Eri with his entourage at a place near the Anambra River later called Aguleri/Nnri. The Bible mentioned Eri (the progenitor of the Igbos) as one of the sons of Gad (who is one of the twelve sons of Israel) cf. Gen. 46, 16; Numbers 26, 16). What are Igbo biblists and theologians saying about this fact? The history of Rome is built on a more incredible oral tradition.

⁸ In almost all the European countries and America, there are such associations. One of their major tasks is to bring to the awareness of their people a new publication or development in their area of competence. Take Italy for instance, any new major publication in missiology be it in German language or any other, is immediately taken up by the Italian missiological association and in a question of a year or so, the volume is translated into Italian for the local public. The same applies to other countries where such association exists.

countries, there are already established publishing houses serving the academic community up to the University level. There is nothing that stops the theologians in entering into dialogue with any of these publishing houses. All it may entail is for them to provide experts (editors) from the theological group that will give an authoritative vent to whatever will be published in that sector.⁹

h) African theologians should also insist that the program for the education of their people be it in the class room or through publications, must include the lives of great African heroes in various fields of life. Inspiration for the creation of a new identity can be gained from learning about the lives of Olauda Equiano, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Julius Nyerere, Steve Biko, Martyrs of Uganda, Blessed Iwene Tansi, Cardinal Joseph Malula of Kinshasa, etc. In the same vein, the theologians are challenged to publish works on those early local Christian converts and heroes whose courageous lives are not yet in print. Hence, topics for the licentiate and doctoral theses of African students should centre around African reality and dialogue with the works of pioneer African authors and theologians. This was what Thomas Aquinas did when he wrote on the works of the pagan Aristotle and baptised him. This is what students in the West and elsewhere are doing when they choose topics bordering on the works of their ancestral authors such as Immanuel Kant, Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Karl Barth and so forth.

However, there may be financial problem. But if the theologians form professional associations with missionary objective, they shall always see the lay faithful ready to provide them with the money required. This is also another way of forming the laity on spirit of cooperation for mission and pastoral works as well as for social development of the society at large. Thus, African theologians are challenged to continue the documentary work and publication on the history and culture of their people. This must of necessity include their new story in the Christian Church. Therefore, it must be pursued in a form of dialogue between their culture, history and the Gospel message. This is also another way of educating the people and of recreating a new cultural identity. It is a way of evangelisation. The fruit of such a project may not be reaped in our time. But we shall be happy that the future generation will have something good to tell about us.

6. Conclusion

Our starting point is the call for a new language for missiology in Africa. The paper has tried to show the inadequacies of the prevailing missiology in the evangelisation of Africa. It has also demonstrated that the new language can only emerge through the involvement of African Christians and theologians in the construction of local theology, liturgy, catechism and so forth. But this should always be carried out in communion with the universal Church-Family. In other words, the role of African intellectuals and gifted theologians in the development of new cultural identity is irreplaceable.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the famous Kenyan novelist, in one of his books, *Devil on the Cross*, tells a story of a man who suffers from ogre. The ogre has lived with the man for many years that it is already a malignant likely to prove fatal to his health. The man has visited all the well known medicine men but none of them could cure him. One day he decided to visit an old man. After narrating his story, the old man looked at him in the face and said: My child, you have a key to the solution of your problem. Then the old man told him: Go home, get an oil, boil it, and then pour it on your back at the very spot where the ogre is, and you will experience a total freedom. But our friend shouted: But what shall become of my back. There you are, replied the old man. You have

⁹ I emphasize this fact of entering into agreement with a local based publishing house for obvious reasons. First, books well printed and published in Africa is not only affordable but also serves the local community. Secondly, the voice of leading African theologians is scarcely being heard in the continent because of the dearth of publishing houses for theological works there. Again, thousands of theses and papers given in Africa continue to gather dust and may never see publication. Even, the works of leading African authors circulate more in Europe and America than within Africa itself which they are meant to serve (Okoye 1997, 16).

now known what to do. Either you go back home, risk a burnt back and experience a total freedom, or you go back and live with the ogre as a perpetual feature of your body.

Cooperation is the key word that can lead us to eradicating the root cause of our problem in Africa. This applies both to our ecclesial and civil communities. We must cooperate and love ourselves as brothers and sisters. Only in this way can we cloth and build a house for Jesus Christ who has found a “new home land in Africa”.

Francis Anekwe Oborji, a Catholic priest from Nigeria, has his doctorate in missiology from the Pontifical Urban University, Rome, where at present he is professor of mission theology and the history of evangelisation in Africa. He is also the current Executive Secretary of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achebe, Chinua. 1958: *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heineman.
- 1983: *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- Ayinmode, A. Babatunde. 2001: “The African Mindset: Too much Intrigue, lots of Intolerance, too little Selflessness”, in *Nigeriaworld* (website home page), 04/02/2001, pp. 1-4.
- Ayisi, O. Eric. 1992: *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture*. London: Heinemann.
- Basden, G.T. 1938: *Niger Ibos*. London: Seeley Service & Co.
- Boka di Mipasi, Londi. 1990: “Quandi l’Africain dit “inculturation”, in *Telema* vol 63, pp. 15-37.
- Bosch, David, J. 1993: *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Carey, William. 1891: *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Clapham, Christopher. *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Coulon, P., et alii (eds). 1988: *Libermann (1802-1852)*. Paris: Cerf.
- Dowden, Richard. 1999: “What’s Wrong with Africa?”, in *The Tablet* (16 January), pp. 72-73.
- Dupuis, Jacques. 1994: “Evangelisation and Mission” in Latourelle, R., and Fisichella, R. (eds). *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*. New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, pp. 275-282.
- Equiano, Olauda. 1969: *Equiano’s Travels: His Autobiography: The Interesting Narrative Life of Olauda Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*. Abridged and edited by P. Edwards. London: Heinemann.
- Gibellini, Rosino (ed.). 1994: *Paths of African Theology*. London: SCM Press.
- Ikeanyibe, Uche, P. 1999: *The Quest for the Origin of Igbo People*. Lagos: Aikmay Press.
- John Paul II. 1995: *Ecclesia in Africa* (Post-Synodal Exhortation). Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- 1990: *Redemptoris Missio* (RMi) Encyclical Letter). Vatican City: Libreria

Editrice Vaticana.

- Mbefo, L. Nnamdi. 1996: *Coping with Nigeria's Two-Fold Heritage*. Onitsha: Spiritan Publications.
- Morrow, Lance. 1992: "Africa: The Scramble for Existence", in *Times* (7 December), pp. 30-32.
- Mushete, A. Ngindu. 1994: "An Overview of African Theology", in R. Gibellini (ed.). *Paths of African Theology*. London: SCM, pp. 9-26.
- Mveng, Engelbert. 1971: "Négritude et civilisation gréco-romaine", in *Colloque sur la negritude* (Dakar, Senegal, 12-18 April, 1971). Paris: Présence Africaine, pp. 43-52.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1983: *Devil on the Cross*. London: Heineman.
- Nzuzi, Bibaki. 2000: "The Missiology Institute of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo", in S. Karotemprel, et alii (eds). *Promoting Mission Studies: The Role of Missiological Institutes*. Shillong, India, pp. 239-241.
- Oborji, Anekwe, F. 1998: *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*. Rome: Leberit Press.
- 1999: *La teologia Africana e l'evangelizzazione*. Rome: Leberit Press.
- 1998/99: "Tendencies in the Third World Theologies", in *Encounter* vol 4, pp. 26-35.
- 2000: "In Dialogue with African Traditional Religion", in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, vol 10/2000/1, pp. 57-76.
- 2000b: *Missiologia contemporanea*. Rome: PUU.
- Okoye, James, C. 1997: "African Theology", in K. Müller, et alii (eds). *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspective*. New York: Orbis Books, pp. 9-17.
- Parratt, John. 1995: *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. 1997: *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium* (an interview with Peter Seewald). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Sarpong, Peter, K. 1996: "Conclusion", in *African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*. New York: Orbis Books, pp. 220-226.
- Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa. 1994: *Nuntius (Message)*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Tiénou, Tite. 1996: "The Training of Missiologists for an African Context", in J. Dudley Woodberry, et alii (eds). *Missiological Education for the 21st Century: The Book, the Circle and the Sandals*. New York: Orbis Books, pp. 93-100.
- Uzukwu, Elochukwu, E. 1996: *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Vatican Council II. 1966: Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes* (AG).
- 1965: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG).
- 1966: Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Gaudium et spes* (GS)
- 1963: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC). (Flannery Austin 1979 (ed.). Minnesota: The Liturgical Press).
- White, J.E. 1992: "African-American Eyes", in *Time* (September 7), pp. 52-53.