BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

AFRICA: FIFTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE
Religion, Unity, Theology & Reinventing Africa

PUBLISHED BY
The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians
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Many African countries have celebrated, or are planning to celebrate, 50 years of independence. Ghana was independent in 1957; while Nigeria gained independence in 1960. Celebrations were accompanied with parties and fanfare. But are Africans generally better off since the 50 years of independences? What success areas should one focus on, and what regrettable areas should one move away from? The Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology is primarily interested in the way religion and theological reflection impact African societies for better or for worse. Volume 23 asks important and perhaps provocative questions about how and to which destination Africans have been journeying since 50 years.

The lead paper by Ramazani Bishwende reflects on the dreams and hopes of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans on the future of the Black peoples throughout the world: The need for the United States of Africa, strong and progressive to ensure that the evils of slavery, colonialism, ethnic and religious bigotry, and underdevelopment are set aside so that humans flourish in the continent where human life emerged in the first place. The author expatiates on the dream of Cheikh Anta Diop on the shape and form of the United States of Africa and evaluates the problems and prospects of realizing such a dream, regionally and continentally. The second paper by Yushua Sodiq surveys one of the possible problem areas of the continent—religion and its fallout. He surveys the Islamic Shari’ah Law as thought out and applied in Zamfara State of Nigeria. In fact there is a diversity of viewpoints on what has actually been achieved through Shari’ah in Zamfara sate; his conclusion is that, based on the events on the ground, scholarly opinion calls for careful evaluation of its impact in the state and in Nigeria with reliable evidence or data.

Two contributions x-ray what has been going wrong with the African imagination and especially the disservice of misinformed scholarship in moving Africa forward. David Tonghou Ngong discounts the usefulness of the radical break some African theologians establish between African patterns of thought and
Western patterns following the vitalistic philosophy of Placide Tempels. This ethnosophy is totally unhelpful for postcolonial Africa. He rather aligns with critical African philosophy in indentifying Africa’s limited scientific and technological development as the principal cog in the wheel of economic progress and human flourishing in the continent; societies can hardly flourish economically if they are not scientifically and technologically strong. Consequently, the scientific mode of thought, rather than the vitalistic, is a more helpful and progressive model for African theology. Using similar and perhaps stronger and more passionate language, Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua excoriates the total absence of the postcolonial state, the installation of patrimonialism as statecraft, and the corroding of the African imagination by the “witchcraft mentality”. Not only that elderly women and children are accused, brutalized and killed as witches in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Nigeria, but in many of these countries witchcraft and the occultic present the sites for experiencing and analyzing political conflict, economic success or failure. Neo-Pentecostalism and the so-called Churches of Awakening criminally propagate witch-hunting and divert attention away from criminalized postcolonial state. The Churches and theologians have a major task of playing their prophetic role in denouncing corruption and the politics of the belly, and also in deconstructing the witchcraft mentality.

Finally, focusing on the shape of the universal Church, with particular reference to the challenges of ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue, Ignatius M. C. Obinwa proposes the African extended family system as a viable model for unity; various Christian confessions become sub families of an extended family representing the universal Church; they relate to one another as the ancient local Churches did in the early years of Christianity, before cleavages occurred. Perhaps Obinwa’s paradigm will help Africans re-examine the issue of African unity for human flourishing.

Elochukwu Uzukwu C.S.Sp.  Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka
When Will There Be a United States of Africa?
Stepping-stone Toward an African Renaissance in the Age of Globalization

By

Augustin Ramazani Bishwende
St Paul's University, Ottawa, Canada

We live in a historical period that is marked by globalization. The world has become a planetary village; people live in close proximity to one another. They live in a state of interaction, interconnection, interdependence, and intercommunion. In this mondial society, as Edgar Morin likes to call it, to give substance to the concept of development that is endogenous, self-cantered, and cultured, taking account of the context and the country, which is to say the historical milieu and social insertion, people are becoming more and more sensitive to the paradigm of regional integration, to differing economic and political groupings. This is done to support the economic growth of their regions, their continent, and their countries, to face up to industrial, economic, and commercial competition that has become more and more fierce on the world market. In brief, this is the price of development. If, since independence, Africans have difficulty agreeing about the project of a United States of Africa, is it permitted to maintain that this non-federal paradigm would be tainted with imperialism? Could it work toward the regional disintegration of Africa and deconstruct a common African identity? In brief, would it be an obstacle to an African renaissance?

The discussions of political leaders do not converge over the unity of black Africa, but these are the same political figures who established the African Union. The African Union was born from the will to boost regional integration. But the African Union is not the United States of Black Africa. When one itemizes the various writings that have been published on this subject since independence, one becomes aware that various researchers present different sensitivities, ideological tendencies, currents, ideas, and
reflections of political figures yet they have difficulty in having recourse to the arguments of specialists, historians, sociologists, and philosophers of African politics who have asked this question since before the start of the decolonization of Africa in 1953. It is difficult to analyze their thought as well as the scientific arguments that have militated in favour of a federal state of black Africa. This is the reason I intend, in this article, not to present the arguments of political figures over the United States of Africa but rather the thought of the erudite scholar Cheikh Anta Diop over the pertinence of a federal state of black Africa.

In the 1960’s, Diop published a work entitled “The Cultural, Technical, and Industrial Foundations of a future Federal State of Black Africa” (“Les fondements culturels, techniques et industriels d’un futur État federal d’Afrique”) in the edition Présence Africaine in Paris. He re-edited his work a decade later by lightly modifying the title of the first edition. The old Title, “Les fondements culturels, techniques et industriels” became, in the reviewed and corrected edition of 1974, “The Economic and Cultural Foundations of a Federal State of Black Africa” (“Les fondements économiques et culturels d’un État federal d’Afrique noire”). What message did Diop want to transmit both to black Africa and the world as a result of this publication? What are the cultural foundations of a federal state of black Africa? What is the political landscape of this federal state that he advocates? What have we done with his message? Has there been a genuine reception of Diop’s thought in black Africa?

Our reflection will consist of four axes: (1) The historical context: the goal will be to become enriched by the history and experience of others. (2) Precise terminology: is there a difference between confederation and federation? (3) Diop’s political thought on the federal State of Black Africa. (4) An African renaissance

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occurs by means of the United States of Africa. We have conceived of our heuristic hypothesis as follows: “It is imperative that Africa become united.” This rallying cry launched by Kwame Nkrumah has been current since the 1950’s. The United States of Africa would therefore be the response to the balkanization of the continent and to the division of the African peoples imposed by the Conference of Berlin (1884-1885). Such states would help in the struggle against the devastating ravages of a neo-liberal, globalized capitalism that provoked conflict, misery in all its forms, poverty and other challenges throughout all of black Africa—in brief, the regional disintegration of the African continent. The United States of Africa is the only one “likely to make the continent an actor on the world stage”.  

The realization of the project of a United States of Africa would allow the creation of a new African federal state that would cover 30,065,000 square kilometres and would consist of a total population estimated to be more than 800 million inhabitants presently and 1 billion inhabitants in the near future. The current model of sovereignty has brought nothing but chaos to Africa. But the black continent’s progression toward a federal government would bring a glimmer of hope. A united Africa that would speak with one voice would have more weight effectively and would be in a situation of strength in its relations with the rest of the world. Besides, by creating a conjoined African military force, one African currency, and an African passport permitting the free circulation, within Africa, of all African nationals, the project of a United States of Africa is likely to settle the problem of the ‘micro-nationalisms that are the wound of the ‘African continent’ according to the Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade. More than merely a political project that would endow the continent with an operational executive power, the United States of Africa expresses the will of the various peoples of Africa to construct an African identity on a basis of shared values”.

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4 www.fesman2009.com/fr/component/content/article/68/182.
Becoming Enriched by the History and Experience of Others

After the American Revolution of the 18th century, the American states understood that they had to unite and work together in order to survive and become a power in the concert of nations after the experience of British colonization. The deep-seated motivations for the union of the American states aimed to establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to Americans of that age and their posterity.\(^5\) And so, marked by this historical consciousness of self-determination and liberty for all Americans and their posterity, they created this United States of America under the presidency of George Washington (1789-1797), which imposed itself as a global economic power after the Second World War. “It bears recalling that the famous ‘We the People of the United States’ in the American Constitution of 1787 excludes Indians, Blacks, women, and even indentured servants. This constitution appeared as a ‘work of genius’ in 1787, conceived by men who were wise and full of humanism, who would have erected a noble juridical framework in homage to democracy and equality. In fact, the new constitution was composed by a small colonial elite—55 men among the richest of the New World.”\(^6\)

If Americans fought for justice, liberty, and peace in view of their prosperity, Europeans today are preoccupied with the future and the evolution of their union for themselves and their posterity. This union was begun as ECSC, the European Coal and Steel Community, in 1951. It has currently been broadened to an economic and political union of 27 countries (with the Euro as operational currency through the currency market) that looks to

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\(^5\) “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl/amnord/usa_6-3histoire.htm.

\(^6\) www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl/amnord//usa_6-3histoire.htm.
integrate such Balkan countries as Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Greece. There is even talk of the possibility of bringing Turkey into the European Union. Europe has been searching for a way to consolidate peace because of the fear of Soviet expansion after the end of the Second World War. On March 17, 1948, the Europeans signed the Treaty of Brussels that anticipated a union in the west, instituting an economic, social, and cultural collaboration and collective defence. But when one reads the various declarations of the European Founding Fathers Jean Monnet, Konrad Adenauer, and particularly the Declaration of May 9, 1950 by Robert Schuman, the objective was to replace national rivalries with a union of peoples respecting liberty and diversity. But the objective was also obviously to create a European power, rival to the United States of America, their principal ally, and the Arab-Muslim world,\(^7\) which has plunged the west into anxiety because of all the problems created by terrorism.

Today, we would not be able to forget the great gestating project of reassembly of the new group of the Community of Latin-American States and the Caribbean as a distinct regional area devoted to freeing itself of all foreign guardianship, with the objective of creating its own World Bank. Latin-Americans want an end to Yankee imperialism. They definitely want to quit the Organization of American States (OAS) located in Washington and dominated principally by the United States of America which, according to them, seems to have failed when faced with the political, economic, and social integration of the entire region. The OAS has worked toward the disintegration of the Southern countries. Even though the Community does not yet actually exist, Latin-Americans wish to constitute a communal cadre that is unified, democratic, and respectful without restricting the rights of humans.

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\(^7\) The cultural treaty between the states of the Arab League was signed after November 25, 1945, with the promotion of cultural cooperation among the countries of the Arab world as objective.
Finally, there is talk of the Conference on Interactions and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) which seeks to operate an economic reassembly of Asian countries under the auspices of creating a great bank, modelled on the World Bank, prior to conducting and managing Asian economic affairs with the rest of the world. This conference imposed itself on the margins of the meeting of the United Nations after the financial crisis of the nineties. Among the responsibilities of the 22 countries who are members of CICA, democracy and cooperation present themselves as instruments enabling the prevention of disputes and encouraging understanding and mutual respect between different cultures and religions. The goal is to enhance the security and development of the entire region. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall and during the Cold War, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had long established itself as the world power in Asia opposed to the European-American coalition thanks to its much more powerful internal cohesion. Until today, the Soviets have succeeded in spreading their Communism to other continents and influencing certain large countries like China, Cuba, and Angola.

And now, *when will there be an African United States?* We have had the Organization for African Unity (OAU) in sub-Saharan Africa since 1963. It came into being from the failure of the turbulent and chaotic political and ideological debates between the federalists (Kwame Nkrumah) and the sovereignists (L.S. Senghor, Félix Houphouët-Boigny) over the possibility of a federal State of Black Africa. The heads of state present at Addis Ababa opted for the OAU with a view to promote solidarity and unity between African states with the goal of eradicating colonialism, and to accompany the independence movements in African countries. The OAU seems to have really worked at the promotion of cooperation between these states. It helped certain states that were still colonized to regain political emancipation; it contributed to the vigorous denunciation of apartheid without, for all that, waging combat against it. But did it actually favour the economic integration of Africa? Forty years later, in 2002, the African heads
of state, after several disagreements about the constitution of the United States of Africa and prior to the failure of the OAU, sensed the need to create the African Union (AU). It was created in Durban, South Africa with a view to strengthening the regional integration of Africa. Even though stillborn for certain historians, the objective of the AU is to work at promoting democracy, human rights, and the development of Africa by attracting foreign investment through the program of The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Despite the creation of the OAU and the AU, a question has traversed the entire postcolonial period since 1924\(^8\) and preoccupied African intellectuals before political figures appropriated it in order to dismiss it because of their own egoistic interests: It is the *United States of Africa*. The question has been raised several times by the President of Libya; it failed at the ninth African Union summit at Accra in July, 2007 and at Addis Ababa in January, 2008. It will simply be entrusted to a ministerial commission because it does not interest certain African political leaders; it will be revisited in 2015. What does the Senegalese savant Cheikh Anta Diop think about the federal State of Black Africa?

**An African Confederation or Federation?**

Why does Diop speak of the federation rather than the confederation of Africa? The term “confederation” is used when it is a question of creating a state founded on an *international treaty*,

\(^8\) “The idea of the *United States of Africa* was proposed from 1924 on by the Jamaican writer Marcus Garvey, who dreamed of an Africa that was strong, showed solidarity, and was prosperous. This vision was the origin of the creation of Pan-African movements in 1945. The use of the term United States of Africa at the fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester during the same year by W.E.B. Du Bois, Patrice Lumumba, George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah marked a decisive step towards its creation. Since then, this name has designated the creation of an eventual federal African state.” Cf.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etats_Unis_d’Afrique.
such as the Canadian Confederation or the Swiss Confederation. For his part, Diop would like Africa to become a federation and not a confederation, that is to say a federal state founded on a federal constitution after the example of the United States of America. This country constitutes the first modern political federation. But one also finds other political federations in Europe, such as Germany, Belgium and other countries. A federal state is assured of its power thanks to a double government: federal and state or provincial. The federal state is recognized by the articulation of three political principles: the principle of exclusion, the principle of autonomy, and the principle of participation. Given this terminological precision, a federal state is truly different from a confederated state. And for Diop, the African continent must become a federal state, drawing its political power from a federal constitution through which the federal and provincial governments are recognized and draw their power and strength while respecting the principles of exclusion, autonomy, and participation in the development and socio-political and economic construction of the administered territory. Why a federal state in Africa? What is the objective of such a project?

The Political Thought of Cheikh Anta Diop over the Federal State of Black Africa

*The Cultural Foundations of the Federal State of Black Africa*

During the 1960’s, Diop noticed that the history of Africa was being written by other people, the Europeans in particular. Black Africans have a more or less confused cognizance of their history. They have trouble following, as a practical matter, their own historical evolution from Sudanese-Egyptian antiquity to our era. Black Africans do not know the history of their continent. Thus, the necessity imposed itself on Diop to not only write the history of
Africa but also and especially to restore the historical consciousness of the black African. It is necessary to demonstrate and establish the historical, psychological, geographical, economic, and cultural unity of all the inhabitants of the black continent following from their adaptation to the same material conditions of existence. A common linguistic foundation also exists. African languages present the same unity and form a large linguistic family as homogeneous as that of the Indo-European languages. In his view, we cannot think about

[C]onstructing an African federal state on the scale of the black continent except on the basis of our historical, psychological, economic and geographical unity. In order to fashion this national unity, we are obligated to found it on a modern native cultural basis, to recreate our linguistic unity through the choice of an appropriate African language that we will elevate to the level of a modern cultural language.... Linguistic unity dominates the entirety of national life. Without it, national and cultural unity is nothing but a fragile illusion.¹⁰

For Diop, linguistic development should be the first task, having priority in view of establishing a federal state on a continental scale. Linguistic unity must be the foundation of foundations for a black federal African state. Taking the example of the United States of America, the real revolution consisted, among other things, in implementing a linguistic plan under the presidency of John Adams (1797-1801) with a view toward arriving at the imposition of English as the only national language,

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¹⁰ Black Africa overflows with natural resources, agriculturally rich soil and energy resources: hydraulic, solar, thermo-nuclear, wind, thermal-sea, tidal, thermal-volcanic, geothermal; their utilization by Africans to transform the raw materials that the continent harbours would turn it into an earthly paradise. None of these energies is polluting, contrary to coal, petroleum, and atomic energy. Cf. DIOP C.A., Les fondements économiques et culturels d'un État fédéral d'Afrique noire, p. 72.

the language of the colonizer. From multilingualism to a Jacobin monolingualism, the Americans made their choice beyond the tensions that existed among several languages: English, French, German, and Spanish.

Diop demands that a competent inter-territorial commission consisting of patriots who love Africa be put in place. He turns to them again to choose one of Africa's principal languages as the only language both of government and culture on a continental scale. This language will be spoken in all the countries of black Africa; it will be taught in the secondary schools of the continent. As this evolution proceeds, once the school and university textbooks in the different disciplines are written in this language, it will replace the old European languages entirely in all official education. Nevertheless, Diop does not do away with the European languages from education; they will become the viable optional languages in official education at the secondary level. He insists on the fact that it would not be possible to establish linguistic unity continent-wide using a foreign language. He would qualify doing so as "cultural abortion".\footnote{Ibid, p.25.} We must fight all attempts at assimilation coming from the outside. Thus, it would resolve a lot of problems if Africa were to opt for one language only for government and culture that any foreigner would learn in order to communicate with any African from any region. This would permit Africa to become disencumbered by simplifying relations among Africans themselves but also between Africans and the rest of the world. Prior to thinking about creating a black federal state of Africa, Diop invites Africans to resolve the vital problems that the continent faces, the cultural problem in particular. "The influence of language is so important that the different European countries think they can retire politically in appearance from Africa without much harm, while remaining there in actuality in the economic, spiritual, and cultural domains."\footnote{Ibid, p.26.}
After having insisted upon the cultural-linguistic unity of black Africa as prerequisite and foundation of the constitution of a continental state for Africa, Diop advises against African political officials who never cease deceiving the popular masses with false unions without a historical future: Commonwealth, Francafrique, Eurafrique. The state in Africa must conceive itself under the form of a federation, that is to say an effective political and economic organization governed by a collegial power. Black Africa swings over the slope of its federal destiny. The progressive reinforcement of organic "federal" connections, to the detriment of a central administration dependent upon the former home countries, presents itself as a means of survival for black Africa.

Nevertheless, "the proliferation of political leaders is a specifically African fact, stemming from the colonization by various countries and the division in administrative territories of vast conquered regions."

It constitutes a serious difficulty in the attempts at the continent-wide unification of Africa. Despite beautiful public declarations, multiple interests, both individual and general, [lead to more and more of an attachment] to the borders of different territories [inherited from colonization]. Furthermore, no one has yet proposed a concrete way that might be able to lead infallibly and rapidly to a federation of African states, with partial or total abandonment of local sovereignty. No one has even proposed a kind of cartel of presidents or heads of state as an embryo of federal government that would be enlarged at the same time that states are emancipated. However, one could thus constitute a collegial direction at the heart of which one would refuse to give the primacy to this or that head of state until the entire continent was independent. Particular interests would be safeguarded as well as the unity of Africa.... In this way, the existence of
continental states risks being the prelude to planetary unification.\textsuperscript{13}

In this perspective, the actual independence of black Africa passes through the constitution of a continental federal state. Diop deplores that certain political officials continue to treat the national problems of Africa with the mentality of functionaries.

Several reasons make the project difficult to set up. First of all, black Africa is constituted by numerous "so-called political leaders" in name only who have been put in place by the former colonial powers. These "leaders" work only for the interests of the home country—their masters. Then, the division of Africa effectuated by the Conference of Berlin seems to have performed a sort of territorial surgery. It split up the African continent into several small administrative territories that do not permit the heads of state and the governments to appropriate the pan-African project of a federal state of black Africa. Finally, this project is delayed because of the absence of serious cultural policies in all the independent states of black Africa. Except for Tanzania and Kenya, who have adopted Swahili as the language of government, "no state has yet established a systematic policy of systematic renovation of the national language, none utilizes an African language as the language of government, none seeks to create without delay a powerful modern army endowed with a strong air force, civically educated and incapable of Latin American style putsches, but capable of suddenly facing the historical tasks that could still await us. Instead, we risk having symbolic embryos of an army, with outdated materiel, no air force, no ballistic missiles of any sort, but that would counterbalance an ultra-modern and dictatorial police force."\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid}, p.32-34.
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}, p.44-45.
\end{itemize}
United States of Africa?

What will be the limits of this Federal State of Black Africa?

For Diop, they would extend from the Tropic of Cancer to the Cape of Good Hope, from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. This federal State of Black Africa would be subdivided into eight regions, each of which overflows with resources that Africans can exploit: the Basin of Congo-Zaire, the Region of the Gulf of Benin, Ghana and the Ivory Coast, Guinea-Sierra Leone-Liberia, the Tropical Zone (Senegal-Mali-Niger), Nilotic Sudan-Great Lakes-Ethiopia, the Basin of the Zambezi, South Africa. The industrial and technical politics of this federal State of Black Africa would be thought and rethought, within the framework of an overall plan conceived to the scale of Africa, taking account of the resources that are found in each region. This general plan of industrialization of the federal State of Black Africa cannot be led successfully except through a federal government and the totality of the African people.

Where will the Investment Funds needed to realize this Industrial Vocation of Black Africa come from?

According to Diop, they will come from the following five sources: (1) The most important investment factor is human. It is the collective will of the people to serve the country. (2) It is necessary to put in place a new political economy (NPE) that endeavours to promote mixed, private and state industrial companies with a growing part of the federal government. (3) We should exchange our precious metals for strong currencies and machines. (4) We should sell our surplus raw materials, as long as our industries cannot absorb them. (5) Finally, we should count on international investment funds. It is not necessary to exaggerate the need for aid as a way of avoiding blackmail. We must count on ourselves above all and refuse aid that is stocked with unacceptable conditions. In brief, Africa must develop its own interior market, which is one of the most important in the world, in order to organize the economy of the federal State of Black Africa.
In conclusion, Diop shows that at the end of the day, a federated black Africa will become industrially and politically as powerful as the Soviet Union or the United States of America. At the end, he proposes twelve essential points as basic principles to make the federal State of Black Africa effective: (1) Restore cognizance of our historical unity. (2) Work at linguistic development on a continental scale—one African language for culture and government. The European languages will be proposed as viable languages for secondary education and the national languages will be officially elevated to the rank of languages of government serving the expression of Parliament and for the drafting of laws. (3) Find an efficient form of representation for the feminine population of the nation. (4) Give life to the African federal unity by unifying French and English speaking Africa. It is the only way to swing black Africa over the slope of its historical destiny. (5) Place in the Constitution the necessary measures so that an industrial bourgeoisie doesn’t come into existence by proving that one is socialist and by preventing one of the fundamental evils of capitalism. (6) Create a powerful State industry. Give precedence to industrialization, development, and to the mechanization of agriculture. (7) Create a powerful modern army, endowed with an air force and a strong civic education. (8) Create technical institutes that are indispensable to a modern state: nuclear physics and chemistry, electronics, aeronautics, applied chemistry, etc. (9) Reduce the styles of living and equalize salaries in order to transform political postings into working positions. (10) Organize the farmers who possess adjoining fields into cooperatives of production with the goal of mechanizing and modernizing agriculture for large-scale production. (11) Create model State farms in order to enlarge the technical and social experience of unorganized farmers. (12) Promote a policy of full employment in order to progressively eliminate the material dependence of certain social categories. 

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15 Cf. Ibid, p.120-122.
History shows that unity confers strength. All the people of the world, Americans as well as Europeans, who have integrated and adopted the principle of union and regional reassembly in their social project have acted according to three fundamental points: the principle of self-determination, the principle of justice, and finally the principle of economic justice.

1) Principle of self-determination: The American Revolution purports first and foremost to be a quest for independence and autonomy away from the colonial British power. For the Europeans, the political stakes of the Union are to become autonomous in the face of the primary world economic power, the United States of America which, after the Second World War, came to the rescue of Europe with the Marshall Plan. Faced with the certain menace that terrorism currently represents worldwide, the Europeans want to constitute themselves as a power in order to face the Arab-Muslim world. When Africans reflect on the project of the United States of Africa, do they think to win their autonomy when faced with foreign powers? Do they want to remain continually dependent on others? If they reflect, in the context of current geopolitics, on being able to occupy their place in the concert of nations, not as victims but as historical subjects, they will see the pertinence and the urgency of constituting a federal state.

2) The Principle of justice: In a world marked by domination, the inequalities, the injustice installed in the case of America by the British colonial system on the one hand and in the case of Europe by globalization—the delocalization from the neo-liberal capitalist system, creating economic and financial crises every decade and by the real menace of terrorism from the Arab-Muslim world—Americans and Europeans have understood that the stakes are high to become unified in order to survive and struggle together. Do Africans perceive the necessity of creating the United States of Africa? If so, they could combat together the effects of neo-liberal capitalism that renders them fragile by becoming victims of an
unjust globalization. They could fight against the imperialism of colonizing powers and the exploitation of multinational companies that pursue the pillage of their resources.

3) **The Principle of Economic Progress**: It consists in the territorial pacification and the construction of free and autonomous territorial areas in order to advance the prosperity of all. The Americans constituted a union in order to establish peace in their territory, to assure the freedom of their citizens, to be powerful with an eye to the economic progress of their states and the general wellbeing of all Americans. After the Second World War, the Europeans felt the necessity to pacify their continent, to work for the freedom of their citizens and to become powerful so as to ensure the economic progress of all Europeans. After independence, many African countries are in the grip of civil and ethnic war. The continent has known several crimes against humanity, crimes of war, the massacres and genocides of the Tutsi, the Hutu, and the Congolese. Wars follow one another and the war lords continue to pillage, to kill, and to massacre in order to accede to power. Why would the historical destiny of Africa not project a United States of Africa in order to put an end to all of these horrors? Why would the salvation of this continent not go the way of reconciliation and peace by consolidating viable economies for the wellbeing of all Africans?

In fact, fifty years after independence, we can affirm clearly and unambiguously, with regard to the modern African scene, that Diop’s thought has not yet been received in black Africa. We can affirm this by acknowledging the following three points:

1) **The triumph of the African model of partisan sovereignty**: Even though they have delayed the question of the United States of Black Africa until 2012, many African heads of state are not very enthusiastic. The stakes and economic and political interests are very high and have the upper hand over the general interest of Africa in its entirety. The political model of an Africa of states seems to have currently triumphed on the continent.
For certain African heads of state the inviolability of the borders drawn by the Conference of Berlin and inherited from the colonial administration seems like a gain. Even partisans of sovereignty such as the president of Senegal Leopold Sedar Senghor and Felix Houphouet Boigny of the Ivory Coast, attached to gradual and progressive unification, do not seem to have worked during their lifetimes to make their minimalist politics operationally effective. The hope for an African renaissance by means of a federal state of black Africa is dwindling. The future for a United States of Africa seems to us to be uncertain, yet we believe it is the path that could lead the continent to its effective self-determination, to its opening up, to its economic liberation and to the sincere fraternization of the black peoples as a prelude to global unification.

2) The industrialization of the continent and the economic consolidation of African states seem to be a stinging failure. With the exception of South Africa, a country considered to be one of the great regional industrial powers, several African states are currently having difficulty in creating viable economies. Because of this, they are unable to support an industrial and technical program that attracts sufficient financial means. However, the current task of black Africa, even though it is a victim in the cogwheel of the global economy, will be to become as globalizing and to become part of the concert of other nations. Today in black Africa, the urgency is to create a vast common market encouraging, foremost and fundamentally, every African country to produce, distribute, and consume its own products before selling them elsewhere. Black Africa becomes fragile when it depends first and foremost on foreign markets. The economic cooperation of the southern countries (cooperation Sud-Sud), put in place by certain countries such as Brazil, South Africa, China, Iran, and Mexico, is meant to be encouraged on the continent without neglecting, obviously, the cooperation between north and south.

3) The continental linguistic development does not keep up. With the exception of Swahili, adopted as the language of communication by the African Union (AU), linguistic unification
on a territorial and continental scale, that is to say the choice of an African language of culture and government used throughout Africa, remains a dead issue. European languages such as English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese are used in many African countries. Even though they remain important for communicating with the world, they will not work toward the opening up of Africa. This situation is such that black Africa will remain dominated, colonized, and culturally alienated for several years. In order for the different corners of the African continent to understand one another, they are obligated to communicate in foreign languages that have been inherited from colonization. Yet they possess national African languages that would facilitate rapprochement.

Conclusion: The African Renaissance Occurs through the United States of Africa

We cannot but maintain here that if Africa experiences so many problems, multiform crises, civil wars and political murders, massacres, genocides, and famine—in brief, if Africa experiences a certain disenchantment with its internal organization and its economic integration—it is because it is not sufficiently united. We think that the renaissance of Africa occurs through the creation of a federal state on the continent. The politics of economic-political, cultural, and social integration of the continent by means of the constitution of a political federation would be beneficial and advantageous on several accounts. We think that the United States of Africa presents itself, first and foremost, as an anti-imperialistic policy. Next, the United States of Africa constitutes a basis and foundation of socio-political and economic unity for the continent. Finally, the United States of Africa would help Africans to articulate cogently unity in diversity and diversity in unity—in brief, the United States of Africa would permit Africans to live the experience of otherness with respect for each people’s indigenous identity.
United States of Africa?

The United States of Africa, an Anti-Imperialistic Policy

The politics to which imperialists, like dictators, have recourse in every place, consists in *dividing in order to rule and dominate more effectively*. Becoming unified is the first and most fundamental requirement in order to cast off imperialism and every form of domination. The failure of the Organization of African Unity was already manifest in its initial conception. In the view of different parties that opposed the African heads of state, it was not an agreement about African unity that made the birth of the OAU possible in 1963, but rather the communal opposition to political systems based on race adopted by Pretoria in South Africa. The exit from Pan-Africanism played itself out in three minutes when, on May 25, 1963, the Algerian president Ahmed Ben Bella intervened in order to support the effort for decolonization. For him, this last item was a political agenda of high priority. By insisting on decolonization, the Pan-African conference of 1963 precluded from the priorities of the OAU the Pan-African program for the unification of Africa and for the federation of African states.

In effect, if for Pan-Africanism, unity and solidarity, even more than fundamental African cultural values, are nothing but immediate and urgent means for constructing the wellbeing and security of Africans, the OAU poses unity and solidarity as objectives to be attained. This method proves itself to be a handy way to clear the urgency of the problem of unification, in order to substitute cooperation, seen as a way to realize unity.¹⁶

In order to correct the OAU’s failure and exit the impasse, Africa must become a federal state. The project of the United States of Africa will allow the continent to leave behind the imperialism of foreign powers that are ambitious to re-colonize Africa, with the neo-colonialism and exploitation that follow, supported even more

by those multinationals currently embroiled in economic competition accentuated by globalization. In the wake of this, unity and solidarity would no longer be considered as ideals to be attained but as means permitting Africa to become an economic and industrial power.

The United States of Africa, A Policy of Socio-Political and Economic Unity

The transition of the Organization of African Unity into the African Union “happened in a context where Africa remained undermined by recurring, useless, and interminable civil wars such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ivory Coast, Burundi, Rwanda, and Angola, etc: but equally through the intensification of bloody coups d’état, in tandem with the deepening of the economic decline and the expansion of social misery. The ecological and environmental destruction of the continent south of the Sahara worsened during the same time period.”

The change from the Organization of African Unity to the African Union in 2002, a period of disenchantment for Africa, tried to mask the global failure of the general objectives announced at Addis Ababa in 1963. It wanted, however, to recuperate the guiding ideals of the original and traditional Pan-Africanisms for political unity without providing the means and necessary tools for realizing such unity. The objectives of the African Union are those of the Organization of African Unity: To realize greater unity and solidarity between African states and between the peoples of the continent. Will it suffice to change the name of an institution in order to respond to the hopes and aspirations of the various African populations? Why transfer to the African Union the same objectives that failed lamentably within the Organization of African Unity and have contributed to the halting of continental unification and the

development of Africa for the last 50 years? Why be afraid to put in place a real central African government, through a political unification that is legitimated beforehand by the people in order to truly reconstruct African power for the third millennium? It seems evident that the new project of the African Union would not be able to lead to the unification of the African people. Outside of a (African) Court of Justice and a Pan-African parliament that could constitute the real grounds for a federal state of Africa, the structures of the African Union risk ensuring the continued division of the continent and reinforcing neo-colonialism through the exploitation of African resources.

In fact, the unity considered as a base and foundation of the federal state of Africa would permit, first and foremost, all of Africa to contract with economic partners in order to support its industrial policy by exploiting its own raw materials and by consuming that which is produced. As a federal state, the continent would have at its disposal a federal and state administration, a federal Pan-African and state parliament, and a Supreme Court of federal and state justice making decisions for the entire continent while promoting the autonomy and the competence of each region in certain matters. In order to support a certain protectionist policy that is consistent with consuming, first and foremost, that which is produced locally so as to help local farmers and entrepreneurs, Africa would have to have one, large common market at its disposal, one sole currency, the free circulation of people, capital, and goods. Such a policy would permit opening the continent up while facilitating commerce, cooperation, and trade with other states and continents. This presupposes opening the borders drawn by the Conference of Berlin and ratified by the Organization of African Unity—in brief, this requires that one accept breaking the chains of neo-colonialism that throttle us like a bottleneck and that do not facilitate access to self-determination. From this perspective, the famous dogma of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, a dogma that often seems to have legitimated several African dictatorial regimes, would fall away of itself. With this dogma, unacceptable political crimes have been protected; war
crimes, massacre, and genocide have been perpetuated continent-wide. People have closed their eyes to the exploitation and the embezzlement of African resources, administrative corruption, clientelism and favouritism instead of promoting the general wellbeing of Africans.

**The United States of Africa: Politics of Otherness While Respecting the Identity of Each People**

The balkanization of Africa in diverse states not only renders inefficient the various state administrations currently but it also and especially does not permit the different peoples of Africa to enjoy the Africanicity that makes their identity what it is. Africa is both one and diverse when it comes to its populations, cultures, values, its own history of suffering, struggles, and communal resistances. The project of a United States of Africa would permit Africans to form one citizenry, African citizenry. This ought to be experienced in the diversity and respect for the singularity of each people's culture and region of Africa. The federal state of Africa, as Diop has emphasized well, would not be able to own the future without a cultural foundation that is expressed through one continental language, though not discarding the various national languages and vernaculars that would be essential regionally, and the universal values of Africanicity that would emerge from different cultures of the continent. In order to de-balkanize African cultural ghettos, one would have to promote a multicultural policy that takes seriously the various cultures that are on the continent.

If Africans find themselves by implementing a project of African citizenship without fusion or confusion respecting the diversity of peoples and cultures, African identity will not be locked up but rather opened to otherness as the *sine qua non* of the display and richness of African citizenry. Foreignness is not the enemy of Africans; it is an opportunity. Nevertheless, not everything foreign is an opportunity for Africa, but rather the foreigner who brings peace and comes to invest in Africa. It is the
foreigner who will expand and support African lives. It is not the foreigner who comes to exploit Africa and bring war, but the one who comes to invest and contribute so that Africa may become a power on a worldwide scale like other powers. In brief, it is the foreigner who comes to be inscribed in African history. Ethnic, "tribal", and clan divisions known by Africa since independence are divisions that are sustained and supported by certain political figures in order to reign over their brothers and sisters with the goal of exploiting them for egoistic interests, to the profit of the multinationals that exploit them. In brief, the survival of Africa occurs through unity and the project of a federal state in which all Africans would be able to recognize themselves and flourish. The political project of the United States of Africa would not be left only to political figures. It would be necessary for African civil societies to appropriate it in order to facilitate the evolving social revolution on the continent by turning their back on all foreign and African ideologies seeking to subjugate Africa.

The question of the United States of Africa falls to all African peoples. It would be to hit an impasse to leave this question only to African heads of state because these figures are enslaved by their egoistic interests. Because of this a consensus will not necessarily come from them. As long as this question is not democratized and left to the African people in general, it will not be solved effectively. We think that it is pertinent to be able to work on the education of young generations of Africans in order to lead them to educate themselves and become cognizant of the geographic, historical, cultural, political, and economic unity of Africa. They can appropriate the project of a United States of Africa to take it on as one of their political choices. In this way, they can become creative by becoming integrated as historical subjects in the fierce competition of the world economy. In fact, if we bequeath an Africa that is economically strong to the young generations of Africans, they will be respected by the other citizens of the world.

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Islamic Law in Zamfara State of Nigeria: Success or Failure

By

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Nigerian Muslims are deeply committed to their religion; that explains the massive support the Muslims gave to the recent implementation of the Sharia criminal justice system in the North. Multiplicity of culture, ethnicity and religion created a divide, which in turn created mutual suspicion largely between the Muslims and Christians. I think it is this suspicion that moved a section of the Christians in the North to view the introduction of Sharia as a holy jihad designed to culminate in the eventual dethronement of the secular nature of Nigeria. The Muslim on the other hand nurses a certain fear of concerted designs by some persons within and outside the country to truncate the implementation of Sharia. The result being, when the Christian opines that the implementation of Sharia is unconstitutional, the Muslims view this opinion as a move to destroy Sharia.¹

In this paper, my attempt is to analyze the application of Islamic law in Zamfara State and to evaluate whether its application is successful or unsuccessful and the effect of its application on the people of Zamfara State.

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has a unique position in the world. One out of every ten black people in the world is a Nigerian. Whatever country one goes in the world, one finds Nigerians. It is also a country of diverse culture. However, Nigerian government is fraught with corruption, social ills, moral decadence and an unstable environment, particularly the tension in Delta region. The hopes of the people were high when President Obasanjo took over as an elected civilian leader in May 29, 1999 and put an end to military dictatorship government. Fortunately or unfortunately, it was during the reign of Obasanjo that twelve states from Northern Nigeria opted for the application of Islamic law in their states. It was a shock to many Nigerians. President Obasanjo, as an elected leader, insisted that Nigeria is a democratic government and therefore each state has the right to choose the laws it wants among existing legal systems in Nigeria: Common law, Native law, and Islamic law (Shari‘ah).2

Ironically, whenever Islamic law is mentioned, people raise their eyebrows and bring to mind immediately all the negative aspects of Islamic law and then condemn it instantly without any reservation or second thought. What many are unaware of is that Islamic law has been in application in Nigeria since 1808 when Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio became the leader of the Muslims in the North. Islamic law was in operation in Northern Nigeria before the arrival of the British Colonial rule. Shari‘ah continued to be applied during the Colonial rule and after its departure. Of course, the British curtailed some of its aspects but the Shari‘ah law has never been totally pushed aside in the history of modern Nigeria.3

2 Nigeria has three legal systems: Common law, Islamic law and Customary law. For more information, see, Akinade Olusegun Obilade, The Nigerian Legal System (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1970), p. 4. See also chapters one and two of this book for full coverage of the legal system in Nigeria.

In this paper, I would like to address how the total application of Islamic law into all aspects of life was reintroduced in Zamfara state, what areas Islamic law cover, and why; how it has been implemented, and the effects of its implementation on the people of Zamfara. I will begin this discussion by a short analysis of the history of Islamic law in Nigeria.

Even though many people hear about Northern Nigeria, they know little about its legal systems. Hence, when the governor Ahmad Sanni Yerima declared that he would apply Islamic law in his state, many Nigerians objected, thinking that it was unconstitutional to do so. Nevertheless, both parties presented their arguments rationally and emotionally. At last, the Northern States adopted Islamic law in their states because it was what the majority of their citizens want and since democracy is a system which respects individual decisions, the Shari`ah law is allowed to stay. The question to be asked is to what extent does this law affect or benefit the Northerners? Are the people in the North who practice Islamic law more secured than others? Are they better off economically and politically? Is justice being achieved in these states? Are the majority of the citizens happy with these applications? Are non-Muslims oppressed through Islamic law? Are their rights as citizens being respected and protected? These are a few questions that come to mind whenever the issue of the application of Islamic law is raised and discussed. Not all these questions are to be answered in this short paper. This work only addresses the question of the effect of the application of Islamic law on the people of Zamfara State.

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4 This is perceived as re-introduction of Islamic law in the sense that before this time, Islamic law was only applied to personal laws only like the marriage law, custody law, law of inheritance, etc.
Islam came to Nigeria through Arab traders from 11th century. Since then, it spread gradually until the present Northern Nigeria became Islamic States in the 19th century. Muslim scholars in different centuries made concerted efforts to enforce the application of Islamic law but the Hausa and Bornu leaders rejected it generation after generation until the early 19th century when the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio succeeded against the Gobir and Hausa people. Thereafter, Shaykh Dan Fodio established Islamic State and applied Islamic law. He began gradually and his son Muhammad Bello and his brother Abdullah Bello, followed Dan Fodio’s footsteps and retained Islamic law. The succeeding Sultans (Muslim leaders) followed in the same path until the arrival of the British and the conquering of the Sokoto Caliphate by the British Colonial rule in 1903. Before the British came, Islamic law was applied in all Northern states and at Ilorin in the present Kwara State. The application of the law during the Sokoto Caliphate was well established and very inclusive. It was the State law. When the British came, it found, to its surprise, an established legal system of governance. The British were shocked to find that the Fulani and Hausa were civilized, literate, and organized. They had all systems of governance, the judiciary, the police, the tax system, and an effective administration and documentation of their proceedings. Hence, the British had no choice but to rule them through their own leaders. So they established an indirect rule policy whereby the local leaders remained ruling their own people and the British oversaw their activities and rendered some advice where necessary. As a result, Northerners were left alone to apply their Islamic law on their people. But the British government after a short time began to interfere and make changes to the application of Islamic law. It recognized some laws and abrogated others on the pretext that they

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were harsh and repugnant to natural justice. It abolished some of the *hudud* laws (Islamic criminal codes) like stoning to death for adultery, cutting the thief’s hand, execution of murderers and armed robbers.\(^6\) The abolishment of these laws had led to the erosion of security and social values in the North. Later, a new penal code after the independence was established for Northern Nigeria, endorsed, and applied at that time. Yet, many people were not satisfied with those changes by the British colonial rulers.\(^7\) They hoped that one day, they would be able to re-establish and apply Islamic law in its totality on their own people. Thus, after the independence in 1960, the Northerners kept pressing for more allowance for Islamic law in their states and gradually and steadily, they continued to win support for it until lastly in 2000 many opted for the whole scale application of Islamic law.\(^8\) Zamfara and some

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\(^6\) The idea of changing and modifying Islamic law was first introduced by Lord Lugard when he declared that there must be changes in the application of Islamic law. He said: “...the time is now, in my opinion, ripe for a change, but the change must be gradually introduced if they are to be effective, and not alienate the confidence of the people.” See, Lord Frederick Lugard, *Political Memoranda.* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), p.272. It is in this aspect too that Lugard emphasized that the Islamic law must meet the “repugnant test.” (Lugard, p. 84); Hiskett, Mervyn. *The Development of Islam in West Africa.* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 277. See also, Abdul Malik Bappa Mahmud, *A Brief History of Shari`ah in the Defunct Northern Nigeria* (Jos; Jos University Press, 1988); pp. 9-11.

\(^7\) For more information about the development of the legal system in the North, see, Obilade, Akintude Olusegun, *The Nigerian Legal System* (London: Sweet &Maxwell, 1979); pp. 34-35.

\(^8\) The Penal Code was introduced in northern Nigeria in 1956 as suggested by the delegation which the government appointed to look into the issues of Islamic laws in the North. The government appointed a delegation which visited Sudan and Pakistan and assigned to recommend how to deal with Islamic law in the north. That was between 1953-4. The delegation was headed by J.N. D. Anderson of the SOAS in London. For more information on this issue, see Abdul Malik Bappa Mahmud, *A Brief History of Islamic Law in the Defunct Northern Nigeria* (Jos; Jos University Press, 1980, pp. 9-11. See also Musa Ali Ajetummobi, *Shari`ah Legal Practice in Nigeria: 1956-1983,* (Ph.D dissertation, University of Ilorin, Department of Islamic Studies, June 1988), pp. 72-74.
other states went to their State House of Assembly which wholeheartedly voted for the application of Islamic law. These states set in motion the procedures to apply Shari'ah. They hired qualified lawyers, judges, and administrators to help them implement Islamic law and expand it to all areas of life. New Islamic penal code was enacted in each state.

The establishment or adoption of Islamic law in twelve Northern States caused uproar and intense criticism in Nigeria and abroad. The opponents of the application alleged that application of Islamic law is unconstitutional because it amounts to recognition of and giving preference to a religious law over the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and by implication, it amounts to the rejection of the Constitution of Nigeria as the Supreme law of the country. The opponents believe that the states that opted for Islamic law are politically motivated and that they would soon abandon the quest for implementing Islamic law. However, both proponents and opponents of Islamic law argue forth and backward but finally the Islamic law as the Supreme Law of the State was endorsed in twelve states.

A Short History of Zamfara State:

Zamfara is one of the old Hausa States in Northern Nigeria. It was a part of Sokoto State until it was partitioned as a new state on October 1, 1996 under the military regime of Sanni Abacha. It has a population of about 3 million people and its capital is Gusau. Its inhabitants are mostly Hausa and Fulani with minority Igbo, Yoruba, Nupe and Tiv. English is the official language but people speak Hausa, Fulfude and Arabic in their daily life. Islam is the main religion of the people with minority Christians and a few traditional religionists. When the military regime fell and a civil government came to power in 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo, the newly democratically elected President, enacted a new constitution. Under the new constitution of 1999, each state was
allowed to adjudicate within the three legal systems allowed by the constitution. This offer gave the Governor of Zamfara State, Ahmad Sanni Yerima, an ample chance to opt for the full fledged application of Islamic law in all aspects of life, including criminal laws. On October 27, 1999, the Zamfara State Governor announced publicly that his state would apply Shari'ah and that the Zamfara House of Assembly has approved the motion and the application would take effect on January 27, 2000. It did. The announcement caused uproar in the media and in the government within Nigeria and abroad.

But before the Federal Government would take action for or against it, a few states in the North announced their readiness to follow suit. Within 2000-2001, the following states had declared their commitment to apply Islamic Law: Bauchi State in June 2001, Bornu State in June 2001, Gombe State in November 2001, Jigawa State in August 2000, Kaduna State in November 2001, Kano State in November 2000, Katsina State in August 2000, Kebbi State in December 2000, Niger State in early 2000, Sokoto State in January 2001, and Yobe State in October 2001. However, not all these states endorsed the application of Islamic law in its entirety. For instance, Kaduna and Bauchi States did not approve the full scale application of Islamic law in all aspects of life; they allowed the Christians in their states the right to be adjudicated by Christian Customary laws at Area courts. Any case which involved Muslims and Christians were heard by the Magistrate courts, except when both parties agreed to be adjudicated by Shari`ah courts which happened at times. Even Zamfara State itself which spearheaded the application of Islamic law did not endorse officially the application of the law of apostasy because of its sensitivity and the

9 See Nigerian Constitution of 1999 section 38 (1) and section 262 (1), section 277 (1). These latter two sections allow the State Assembly or National Assembly to enact laws as approved by their assembly.
10 A researcher can Google on “Islamic Law in Nigeria” and see a couple of references and postings for and against Islamic law.
damage its application might cause to Islam and Muslim’s image in a country which prides herself to be democratic. Nigeria guarantees freedom of religion to all its citizens. Any endorsement of the law of apostasy would go against that great foundation of freedom of religion.

Between 2000 and 2001, twelve states began to apply Islamic law. One may ask “are these states more secured today due to the application of Islamic penal codes?” Are the people of these States and Zamfara in particular better off economically as a result of this application? Are the citizens of Zamfara happy with the result of this application? What are the major achievements of the government after it had applied this law for eight years? How are non-Muslims being treated in Zamfara State? What do non-Muslims feel about this application? Are they discriminated against? Are they being relegated to second class citizens? Do they receive fair treatment from state government and apparatus? Does the government actually assess its performance since the beginning of the application of Shari‘ah? What is the future of Islamic law in Zamfara State? Little data is available, if any, to help answer these important questions.¹²

Starting from the last question, it appears that Zamfara State will continue to apply Islamic Shari‘ah regardless of whatever negative responses it receives from the people. The advocates of this application believe very strongly that Nigerians will embrace and admire the achievements of Islamic law as time goes on. For any law to be embraced and successful, they believe, it must take some time; sacrifices, adjustments, and modifications must be made. As they apply it, they learn from their mistakes and therefore, they are very adamant for its application.¹³ There is no

¹² Most of the information we collected are from the state itself and it is limited. On the other hand, majority who critique the application of Shari‘ah law in Nigeria are non-Muslims and they actually have bias against any application of it. Hence their critique is open to suspicion as well.
¹³ Misbahudeen O. Raheemson, “The Effects of Shari‘ah on Non-Muslim”, in Unfamiliar Guest in a Familiar Household, a monograph on Arabic and Islamic Studies in honor of Professor Isaac Adjoju Ogunbiyi. Paper presented on April
thought whatsoever that the application of Islamic law will disappear in the North, rather, there is great potentiality that other states in Nigeria will opt for the application of Islamic law to please their constituencies. It seems to me that the Northerners care less about what others are saying about this law; they are guided by the perception of living under the rule of Islamic law. Politically and economically, people may perceive them as backward for their intention to apply Islamic legal system, but they are religiously and emotionally satisfied with it and that is all they are after in my opinion. 

Accusation against the Application of Islamic Law in Zamfara State

While the advocates of Islamic Law make big claims of significant achievements in terms of security and economy because of the application of Islamic law, the critics point out many areas where this law has failed. The critics argue that the application has not achieved any substantial positive goals but rather caused havoc to the people of Zamfara State.

The first accusation was the idea that because of the need to apply Islamic Law, Zamfara State became a police State where the government established *Hisbah* group to monitor and enforce Shari`ah application. *Hisbah* group is perceived as a moral religious police group, which *can* accuse and hold people

25, 2003 | Lagos State University, Lagos. Raheemson explains the positive aspects of Shari`ah and why it should be given chance to operate. He cautions any judgment before its true application.

14 Our conviction that the issue of the application of Islamic law is not going to go away is the historical evidence. When the British took over the Northern Nigeria in 1903 and gradually suspended the total application of Islamic law, the government thought that would be the end of the request for its application. But whenever there was an opportune chance, the Northerners brought back the issue of Shari`ah as it occurred in 1960s, in 1979, in 1980 and in 1999.
responsible for their actions. Even though Hisbah does not have authority like federal police to detain offenders, it has been charged with the power to suspect, and charge people for moral violations of the Islamic code. Since it has more interaction with the local people and its members do not have public uniform, they are able to mingle with and charge suspected people probably arbitrarily. As a result, citizens of Zamfara feel that they have been robbed of their constitutional freedom to do what they want without being policed. People occasionally accuse Hisbah group of abuses of its power. At times it has conflicts with the federal police. Of course, several attempts are made by the State and federal police to unify their efforts. The police see the Hisbah group a rival to its authority.15

Another strong accusation was the charge of discrimination against non-Muslims in many areas, especially in the economy. While the advocates of the Islamic Law insist on banning the selling of alcohol publicly, the Christians, whose religion does not condemn its selling and drinking are banned from operation publicly, hence they lost many customers. In the early stage of implementing the Shari`ah law, many beer-parlours were closed because of the government’s ban on alcohol. What Muslims consider a gain is a shortage and loss for Christians. The advocates of Islamic Law have pledged that Islamic law will not be applied on Christians and non-Muslims, but the ban on alcohol has serious negative effects on Christians who are owners of beer-parlours. Those few Christians who insist on opening their beer-parlours in their homes and selling beers and alcoholic beverages to Christians are perceived as immoral people by the Hisbah group. They are labelled enemy of progress. The Zamfara State also bans gambling, prostitution, and all what they termed immoral activities. Majority of the people who operate these businesses are Christians from the

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15 See Human Rights Watch, “The Enforcement of Shari`ah and the Role of Hisbah,” September 24, 2004, documented by the World Report Events of 2010. (Human Rights Watch, vol. 16, no. 9 (A), see p. 45. Zamfara is not the only state which recruits Hisbah to enforce the implementation of the Islamic law on the people. Other states like Kano do the same.
Southern part of Nigeria. They suffer economic shortage from this ban.16

Through the application of Islamic law, the state also bans riding of males and females in the same bus. Thus, the birth of segregation of sexes in transportation; males ride different buses from the females. As a result, there was a drastic drop in the numbers of people using public transportation, which resulted in the decline in businesses in the State. Again, the majority of the taxi drivers and okada drivers17 in Zamfara and many northern States are non-Muslims. They expressed their frustration with the ban on riding together on the same bus. Later, the government bought buses for women transportation. But they are not carrying women without Hijab.

Further, the advocates of the Shari`ah are accused of immoral discrimination against the poor. If the poor violate Islamic Law, the Law is applied against them, when the rich violate the Law, the Shari`ah is not adequately applied or the punishment is reduced, or the law is reinterpreted. Hence, the hands of those who stole cows and donkeys worthy of 20,000 Naira ($200.00 Dollars) were cut off, while those who stole millions of Naira from the States’ treasury escaped the punishment on legal technicality at court and at times they receive less punishment.18 Nonetheless, no victim has

16 This is not to say that some Muslims are not engaging in these businesses, but the majority are Christians. See the above article on “The Enforcement of Shari`ah and the role of Hisbah.” The author also lived in Sokoto State when Zamfara was then a part of Sokoto State and observed that beer-parlours are often operated by the people from the Southern or Eastern Nigeria. See also “Nigerian Human Rights Report” on Freedom.
17 Okada drivers are the people who drive motorbikes around and carry passengers. This is a form of transportation in some parts of Nigeria.
been stoned to death in Zamfara State despite that the law
prescribes stoning to death for adultery.

Lastly, women are directly or indirectly kept at home by
insisting that their legitimate roles as mothers lie at home and not in
the public arena. Therefore, only a few of them participate in the
public work or hold government positions in the state. Women are
discriminated against in the public. Women are excluded from
holding ministerial, political, and leadership positions.19

Zamfara state is accused of denying business permission to
non-Muslims in the state. This is done under different pretexts,
such as the lack of adequate information. It is alleged too that
Zamfara remains less prosperous economically because of the
application of Islamic Law. Most of the trades that bring money to
the state were banned; alcohol and gambling were banned, stage
entertainments were discouraged; women who are more than half
the population are relegated to home duties like cooking and
nursing, hence, they are not contributors to the development of the
state economically. They remain consumers and recipients rather
than producers. If such a trend of degradation of women continues,
the state will not develop technically and economically because
one-half of the population merely consumes and does not produce.
However, Zamfara State officials deny these accusations, arguing
that they are misconceptions and prejudices against Islamic Law.
Everything levelled against Zamfara State can be levelled against
any State in Eastern Nigeria, which does not practice Islamic law.

(www.washingtonpost.com/wp-
dyn/content/article/2009/08/11/AR2009081103257.html)

19 By checking the members of the Zamfara State House of Assembly from 1999
till present, there is no single female member among all of the house members. Also,
there is no female member as the head of any local government. The principle
members of the house of assembly (24 in number) are all males. The state also has
twenty different committees; there is no name of any female member as head of any
committee. This in our opinion shows that little attention is paid to the role of women in the State. See Zamfara state government website:
(http://zamfarastatehouseofassembly.org) for more information.
Claims of the Achievements of the Application of Islamic Law

Year after year since 2001, each Northern State which applies Islamic Law claims victory and celebrates its achievements and prosperity. But what exactly do these states realistically achieve? Indeed it is hard to pinpoint any specific achievement except the general claims which each state made. Attempts to get statistics on the achievements of these states have not been successful. However, there are a few papers presented in Nigeria at some conferences on Shari‘ah law in which their authors assert the achievements of the application of Islamic Law but without providing data to support their claims. On the other hand, many of what are claimed to be offered to the citizens of Zamfara State are basic amenities that citizens are entitled to receive regardless of whether the State applies Islamic Law or not. For instance, Shehu U.D. Keffi mentions in his paper titled, “Improving the Quality of Life through the Implementation of Social-Economic Aspects of Sharia in Nigeria,” that Zamfara State offered loans to many groups in Zamfara to alleviate poverty among the citizens. This offer, in our view, falls within the responsibility of the State to assist the needy; the implementation of Shari‘ah has little to do with it. The Federal Government establishes different agencies to eradicate poverty in Nigeria, both among Muslims and non-Muslims. The Federal and State Governments often provide “soft loans” to various groups with the aim of helping them alleviate poverty. This has never been an exclusive duty of the Shari‘ah States.

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However, it should be pointed out here that Zamfara State establishes the Institution of Zakat,\textsuperscript{21} which is charged with collection of Zakat, gift and endowment and their distribution to the needy members of the community. This institution of Zakat totally differs from the Federal and State agencies which collect taxes from the citizens. What was not so apparent is whether the Zakat money has ever been utilized to support all citizens in the State or not. Also, we do not know whether non-Muslims ever receive support from the Zakat money.\textsuperscript{22} Zamfara State also claims that in an effort to implement Shari`ah, it established \textit{Hisbah} group, religious enforcement group, which according to the State, has assisted tremendously in enforcing Shari`ah injunctions and encouraged Zamfara citizens to abide by Shari`ah law. Consequently, the State becomes safe (crime wise) through the supervision of the \textit{Hisbah} group. This claim could be true, but there is no data to substantiate it. But on the other hand, using religious police creates fear among the people. Instead of using education to keep citizens informed about the adequacy, benefit, and viability of Islamic law for the people, the use of \textit{Hisbah} group produces negative results. By using \textit{Hisbah} group to enforce religious laws, some people would become hypocritical in that they abide by the law publicly but violate it privately. Whenever they know that they would not be caught, they would disobey the Law. This occasionally happens in regard to consumption of alcohol in public.

\textsuperscript{21} Zakat is an annual duty of 2.5\% which the rich people have to take out of their wealth and give to the poor. It is part and parcel of the five pillars of Islam. It is only due once in a year and it is not \textit{sadaqah} (charity) which everyone gives. Only the rich pay Zakat.

\textsuperscript{22} Even though Zakat primarily is given to the Muslims, there is nothing preventing the government which is responsible for the welfare of the community to render help to non-Muslims through Zakat because the purpose of Zakat is to attend to the needs of the poor in the state regardless of whether they are Muslims or not. In Islamic tradition, it is said that the second caliph, Umar bin al-Khattab, took care of all members of the community, Muslims, Christians and Jews during his reign. According to the Qur’an, chapter 9:60, every poor person is entitled to receiving Zakat from the State. Hence, Zakat is not exclusive for the Muslims.
However, the government which recruits *Hisbah* group believes that this group helps put check on public bribery and other corrupt financial activities like hoarding of goods to promote unnecessary inflation. The *Hisbah* group also assists traders to improve their attitudes and to use scales in trade; it helps find lost properties in the market, as the government claims.

Another achievement, which the advocates of Shari`ah claim, is the quick dispensation of justice. Cases are taken to the courts immediately and adjudicated as quickly as possible; except criminal cases which often take a long time due to the need of thorough investigation and cross examination of evidences before making any judgment to escape undue mistakes. Due to the fact that lawyers are not always involved in many of the cases that come to Islamic courts, the dispensing of justice was quick. Many people, including some non-Muslims, prefer to take their cases to the Shari`ah courts because they believe that they will receive fair judgment with less spending on lawyers. Adjudication in Shari`ah courts also saves time for all people involved because the cases are less postponed. While many are happy with this quick dispensation, a few are sceptical of unfair justice due to the lack of thorough deliberation before pronouncing the final judgment/verdict.

In addition, the State Legal agencies record fewer cases at the courts after the implementation of Shari`ah because people resort to solving their family disputes and domestic problems through arbitration which the government encourages rather than going to the courts. It is claimed that *Hisbah* group is very instrumental in carrying out arbitration among disputing members of the community. Of course, if the parties involved in dispute could not reach any amicable solution, they can still take their cases to court. It should be pointed out that any party who does not agree with the judgment of the court in the state can appeal to a higher court. And even if one disagrees with the decision of the State high court, one can still appeal to the Federal Court of Appeal in Kaduna, which is the final resort for any disputed case be it civil or criminal. The
judges at the Federal Court of Appeal are versed in Common and Islamic Laws.

The advocates of Shari`ah claim that assistance is given to orphans all over the state. While such attempt will definitely help the poor, it may turn the government into a welfare state whereby citizens will claim to be orphans to receive government financial aid. That would cause a big financial burden on the government. Again, the support of the needy members of the state is a responsibility of the government regardless of whether it applies Islamic law or not. If the government fails to help the orphans or any needy members of the community, they will resort to violence or crime and become irresponsible citizens. What the government will spend to put them behind bars (prison) will be more than what it will spend to keep them functional and industrial or responsible members of the society.

Further, the Shari`ah advocates argue that the judges are receiving intensive training to implement Shari`ah. This in our view is a great achievement because if the judges receive adequate training, they will be able to discharge their duties fairly and deliver equitable justice; the community will thus trust the judiciary as they will be treated fairly and equally. The Shari`ah courts before the partition of Zamfara from Sokoto state were suspected of discrimination against non-Muslims at times. What should be understood from these entire claims is that the application of Shari`ah is not limited to legal issues but it spreads to all aspects of

23 That the government rendered needed-assistance to all members of the state is what Sheikh U. D. Keffi, a Lecturer at the Centre for Islamic Legal Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, claimed in his article titled, “Improving the Quality of Life of Muslims through the Implementation of socio-economic Aspects of Sharia in Nigeria.” This paper was presented at the Conference on Women’s Rights and Access to Justice Under the Sharia in Northern Nigeria, held at Abuja on February 26-27, 2003. On page 16–17 of his paper, he claimed that non-Muslims are not discriminated against. He explained how millions of Naira were allocated to non-Muslims, especially the Igbo and Yoruba, to take care of their needs. Our point here is that they should not be singled out for treatment if they are considered part and parcel of the citizens of Zamfara State.
the Muslim daily lives, both private and public. Therefore, the advocates of Shari`ah perceive any function that the State performs or any project it implements as part and parcel of promotion of Islamic law and Islamic values. The main objective of the advocates of Shari`ah is to Islamize the State because that is what the State claims that the majority of Zamfara citizens wants. Non-Muslims in the state object to this religious motive and agenda of proselytization.

Zamfara State also claims that all its citizens are treated equally without discrimination. But such claim has no substance because both Yoruba and Igbo, who reside in the State, are labelled foreigners and treated as others. Hence, the State offers them special financial assistance as soft loan to improve their lots. This is pointed out by Sheikh Keffi in his article. The mere fact that Yoruba and Igbo are singled out for assistance amounts to discrimination. They are assisted because they are not entitled to what Zamfara citizens are entitled to. There are many Yoruba and Igbo who were born and raised in Zamfara, yet they could not contest for any government or ministerial positions because the leaders of Zamfara government perceive them as aliens despite that they and their parents are born in Zamfara and they are Nigerians. Even though such discrimination against non-indigenous people is common in Nigeria, yet it is un-Islamic practice, and one expects that Zamfara State should not engage in such practice since it claims to be following Islamic law which recognizes all believers as equal and hence must be treated with dignity, fairness and respect. Many Yoruba and some Igbo who live in Zamfara are Muslims but they hardly benefit from the government positions because they are considered foreigners. One wonders when a Yoruba Muslim, who is born and raised in Zamfara, will become an indigene who can legitimately hold a high governmental...

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24 Ibid.
25 Even though, non-Muslims are regarded as distinctive group (dhimmis) under Islamic law, when it comes to benefits and rights, they should not be discriminated against.
position and be elected as senator or governor or member of the House of Assembly?

Some Observations

It appears from the above analysis that many claims of achievement by Zamfara State are questionable to say the least. The claim of better public safety lacks concrete data and convincing evidence. The claim of better and equal treatment of all citizens is contested by non-Muslims and Yoruba Muslims, who allege social, economic and political discrimination against them. The claim of economic advancement has not been proven even though the government had spent billions of Naira for various developmental projects whose results are yet to be seen.26

However, one area which Zamfara State should be given credit is the ban on alcohol consumption and drug abuse. If the citizens abide by it, there would be a great reduction in domestic violence and traffic accidents. Again, there is no statistical data available to substantiate this claim. Documented data from other countries like USA and Canada have shown that reduction in alcoholic consumption and drug usage often lead to great reduction in accidents and domestic violence. Nonetheless, non-Muslims and traders who engage in alcohol and other banned businesses perceive the ban a blow to their businesses. And some of them actually moved out of Zamfara State while others changed to other business.

On the other hand, the establishment of Hisbah group, which the State believes to be very instrumental in helping Muslims

26 In footnote # 20 &23, Sheikh Keffi claimed that the states which applied Islamic law are better off economically and security wise. He mentioned the roles played by (Zapa) Zamfara Agency for Poverty Alleviation, in Zamfara State. He stated that the government distributed 500 wheelbarrows and offered soft loans of 10 million naira to the needy. People on the ground are saying that only the families of the people in power benefited from this loan and that there was a lot of corruption about it. See Keffi’s article, p. 15.
adhere to Islamic law, is considered an intrusion into the freedom of the citizens. Many people perceive Hisbah’s function as a moral police on the citizens. Hence it yields negative result. In addition, the support and aids that the government renders to its citizens are duties and responsibilities of the State and as such they have nothing to do with the application of Shari`ah. That is, even if the State does not apply Shari`ah, its duties lie in helping the poor, the orphans, the almanjari (professional beggars) and members of the community who are in dire need of assistance. Hence the alleviation of poverty lies within the responsibility of the State regardless of whether it applies Islamic law or not.

While the proponents of Shari`ah should be given credit for their fervent attempt to root out corruption and moral vices in Zamfara State, it should be recognized that the progressive building of the State infrastructure in terms of providing resources for building schools, vocational institutions and offering loans to the needy are not the result of the implementation of Shari`ah. These are duties which the State has responsibility to discharge regardless of whether the State applies Islamic law or Common law. In fact, people elected the governor and his executive members to improve the lives and lots of the citizens. When the State constructs roads or builds hospitals or fights crimes, it does so because that is its duty and responsibility: to modernize the State, educate the people and defend the citizens against any threat internally and externally. Of course, the application of Shari`ah might be a deterrent to people to commit more crimes, if this can be proven with empirical data, then the Shari`ah would be given due credit.

On the other hand, the proponents of Shari`ah count among their successes the assistance offered to Muslims to build mosques and salary for the Imams (Muslim religious leaders) and Muazzins (those who call believers to prayer). This can only be considered a success if other religious groups like Christians receive similar support from the State to build their churches and institutions. Otherwise, such exclusive support for the Muslims amounts to discrimination which breeds ill-feeling among different religious
groups in the State. We also believe that paying salary for the Imams by the government is a means of control of the society as experience has shown in other countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Libya. In the nearest future, those Imams would dance to the tune of the government and would never attempt to criticize the government because of the fear of losing their pay checks. Such practice is unhealthy and occasionally creates a welfare State where majority of the people will depend financially upon the government to survive.

Also among the successes which the proponents of Shari`ah count upon was the level of awareness and commitment from the civil servants in the State to the service and advancement of the State as well as holding each one responsible and accountable in his/her position. As a result, the performance of an elected member is gauged according to the standard of Islam. While this may be true, we do not have any empirical evidence to support this claim. Are the members and employees in the civil service sector actually living up to this standard and thus delivering their duties in the best manner expected of them? We do not know and there is no mechanism to assess their performance.

On the other hand, the critics of the application of Islamic law have pointed out that the application has led to many failures and shortcomings. Some of these failures are:

a) Discrimination against non-Muslim who are not allowed to sell alcohol or engage in gambling publicly. Hence many lost their customers and their jobs and some left the State.

b) Non-Muslims, especially the Christians, are not allowed to build more churches, whereas, the State encourages building of more mosques and the Imams are paid from the government fund. This fund belongs to all citizens and not to a specific group of people.

c) Discrimination against women: No single woman is elected or appointed to any important ministerial or senatorial position. Either they are assumed to be unqualified or they are not elected because they are women. In each case, the government should encourage their election and educate
them to become leaders of tomorrow. Their relegation to domestic work or bearing children and taking care of the young would deprive them their due positions and rights in the society. Women should be equal citizens of the state rather than second class citizens.

d) Lack of equal treatment of the citizens especially the Igbo and Yoruba: Despite that many Yorubas and Igbo were born and raised in Zamfara State and some are Muslims, they are continuously treated as foreigners and they have less voice in how they are governed. They are not invited or allowed to serve as members of the house of Assembly or as Senators. They are not holding any high level government positions under the pretext that they are not indigenous people of Zamfara, whereas, they are Nigerian; they are born and raised in Zamfara and some of them know no other home except Zamfara. When the Zamfara State gave soft loans to them, they were perceived as others. Such discrimination is against Islam for there are many Yoruba in Zamfara who are Muslims by birth.27

e) There is no female minister or senator or member of the house of assembly as they have them in Bauchi, Lagos and other States in Nigeria.

Many complaints come from non-Muslims because they raised their voices and felt that they have been discriminated against. This does not imply that all Muslims of Zamfara are happy with the application of Islamic law. They may have kept silent not to be

27 While Zamfara State should not be blamed exclusively for such a discrimination, one expects a state which claims to be implementing Shari’ah to eliminate discrimination and treat others as equal like themselves especially when they are Muslims like them. Of course, in some other states, things are improving. In Ogun-State for example, in the past, there was a Hausa man who was born in Sagamu, raised there and was selected to represent his district as a member of the House of Assembly in Ogun State.
labelled anti-Islam or anti progress. But definitely, there are some Muslims who object totally to the application of Islamic law.

I will conclude this short paper with a quotation from Professor Yadudu’s article, where he insisted on the need for serious evaluation of the achievements and the failure of the implementation of Islamic law in all Northern States in Nigeria.

With all its attendant imperfections and difficulties, I am satisfied that it is about time we carried out wide ranging and far reaching series of empirical studies to evaluate what impact the implementation of Shari’ah has had in the last seven years on the societies that had embarked upon it. The results can only help us to see what sort of things we have been doing right, which ones not so well and, hopefully, lead to improvements in the delivery of its dividends particularly in socio economic spheres and to avoid any miscarriages of justice and minimize or eliminate implicating avoidable hardship on the believers who have voluntarily submitted to the dictates of the Shari’ah.\(^{28}\)

Yadudu wants the political leaders, public servants and other officials who are in charge of the application of Shari`ah to critically evaluate their performance rather than just concentrating on enumerating or detailing their material achievements which lack empirical data.

I believe that Zamfara State has accomplished relatively some achievements but not as much as the advocates of Shari`ah claim. I believe there is a need for more research works to be done as to what extent is Islamic law perceived as beneficial to the citizens of Zamfara State. Any question of whether the citizens are better off due to the application of Shari`ah cannot easily be answered

because of lack of enough empirical evidence to support it at present. Therefore, it will be a conjecture at present to conclude that the application of Islamic law is a success story or a failure. If the citizens of the State feel that they like how their government applies the law upon them let them support it. After all, they know what is good for themselves more than anyone else. It may be added that eight years seems too short a time to gauge or assess the

29 There are other non-Muslims and non-Northerners who do not share the author’s opinion as evidenced in the testimony below. Tony Edike from Enugu reported in Vanguard on July 7, 2005 on the visit of ANPP delegation to Zamfara State where Comrade Godwin Erhahon, the secretary of the party said after his visit that “Sharia has not in any way harmed the Igbo or non-Muslims in the State. …Sharia is not against individuals; it is to instill discipline in the system. Again, ever before Sani Yerima became governor, Zamfara has been predominantly an Islamic State. Sharia was not Yerima’s concept because the state was already Islamized. He only declared it in line with his campaign promise to his people…. The impression we the people in the South had before now is that Christians were not given chances to operate. But we got to know that Zamfara is the only state where there is no religious crisis in the North. The governor has ensured that there is religious harmony between Christians and Muslims and this is largely responsible for the peace and tranquility in the state. When you go to Zamfara the level of development there is far ahead of what we have in some states in the South. He was the first to increase salary of workers and that challenged the federal government to review wages nationwide.” See Vanguard Lagos news of July 7, 2005.

30 It should be pointed out that the issue of application of Shari‘ah and its benefit should be left to the people of Zamfara themselves and that not all people in the State oppose Shari‘ah law. To some people, even non-Muslims, it is a good legal system which they prefer to common law. A case in point is a story narrated by Dr. Raheemson at Lagos State University, Lagos that a spare-parts dealer (an Igbo man) sold on credit some spare parts to one Hausa man worth N40,000.00. He tried to get his money back without success. He then took the debtor to the Shari‘ah court in Zamfara and the debtor was given seven days to pay back. Before the seventh day, he paid back the money and the dealer was very happy and hence gave N20,000.00 of the money to the poor. See Misbahudeen O. Raheemson, “The Effects of Shari‘ah on Non-Muslim” in Unfamiliar Guest in a Familiar Household,” a monograph on Arabic and Islamic Studies in honor of Professor Isaac Adjoju Ogunbiyi. Paper presented on April 25, 2003 at Lagos State University, Lagos.
success or failure of any new applied legal system. Personally, I incline towards the Shari'ah law despite all the shortcomings which people raise about it. I have seen both Common law and Islamic law in practice in Nigeria and in the USA. Not everything in Shari'ah is perfect. I do not see so much justice in Common law as practiced in Nigeria as well as in the USA. Common law does not deter criminals from committing crimes again and again. One hardly loses a case through Common law with a good lawyer and money. In Common law, you get what you paid for.

From the above analysis, we can conclude that Islamic law is presently going through many phases in Northern Nigeria. While some states apply it to all spheres of life including criminal cases, there are other states which limit its application and insist not to apply it on non-Muslims. Such flexibility has reduced the tension which many Nigerians, especially the Southerners, have expected to cause uproar and disintegration of the country. Above all, both Muslims and Christians should be able to live peacefully in any state in Nigeria without being discriminated against at any level. Nigeria is our country and we should develop a mutual understanding of one another; no group is to leave for another. Since we are created there, we should have freedom to live there harmoniously as equal citizens.

Selected Bibliography


Rethinking the Other in Contemporary African Christian Theology

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Abstract

From the inception of African Christian theology, there has been the tendency to pit a supposedly African way of being against a supposedly Western one. The African way of being is usually seen as characterized by orality and spirituality, for instance, while the Western way of being is seen as characterized by literacy and rationality. This paper argues that positioning a supposedly African oral or vitalistic cosmology against a supposedly Western literate or rationalistic one is currently neither relevant nor wise in the African context. The reason for this is pragmatic: one of the most profound weaknesses of contemporary African societies, as African philosophers such as Kwasi Wiredu, Marcien Towa, and Paulin Hountondji have seen, is their limited scientific and technological development. This generally limited scientific and technological development is troubling given that societies can hardly flourish economically if they are not scientifically and technologically strong. That is why these philosophers have problematized such facile dichotomy. The paper suggests that African theologians need to borrow from the methodological premises of these African philosophers who problematize the dualistic wedge that some African scholars place between Africa and the West.¹

¹ This paper was presented at conferences in Oxford University, England, and the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, Georgia, in September and October of 2010, respectively. I want to thank all those who raised questions about the paper during these sessions. I address pertinent aspects of those questions in the postscript below.
Contemporary African Christian theology has largely reacted against Western representations of the continent and its peoples. Crucial to these representations are the demonization of African traditional religious cultures and the denial that Africans have any coherent cosmology. It is against this background that the Belgian missionary, Father Placide Tempels, endeavoured to show in his *Bantu Philosophy* that Africans have a coherent religious worldview. Central to this cosmology is the now popular and much criticized notion of vital force or power. This vitalistic cosmology is one in which there is an intricate interconnection between the physical and spiritual realms so that the forces that threaten or sustain life are not only physical but also spiritual. Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* was intended to serve missionary and colonialist purposes but its vision has remained the mainstay of a very influential form of African theology called the theology of inculturation. This theology of inculturation has morphed into African Pentecostal theology today in a Christianity that is spreading throughout the continent like wild fire.

Tempels’ work became an important moment in the development of African theology and philosophy as some African theologians began to argue that in order for Africans to feel at home in the Christian faith, Christian beliefs must be expressed in African vitalistic cosmological idioms. This has been the case with

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the work of influential African theologians such as Alexis Kagame, Vincent Mulago, John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, and many others. These theologians maintain a firm distinction between what they see as the African cosmology, which is intensely spiritual, and the Western cosmology, which they see as having been rendered religiously barren by Enlightenment rationality. Thus it is that in much of African theology, like in much of Western theology in the last thirty years or so, there is an apparent disdain for Enlightenment rationality or anything that sounds like it. The apparent decline of religion (Christianity) in Europe and the present significant growth of Christianity in Africa have led some of these scholars, such as Kwame Bediako, to argue that the so-called African traditional religious cosmology is more conducive to the spread of Christianity than Western Enlightenment rationality. There is therefore an apparent call for the jettisoning of anything that sounds like Enlightenment rationality in African Christian theological discourse.

This paper argues that positioning a supposedly African vitalistic cosmology against a supposedly Western rationalistic cosmology is currently neither relevant nor wise in the African context. The reason for this is pragmatic: one of the most profound weaknesses of contemporary African societies, as African philosophers such as Kwasi Wiredu, Marcien Towa, and Paulin Hountondji have seen, is their limited scientific and technological development. This generally limited scientific and technological development is troubling given that societies can hardly flourish economically if they are not scientifically and technologically


strong. African theologians, like other postcolonial scholars, must not focus on maintaining a supposedly pristine identity and culture against a Western Other even as their own people perish. In fact, African theologians must borrow from some trends in postcolonial studies that see identities, both at the centre and peripheries of the world, as mixed. Borrowing from theories of hybridity in postcolonial studies will help African theologians see that they must be at the forefront of advocating for the development of science and technology in the continent rather than limiting their vision mostly to the so-called African spiritualized worldview. It will help them not to present the scientific imagination as the Other to an otherwise spiritualized African imagination. In order to do this African theologians must stress scientific rationality which, as philosophers such as Hountondji and Odera Oruka have shown, is not, in fact, a primarily Western phenomenon; it is also rooted within the African context. Stressing scientific rationality, of course, does not mean that religion should adopt the method of science. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that some things may be better addressed through scientific methods than mainly through religion. Continuously positing a vitalistic Africa against a rationalistic Western Other inadvertently subordinates Africans to the West in the modern, globalized world where scientific and

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technological power increasingly determine the value of human beings.

In arguing for the thesis of this paper, I shall first demonstrate that although some African theologians are aware of the complexity of African identity, the emphasis on difference has come to dominate their work. This is seen, first, in the suggestion that evangelism in the African context should be characterized by orality. Its second and most obvious manifestation is the tendency to appropriate a supposedly African spiritualized cosmology in African Christian salvific discourse. This tendency has dominated African Christian theological discourse and is currently flowering in the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in the continent. I shall then discuss how some African philosophers are challenging this essentialistic worldview that has been embraced by African theologians, arguing that African theologians will do well to borrow from the methodological premises of these philosophers.

In Search of an African Theological Idiom

Some leading African theologians have always been aware of the complexity of African identity even if such awareness has not gained widespread recognition in the discipline. This is especially evident in early discussions about the nature of African theology. The Sierra Leonean theologian, Harry Sawyerr, had argued as early as the late 1960s that African theology must not be uncritically wedded to the idioms of African traditional religious culture but must seek to be both particular and universal. The Ghanaian theologian, John Pobee, also argued that African identity is multiple not only because it has been affected by Western education, science, and technology, but also because of the cultural difference that exist among individual ethnic groups in Africa.

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Because of this complexity and multiplicity of African identity, Pobee suggests, even the idea of the 'indigenous' and the 'traditional' must be taken with a pinch of salt. However, in the argument dealing with the particularity and universality of the African theological enterprise, advocates for an essentialistic African identity have apparently carried the day. In fact, even those theologians, such as Pobee, who argue that African identity must be seen as complex, sometimes talk in terms of "a certain Africanness." It is thus this Africanness that makes Africans different from others; it must therefore be emphasized.

However, when it comes to defining what this Africanness is, one realizes that it is based on race and traditional religious cultures. Thus it is that whenever African theology is defined, North Africa is neatly cordoned off as "properly belonging to the Mediterranean world." Early North African Christianity is seen as belonging to Africa only in a "geographical sense," but culturally distinct from black Africa. However, this racial understanding of African identity, which has its provenance in a racialized African Diaspora, has been trenchantly critiqued by the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Appiah. In fact, to claim that African theology is theology written by black people, for black people, flies in the face of much contemporary African theology because

10 The debate on the particularity and universality of African theological discourse in francophone Africa is epitomized by the debate between Tshibangu and Vanneste at the 1968 colloquium organized by the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Kinshasa. While Tshibangu took the particularistic position, Vanneste took the universalistic position. For more on this debate, see John Parratt, Reinventing Christianity, 11.
12 John Parratt, Reinventing Christianity, 34. For a recent attempt to disabuse the academy from this assumption, see Thomas C. Oden, How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2007).
contemporary African theologians traverse various pigmentation. That is why, in spite of his ambivalence on the nature of African identity, Harry Sawyerr was essentially correct to argue that the term ‘African’ should be seen as “primarily a mythological term, expressive of love for a continent and commitment to an ideal.” Sawyerr does not say what the ideal is but I would suggest that the ideal is the well-being of all people on the continent of Africa. It is not a racialized idea because there has been, and currently are, many black people both in the Diaspora and in Africa, who have been very harmful to the well-being of black people both in and out of the continent. Some of our past and current political leaders are good examples.

Connected to the perception of African theology, as the theology of black people, is the desire to reclaim the traditional cultures of black people in Africa. This endeavour to reclaim the traditional religious cultures of black Africans in the theology of inculturation is understandable given the contempt which these cultures received from missionary and colonial Christianity. The problem with tying African Christian theology to the traditional religious cultures of black Africans is that it has made African theology to be backward-looking in spite of all protestations to the contrary. Thus, much of African Christianity, apart from Black Theology in South Africa and African liberation theology, has come to be based on an essentialized African past. It is for this reason that some ideas that are common to most, if not all, traditional societies in the world have come to be seen as an essentially African way of life. Thus, for example, stress has come to be placed on the orality of African societies. John Mbiti, the eminent Kenyan theologian, insisted that the orality of African culture is a good fit for the orality of the biblical world. According to him, the church can only prosper in African contexts if African oral cultures are taken seriously. He suggests that Christianity thrives more among non-literate, oral people than among the

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educated, pointing out “some negative consequences of missionary evangelization that has put much emphasis on written (school) forms of communicating Christianity.” Among these negative consequences is the marginalization of the non-literate and the undermining of the oral traditions that are characteristic of both the biblical world and African traditional cultures. In fact, for him, people understand Christianity even when they are not literate. He goes on to castigate those parts of the world “where written tradition has subdued and almost killed the oral art.”

Now, pointing out that evangelization in Africa should take the oral contexts seriously is helpful given that many African traditional religious cultures were oral. In fact, given that literacy is not widespread in Africa, it would be foolish to overlook oral methods of communicating the gospel in the continent. However, to speak as if African cultures are essentially oral and must continue to remain so or as if oral cultures are somehow better than literate cultures, even in terms of the spread of Christianity, is a very contentious matter. First, no culture is essentially oral given that all cultures were once oral cultures before the development of writing. African cultures are therefore not essentially oral. Lamenting the movement away from an oral to a literate culture is not primarily an African thing, either. Most cultures passed through preserving information largely through memory to writing the information down. Thus it is that even the Bible itself came to be written so that it may be preserved. Rather than extolling orality as if it were a better way to transmit Christianity, it must be acknowledged that literacy probably does a better job at preserving the faith. If the books in the Bible were not written, we would probably not have had much of the information about Christianity

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which we have today. In fact, there are elements of the thought of some significant persons or groups which we would have loved to have today but we unfortunately cannot have them because their written forms were destroyed. They could not be preserved orally either. Although orality must not be demeaned, to speak of it as if it were somehow better than literacy, even in the transmission of Christianity, probably makes too much of this means of communication.

More to the point of this paper, orality undermines the development of science and technology. As the philosopher Kwame Appiah has pointed out, the method of reasoning common in science might not have been developed in an oral culture. This is because the consistency and descriptive precision demanded of formal philosophy and science can only be preserved in a written mode. Writing makes it possible to check and recheck information to make sure that the information is correct.\(^\text{17}\) Thus, even though literacy is not needed for one to become a Christian, it must not be discounted as Mbiti does. Even though it may sometimes not be the case, literacy may help people understand their faith better. Who knows what important insights are being lost because many illiterate Christians cannot read the Bible for themselves? Who knows how many Christians are being led astray because they cannot read the Bible for themselves? Celebrating orality and even suggesting that it be seen as an ideal context for the spread of Christianity does not only prevent would-be Christians from developing insights that can be obtained only by reading the Bible for themselves, it also promotes an illiterate culture. Given that the talk in Africa in the last fifty years or so has been about the economic development of the continent, such celebration of illiteracy undermines the vision of development. While careful attention must be paid to make sure that the gospel is transmitted to those who are illiterate, portraying African culture as essentially

oral does more harm than good to the modernization of the continent. All those who see a connection between literacy and economic development need to cry out against such celebration of orality. Being an oral culture is not an essentially African phenomenon—it is characteristic of all pre-literate cultures from ancient to modern times. It is therefore problematic to see the orality of African cultures as a phenomenon that has to be preserved.

Promoting an oral culture in Africa is just one way by which theologians attempt to reclaim an essential African traditional culture; a more common way of doing this is the appropriation of what is believed to be the African spiritualized cosmology. The appropriation of the African spiritualized cosmology began with mainline African Christian theology and flowers today in African Pentecostalism. This appropriation of a supposedly African spiritualized cosmology is much evident in the understanding of salvation in African theology.

The point is often made that the churches that were planted by missionaries failed to adequately address African spiritualized cosmology. If this charge is correct, however, the blame cannot be placed at the door of the theologians of these churches because, from the very inception of contemporary African Christian theology, these theologians insisted that the understanding of salvation in African Traditional Religions (ATRs) be taken seriously. Taking the understanding of salvation in ATRs seriously was a central concern of the theology of inculturation. Mbiti, the Anglican priest from Kenya, was instrumental in making the case when he insisted that the Christian understanding of salvation must approximate the understanding of salvation in ATRs. Of the understanding of salvation which Christianity met in Africa, Mbiti writes:

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On coming to African peoples, the Christian message of salvation found a well established notion that God rescues people when all other help is exhausted, and that this rescue is primarily from material and physical dilemmas. God does not save because he [sic] is Saviour; rather, he becomes Saviour when he does save. The concept of saving is a dynamic one which is rooted in a particular moment of desperation.\(^\text{19}\)

The call was therefore that salvation in African Christianity should reflect the understanding of salvation in ATRs. Mbiti was not alone in making this call.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the Methodist theologian from Ghana, insisted that just as salvation is central to ATRs, Christianity can learn from ATRs by seeing salvation as central to the Christian faith. She then goes on to suggest some of the issues that must be included in the understanding of salvation in African Christianity: “Our salvation theology has to feature the questions of racism and liberation from material need. . . . Above all, salvation is to be seen as salvation from evil, both individual and structural. At several points our Christian theology can be aided by African religious beliefs.”\(^\text{20}\)

Kwame Bediako, the Presbyterian theologian from Ghana, insisted that the primal worldview which characterizes the African imagination must be reclaimed not only in the African context but also in the West. He insisted that Jesus Christ should be understood as divine conqueror in the African world, the one who overcomes the spiritual fears of Africans in the “deep forest.”\(^\text{21}\)

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Jean-Marc Éla, the Roman Catholic theologian from Cameroon who is one of the foremost liberation theologians in Africa, insisted that liberation theology must go hand in hand with inculturation theology. This means that African theology must not only address the socio-political and economic contexts of the continent but also the cultural context. This cultural context included the spiritualized cosmology which is common in traditional Africa. In fact, a Roman Catholic leader such as Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, who became Archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia, in 1969, increasingly “saw his religious vocation in terms of combating the all too real forces of evil.” He stated that “In my tradition, society knew that the spirits could cause spiritual disorder in the community.” He then went on to place emphasis on “spiritual healing and exorcism... combine traditional beliefs with the language of the charismatic revival.” As a Roman Catholic, Milingo’s work is a one person refutation of the blanket claim usually made by some advocates of African Pentecostalism, namely, that mission created churches in Africa could not adequately deal with African spiritualized cosmology.

In South Africa, one of the leading figures in Black Theology, the Anglican Manas Buthelezi, insisted that his view of salvation was partly based on the understanding of salvation as wholeness in

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24 Philip Jenkins, The Next Christendom, 130.
It is for this reason that various African Christologies were constructed that saw Jesus Christ mostly as healer, prophet, priest or ancestor, with the goal of making Jesus speak to the African traditional contexts. Even the South African theologian, T. S. Maluleke, who floats the possibility that religion may partly be responsible for the declining welfare of many Africans, quotes the theologian Henry Okulu with seeming approval when Okulu claims that authentic African theology is to be found in the village churches, in schools and frontiers “where traditional religions meet with Christianity.” All of this theologizing, however, appeared not to have significantly penetrated the mainline churches.

It was rather the theology of the Pentecostal-type churches that apparently significantly approximated the understanding of salvation in ATRs. The eminent Nigerian church historian, Ogbu Kalu, has helpfully pointed out that there have been three responses to Western Christian missions in Africa. The first was the establishment of the Ethiopian churches, the second was the rise of the prophet-healing or spirit churches, and the third is the current neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity that is spreading like a weed.

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wildfire on the continent. All these churches fall under what has variously been called African Independent Churches, African Instituted Churches or African Initiated Churches (AICs), but the Pentecostal-type churches belong to the second and the third responses. The second response, known as the prophet-healing or spirit churches, have variously been referred to as Zionist (South Africa), Aladura (Nigeria) or Roho (Kenya) Churches, among others. These churches started in the 1920s and 1930s, partly propelled by the healings which their charismatic founders were believed to have effected during the 1918 influenza epidemic in Africa. Thus it is that, like the ATRs, these churches demonstrated a "pragmatic approach to the Christian life through their prayers and rituals." Of these churches Adogame and Jafta write:

The AIC belief systems should be understood in light of their respective socio-cultural contexts. Belief in spiritual agency remains a cornerstone of the AIC’s worldview, a worldview that incorporates both this-worldly and other-worldly orientation. Special emphasis and attention is placed on spiritual healing, prophecy, visions and dreams, trance, exorcism. A feature germane to AIC worldview is the acquisition, retention and manipulation of spiritual power to conquer myriad of “evil” forces that populate the world around them. Members accept the traditional explanation for diseases, illnesses, and misfortunes but jettison the modus operandi of traditional healing. Through effectual prayers and elaborate ritual action, members attract the attention, power and action of the benevolent forces (God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit and the angelic

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forces) against the malicious, evil forces that parade the cosmos.\(^{31}\)

Thus it is that these churches came to embrace the worldview of ATRs while rejecting the means through which this worldview was to be dealt with. Salvation for them came to include the appropriation of the power of the Spirit of Christ to overcome the many spiritual forces that may attempt to do them harm. Charismatic leaders like the Liberian William Wade Harris, who is one of the most significant African missionaries because he preached from Liberia to Ivory Coast and Ghana, and initiated the Harrist Church, attracted much following. He attracted much following because he, as Jenkins points out, unlike the Western "missionaries, who called witchcraft a delusion...knew its power all too well, and called upon his followers to spurn occult practices.\(^{32}\) "In the eyes of his followers," Anderson writes, Harris "demonstrated that the God of the Bible was more powerful than the ancient divinities," ancestors, and nature spirits.\(^{33}\) Simon Kimbangu, from the Congo, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to become a prophet healer during the 1918 influenza and so he attracted many followers, giving birth to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ on Earth of the Prophet Simon Kimbangu (abbreviated in French as EJCSK). In the same way, the Zionist churches developed in South Africa, the Aladura in Nigeria, and the Roho in Kenya.

A singular characteristic of all these churches was that they saw some elements of the worldview of ATRs as a challenge to their followers and appropriated Christian spiritual discourses to address them. Because these churches accepted the worldview of ATRs, proposing Christian spirituality as the best means to deal

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 280–81. For one of the earliest studies of these churches, see Bengt G. M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1961, first published by Lutterworth Press, 1948).

\(^{32}\) Jenkins, The Next Christendom, 48–49.

\(^{33}\) Anderson, African Reformation, 73.
with it, many scholars, especially historians of religion, church historians, anthropologists, and some theologians, came to see them as the quintessential expression of African Christianity. The mission planted churches were seen as having failed to effectively meet the spiritual needs of African Christians because, like the missionaries that planted them, they tended to question or downplay the validity of traditional religious worldview. The prophet-healing or spirit churches came to be seen as authentic African churches because they catered to what appeared essential to the African worldview. The assumption here is apparently that the best way to address the various issues raised by the African spiritualized cosmology is not to raise the fundamental question relative to their validity (as missionaries and mission churches did) but is rather to accept them and then propose Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit as the ultimate power that overcomes the malevolent forces that threaten people. Because the African imagination is believed to be essentially spiritual, critically interrogating it is tantamount to corrupting this imagination with a distasteful Western rationality.

The conclusion in the literature was therefore unanimous: the missionaries and the mission churches had a wrong approach to the African cosmology while the prophet-healing or spirit churches had the correct one. A leading scholar of the prophet healing and spirit churches in Zimbabwe concludes:

The frequent failure of Missions to cope with the real issues in the lives of the traditionalists or of their African converts left a vacuum which the Independent Church leaders were well equipped to fill. In this respect the [prophet-healing churches] had a distinct advantage over the [Missions churches]. Familiarity with existing practices and beliefs facilitates their task of presenting the tenets of Christianity
to the African mind, if not at a deeper level, then at least in a more appropriate idiom.\(^{34}\)

How did it become obvious that the prophet-healing churches had the more appropriate approach to the African cultural context? It became obvious because most people flocked to them. People flocked to them especially because of "the supernatural powers of the prophets and healing miracles that counteract the forces of evil, disease, and witchcraft." This has special appeal especially to those who are "unhappy and dissatisfied with the strictly western nature of most mission churches."\(^{35}\)

However, apart from South Africa, these prophet-healing and spirit churches have been declining in much of Africa in recent years. Their place is now being taken by the neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic churches.\(^{36}\) What used to be said of the prophet-healing and spirit churches is now being said of the neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, namely that people are fleeing from the mission created or mainline churches (and in some cases from the older prophet-healing or spirit churches\(^{37}\)) to them because these mission churches cannot adequately address their needs. Again, these needs are issues raised by the spiritualized African cosmology.

\(^{34}\) Daneel, *Old and New*, 451. Daneel has recently argued that the worldview of these prophet-healing or spirit churches could help address some of the ecological issues of our time. See his *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).


\(^{37}\) Some flee the older prophet-healing or spirit churches to the neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic churches because some of these older churches are seen as too cosy with some elements of ATRs.
One of the leading voices that defend neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Africa is the scholar of Pentecostalism, Allan Anderson. He rightfully points out that central to the African worldview is the concept of power or "vital force," as Tempels calls it. In this context a person is seen as a "living force" who is able to increase or decrease in vital force and who can influence or be influenced by other forces. To be, then, is to have power or force; to lack power or force is tantamount to lacking being. Since these forces, both personal and otherwise, are spiritual, it goes without saying that one's materiality and spirituality are inseparable. People have to be able to effectively "manage" the spirit world in order to foster their well being. That is why, Anderson avers, in times of crisis, Africans visit prophets, diviners, and seers who are believed to have a deeper perception of the spiritual realm and who can thus help them achieve cosmological balance. But the reliance on power in traditional African religious thought, he points out, produces a "vicious cycle" that leaves the African in constant "helplessness and weakness." This is because ATRs understand God as unpredictable and capricious; the ancestors on whom they sometimes rely for protection and security are not omnipotent. This leaves the African in constant need of a power that is reliable and omnipotent, a power that can adequately address their religious context.

Anderson also charges the missionary churches for having largely discounted this context and therefore caused the African to have a split personality—they were partly Christians and partly adherents of ATRs. In this context, the Pentecostal-type churches' presentation of the Holy Spirit as the power that is stronger than any other power is good news to African ears. These churches

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introduced the idea of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate power that grants the believer the ability to overcome all other powers that sap the life of human beings. The Holy Spirit gives humans the power to be. In fact, the experience of the power of the Spirit can be seen as the hermeneutic key for understanding the theology of the Pentecostal-type churches. Anderson notes that

experiencing the power of the Spirit is a common characteristic of these churches, where the Holy Spirit is the agent of healing and deliverance. In this regard, the experience of the Spirit becomes a self-authenticating key in the hermeneutic process. In these churches therefore, the experience of the Spirit becomes an essential and perhaps the most important key in the hermeneutic. It might even be said that this experience of the Spirit is the dominant theme of the gospel as understood by Pentecostal AICs. The gifts of the Spirit are proof that the gospel is true and the confirmation of the written word of the Bible.39

Anderson insists that this pneumatology is more relevant in the African context than the sterile one imported into the continent by the West. The dynamic or power pneumatology that the Pentecostal-type AICs preach is relevant because it provides the solution that Africans seek. He continues:

The African traditionalist is in a situation of weakness, or of utter dependance [sic] on a power operating from outside to which one does not have permanent access, and which is always conditional. In short, a person’s need for power which will cater for the necessities of life and protect from its vicissitudes—a life that is full, prosperous, healthy, peaceful and secure....The message that the Spirit-type

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churches proclaimed was the power of the Spirit given to a person permanently and unconditionally.\textsuperscript{40}

Thus, according to Anderson, the Pentecostal-type AICs provide a "holistic theology of salvation," a "pneumatological soteriology" that sees salvation not "exclusively in terms of salvation from sinful acts and from eternal condemnation in the hereafter...but also in terms of salvation from sickness (healing), from evil spirits (exorcism), and from other forms of misfortunes."\textsuperscript{41} Hear him again:

People want to celebrate life to the full and triumph over prevailing adversity, particularly disease, poverty, and injustice. Sickness and affliction prevent the fullness of life that Christ came to bring, and like the "leprosy" in biblical times, they isolate people from full participation in the community and disturb the social equilibrium. AICs offer solutions seemingly more powerful than those offered either by traditional means or by Western Christianity, and they claim in the name of Christ deliverance from this adversity.\textsuperscript{42}

As such, Anderson believes that prophecy, deliverance, and even the so-called gospel of prosperity (in spite of all its weaknesses) are, in fact, proclamation of the salvific work of God through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This pneumatological soteriology, for him, does something that is hardly done in Christian mission—it combines proclamation and demonstration of the power of the gospel. In fact, unlike Western theology that is highly theoretical, Anderson points out, the theology of the AICs is

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Anderson, \textit{Moya}, 69.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Anderson, \textit{African Reformation}, 233.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Anderson, \textit{African Reformation}, 233–234.
\end{itemize}
practical theology. In this context the healing and deliverance activities of the charismatic leaders of these churches become the important work of pastoral care. Here again the similarity of this understanding of salvation and that of African traditional religious thought is unmistakable. According to Anderson, this view of salvation does not only adequately address the African worldview but is also deeply biblical. For him, engaging this worldview has helped these AICs, especially its most recent manifestations, to grow exponentially in Africa, thus preventing Africans from relapsing into their pre-Christian religion as happened to them when all they had was Western Christianity. By taking their worldview seriously, this Christianity has also prevented Africans from the secularism that characterizes Western Christianity. The fact that these churches are growing at the expense of Western mission churches, Anderson points out, shows that they are doing something right—they are meeting the felt needs of the people.

In fact, some scholars have now documented how the mainline churches are being Pentecostalized because these churches fear that they may die out if they do not go the Pentecostal way. "In Ghana today," as Asamoah-Gyadu points out, "the historic mission churches now organize prayer pilgrimages for members. They hold national evangelistic/healing crusades, anointing services, and other renewal-oriented programs meant to empower people in the Spirit." Thus the power of the Holy Spirit

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46 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'I Will Put My Breath in You, and You Will Come to Life': Charismatic Renewal in Ghanaian Mainline Churches
seems to be sweeping through Africa being apparently demonstrated mostly in miracles of salvation that entails transformed life, healing and deliverance, prosperity and liberation. It thus appears that those churches that do not think in these terms are portrayed as either on their way to extinction or failing to address the felt needs of the people.

The felt needs of the people, in this case, are conceived mainly in terms of their spiritualized cosmology, a cosmology that is regularly compared unfavourably with a supposedly decadent Western rationalistic worldview. This decadent Western rationalistic worldview is often seen as being outside what it means to be an African. Thus, the fact that some of the felt needs of the people (such as healthcare, education, communication, etc.) can be taken care of through the rationalistic imagination is often ignored, even as Africans continue to benefit from inventions that owe their existence to an elaborate promotion of the rationalistic imagination. Little wonder, then, that many African governments do not see the urgency to develop science and technology! It is because Africans stand to benefit significantly from an elaborate promotion of the rationalistic imagination that this essay insists that African theologians must not wrongly pit a supposedly spiritualized African cosmology against a supposedly Western rationalistic worldview.

As African philosophers such as Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji,


and Marcien Towa have shown, the rationalistic and scientific imagination is not a Western preserve; it is also central to the African imagination. These philosophers have called for the gulf that is usually made between the so-called African spiritualistic worldview and a supposedly Western rationalistic worldview to be bridged for the benefit of Africans in the modern world.

African Philosophy and the Critique of Essentialism

The spiritualized cosmology which is being defended as “African” in African theology has been described in African philosophy as ethnophilosophy. The philosophers who challenged the ethnophilosophical depiction of African philosophy did so for many reasons but two of these reasons appear crucial. The first is that what was described as the African worldview or cosmology also passed for philosophy and the second is that what passed for African philosophy did not address Africans as their primary audience and was in fact not conducive to an enhanced African participation in the modern world. What was hoisted on Africans as African philosophy, these philosophers argue, was initiated by the West with the intention of educating the West about how Africans think and thus facilitate various forms of colonial and even neo-colonial exploitation. This was especially the case with Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* which was clearly written to help colonial administrations better understand how Africans think and for missionaries to have a better grasp of how to present the gospel to

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Africans. Even the Negritude movement of Senghor was not intended for Africans; rather, it aimed at valorizing Africans to their European counterparts. Because depictions of Africans in these works were not intended for African consumption, these depictions focused on things that were not essential to addressing some of the major issues that Africans face in the modern world. Philosophers who critique ethnophilosophy want to talk about Africa in such a way that addresses contemporary challenges rather than fixating on an essentialistic African identity that does not appear to hold much promise for the people in modern times.

Concerning the first reason, because philosophers such as the Beninois Paulin Hountondji, the Ghanaian Kwasi Wiredu, and the Cameroonian Marcien Towa had formal training in Western philosophy and were teaching the subject in universities in their various countries, they thought that what passed for African philosophy was in fact not philosophical enough. They thought that philosophy emphasizes critical rationality that questions apparent certainty. For them, to claim that the beliefs of a group of people, beliefs which have apparently not been critically investigated, should pass for philosophy, is tantamount to redefining what philosophy should be in Africa in an improper way. It was for this reason that Hountondji rejected what he called “ethnophilosophy” because it was characterized by “unanimism.” This unanimism gives the impression that everyone in a particular African society agreed on how the world should be viewed. It was for this reason that Hountondji was among the first to call for what would later come to be known as “sage philosophy.”

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thought of some African sages who held different views on some of the things that were widely believed in their societies.\textsuperscript{52}

Ethnophilosophy included the works of Tempels and his African followers such as Alexis Kagame and, as Hountondji saw it, it was "an attempt to reconstruct a hypothetical collective 'philosophy'." For him, therefore, ethnophilosophy did not merit to be called philosophy but rather should be seen as pre-philosophical, as raw material for philosophical reflection. Ethnophilosophy is raw material for philosophical reflection because Hountondji believed that such collective beliefs are beliefs which have not been reflected upon and therefore need rigorous reflection for their truth or falsity to be determined. Under criticism from some African philosophers who insisted that collective beliefs are not necessarily beliefs that have not been reflected upon, Hountondji has come to acknowledge the validity of some collective beliefs. He has however not renounced his critique of the apparent unanimism that is characteristic of ethnophilosophy.\textsuperscript{53} In fact, for Hountondji, ethnophilosophy marked a dubious philosophical self-effacement that makes African ethnophilosophers lose themselves in an apparent collective mode of thinking. This is because he believes that ethnophilosophy was largely the creation of the individual philosopher who wrote them. They purported to be describing the beliefs of various societies when in fact they were representing their own beliefs.\textsuperscript{54}

For Hountondji, this feigned unanimism serves a dangerous political function in that it stifles freedom of speech and creativity.

\textsuperscript{52} For more on this see the work of the Kenyan philosopher, Odera Oruka, ed. \textit{Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy} (Leiden: Brill, 1990).


It stifles freedom of speech because its suggestion that there is a prescribed view of some important elements of life in a society forecloses possible objections to that view. However, critical philosophy cannot be effectively done in a context where freedom of speech is curtailed because it would be difficult to get at the heart of the truth. Objections to certain ways of life in a particular society may be dismissed simply by stating that that way of life is the prescribed way, the way society has always believed and acted. This forecloses any critical discussion of the matter. Freedom of speech is also important for creativity and human well-being because where people are not allowed to develop ways of thinking that are not prescribed it may not be possible to come up with new and fruitful ideas that may make the lives of people better. In a postcolonial African context where the new political elite were already curtailing freedom of speech and mounting all kinds of autocratic regimes that continue even to the present, ethnophilosophy was therefore playing into the hands of these elites. Thus it was that ethnophilosophy, just like the nation-states that we now have in Africa, actually serves the interest of the elites and their foreign patrons rather than the people who are being spoken about.

Hountondji therefore saw both ethnophilosophy and the Negritude movement as elitist diversionary tactics. Drawing from Aimé Césaire, he charged that ethnophilosophy was a diversion intended to remove the attention of the people from the fundamental political and economic problems that have arisen from colonialism and neo-colonialism. Tempels’ Bantu Philosophy, which was apparently intended to valorize African thinking, came to be seen as an attempt to preserve the colonial order. “Since the Bantu’s thinking was ontological,” Césaire, using considerable sarcasm, wrote,

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The Bantus only wished for satisfaction of an ontological kind. Decent pay! Comfortable living quarters! Food! But of course these Bantus are such spiritual folks, 'what they want above everything and before everything is not improvement of their economic or material situation, but the white man's recognition of dignity as a man, for their full human value.' In fact, doff your hats to the Bantu vital force, wink at the eternal Bantu soul, and you're quits.56

Another significant African philosopher who critiqued ethnophilosophy is the Cameroonian, Marcien Towa. For him, however, the stress on ethnophilosophy is also an unhelpful attempt to preserve an African originality or authenticity which is believed to lie in the African past. This past, for Towa, is one that leaves much to be desired. A basic point of departure for Towa is that of colonial conquest. For those who are attempting to conjure a pristine African past in ethnophilosophy and Negritude, Towa reminds them that the tradition we had in the past is the very tradition that led to our conquest in the past. For him, if this were a viable tradition, Africans would not have been colonized, Conquest exposed weakness in our African tradition that must not be promoted.57 For Towa, if Africa is to nurse any hope of participating in the modern world in a respectful manner, it must acknowledge the weakness of the cultures that led it to become subservient in the global order and then learn those elements (or secrets) of the imperialist West that enabled it to sit on Africa for this long.58 For him, African scholars may sing all they want about

57 This point is also made in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's novel, Ambiguous Adventure (London: Heinemann, 1972).
58 Towa, Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle, 40. Also see, Kwasi Wiredu, Philosophy and an African Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 40.
the originality of African cultures but it would amount to nothing if Africans do not have the economic and political power to make its influence felt in the global order.

Towa draws an expression from Karl Marx to make his point: "The class which is the dominant power in the society is also the dominant spiritual power. The class which provides the means of material production, in the same manner, provides the means of intellectual production." Applied to the relation between contemporary Africa and the rest of the world, especially the West and the rising powers in Asia such as China, India, and Japan, Africa is being made to do the bidding of these other powers because they control the means of production. Even more poignant for Christianity, it may be interesting to note that although the number of Christians in Africa is increasing in our time, African Christian leaders still get much of their training from the West. Thus, although the number of Christians in the West (with the possible exception of the United States) is dwindling while that of Africa is increasing, Africa is still theologically reliant on the West. Most books being read in African theological institutions are published in the West and, using their financial and educational strength, many scholars still leave the West for brief and sometimes prolonged teaching periods in seminaries and theological schools in many African countries. The reverse can hardly be said to be the case.

Those who leave the West to teach in theological schools and seminaries in Africa may pretty well teach what they please because they usually pay their way through the process; in fact, these scholars teach African students what it means to be correct Christians, which is usually the Western way. On the other hand, those who leave Africa to teach in theological schools and universities in the West are usually policed by these institutions because these institutions foot the bills and even still claim

theological superiority. The issue of gay marriage that has rocked the Anglican Church has led some churches in the West to align with churches in Africa and African Anglican churches have increasingly had significant role to play in the Lambert Conference. Some have hailed this as African influence in world Christianity. However, Africa is still largely marginal in the life of the church in general because the continent is still generally dependent on the West and now Asia. These are the people who control the world today. Even though there would soon be more Christians in Africa and Latin America than anywhere else in the world, these places are still largely marginal because they do not yet have economic and political might. (Brazil is an exception in Latin America).

Towa does not make the connection which has been made above but one can discern it from his Marxian perspective. Towa's point is that Africans can sing about their cultural difference all they want but without economic and political power, the continent will still remain the backwater of the world, it will still remain under the subjugation of the dominant powers in the world. The same can be said of African Christianity: the optimistic view that African Christianity is going to influence world Christianity will come to naught if Africa does not have the economic and political means to promote what Africans believe. It is often the case that those with power lord it over those who do not have power both in church and in society. This is glaringly displayed in the nature of Western Christian mission in Africa and more dramatically in cases where a handful of Europeans with guns conquered a mass of Africans with spears, bows and arrows, as obtained during colonial conquests. It is also manifested in the few African elites who lord it over their people with the help of their Western patrons who send them guns and cash. It is therefore important that Africans be enabled to be economically and politically viable if their subservient position in the world is to be overturned.

Before leaving to study philosophy in various universities around the world, Towa was trained in a Catholic seminary in Cameroon. Thus, when he said that “The people who decided to
lose their essence in order to assimilate the secret of the imperialist West recover themselves by remaining themselves and, on the contrary, those who wanted to preserve their originality are in the process of losing their innermost being (être profond) by losing themselves," he was probably thinking of the statement attributed to Jesus Christ in Matthew 10:39: "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (NRSV). Here Jesus Christ is talking about what it takes to establish a relationship with God through him and this applies to matters of faith. But when Towa conjures a similar idea, he is connecting it to the relation between Western and African cultures. Towa believes that because Western imperialism has dominated Africans for a very long time, it is incumbent upon Africans to learn what makes the West tick if Africans are to secure any future of well being in the modern world. It is for this reason that Towa calls for a revolution of world view that mounts a vigorous challenge to African cultures that do not stand the test of the modern world. He makes his case by showing how Russia and China revolted against traditional modes of thought so as to make new and enduring cultures for themselves.

He argues that Russian identity was for a long time characterized by a mystical tradition that had a “profound spiritual desire for suffering.” In fact, suffering was seen as the avenue through which Russians would be saved. But by the middle of the nineteenth century there emerged thinkers such as Belinskij who drew from his “philosophy of lights” to argue that Russia was in dire “need of education, justice, dignity, and liberty, rather than mysticism or piety.” Towa sees this challenge to traditional Russian identity as the road that led to the emergence of communism in Russia and the transformation of the whole society. The same could be said for China which, as Towa points out,

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60 Towa, Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l’Afrique Actuelle, 46.
61 Towa, Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l’Afrique actuelle, 43.
underwent a “formidable cultural revolution” through the activities of the “May Fourth Movement.” This movement is known as May Fourth Movement because it took place on 4th May 1919 and, according to Towa, it could be described as the Chinese Enlightenment. For Towa, this movement challenged traditional Confucian morality and made it possible for China to adopt elements of Western philosophical and scientific cultures without completely dismantling what it means to be Chinese. In fact, the leaders of the May Fourth Movement translated many Western works into Chinese and invited many Western scholars to deliver lectures in China. Towa sees this movement as the starting point for contemporary China.62 It was only through appropriating “the secret of European power” that China could develop itself and promote its own culture.63 Hence, China and Russia had not insisted on maintaining a stale tradition that had no relevance for the times. Even more important, China borrowed from Western imperialistic culture in order to attain a world status where Chinese culture could be promoted.

Thus, the paradox in the statement of Jesus obtains in the interaction of culture, especially the interaction between Western scientific and technological cultures and African cultures. If Africa insists on maintaining something called African authenticity that fails to learn from Western philosophical and scientific rationality, Africa may soon have no culture to protect. On the other hand, if Africa learns from Western philosophical and scientific rationality, that may be a means towards the preservation of African cultures. One may argue whether Towa’s reading of the situation in Russia and China is accurate but the point he makes is a serious one that must be meditated upon. The lesson for Africa is therefore clear: For Towa, there need to be a revolution that challenges what it means to be African. Rather than looking for what it means to be

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African in the past, as ethnophilosophy and Negritude did, Africans should be learning the secret of the power of the West so that it could improve its lot in the modern world. It is only through such creative self-destruction that Africa can build a more hopeful future.

Towa's call for the creative destruction of Africa has led some to accuse him of buying wholesale into Western culture without giving much space for anything African. This is an accusation which Wiredu attempts to avoid by critiquing some elements of African culture while suggesting that others, such as African communalism should be maintained even in a scientifically and technologically advanced Africa. It is for this reason that Wiredu sees philosophy as crucial in reforming, adapting, and developing African cultures, especially those elements of the cultures which he describes as "evils" namely, anachronism, authoritarianism, and supernaturalism. Wiredu defines anachronism as "anything which outlasts its suitability," indicating that various habits of thought and practices and even whole societies can become anachronistic. He however points out that while ideas and practices that outlast their suitability can be discarded, societies that become anachronistic need to be modernized. He thus sees discourses of development and underdevelopment as discourses that also relate to societal anachronism. Societies that are not developed are societies that are regarded as not suitable in the modern context; these societies, many of which are found in Africa, need to be modernized.

An important anachronistic element in African culture is the lack of stress on "logic and rational procedures." Although he believes that there is a place for intuition and emotion in life, Wiredu also faults Senghor for making a virtue of the role of emotion in African thought, insisting that

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[I]n Africa as anywhere else . . . logical, mathematical, analytical, experimental procedures are essential in the quest for the knowledge of, and control over, nature and, therefore, in any endeavour to improve the condition of man [sic]. Our traditional culture was somewhat wanting in this respect and this is largely responsible for the weaknesses of traditional technology, warfare, architecture, medicine, etc. There is little doubt that many of the hardships of traditional life were, and still are, traceable to this cause.  

Wiredu uses traditional medicine as an example. He acknowledges that traditional medicine sometimes work even where modern medicine has failed but he also points out that “traditional medicine is terribly weak in diagnosis and weaker still in pharmacology.” This weakness is partly due to the fact that traditional medicine does not follow scientific procedures in diagnosis and preparation of medicine. However, “Instead of a sober inquiry into the causes of disease...our medicine men [sic] launch into stories of malevolent witchcraft and necromancy. Meanwhile, both children and adults, the children in greater numbers, die or are incapacitated through the administration of scientifically unresearched prescriptions.” He therefore sees “any inclination to glorify the unanalytical cast of mind” in the African context as not just retrograde but tragic. Unlike many African theologians who see the promotion of the unanalytical and unscientific cast of mind as a boon to Christianity, Wiredu correctly believes that it is one of the anachronisms that must be challenged in Africa. The best way to do this, Wiredu rightly avers, is through the promotion of the kind of education that promotes critical thinking. Thus, unlike some scholars of African studies who claim that education has not been able to correct the unanalytical way of thinking common in many

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Africans, Wiredu believes that much of what passes for education in Africa hardly builds critical minds.

Other anachronistic elements in African cultures which Wiredu thinks should be challenged includes “the pervasiveness and stress on ceremony and ritual in many aspects of social life,” such as elaborate and expensive funerals for example, which, even though important in the past, “should now be kept in more reasonable bounds.” The view that older people are necessarily wise is also anachronistic because “the wisdom of uninstructed longevity is unlikely to prove extensively applicable in the complex environments of modern life.” Wiredu also insists that the importance attached to fertility in many African societies also has to be challenged because “when children are produced without regard to the means of upkeep and upbringing the consequences can be serious for them and the society.” Wiredu is quite on the mark with regard to these matters for they are matters about which many African societies do not seem to have given critical and extensive thought. More specifically, apart from some African women theologians who still faltering address the issue of fertility, for example, given the high status placed on motherhood in many African societies, African male theologians have hardly addressed the issue.

The second “evil” which Wiredu deplores in African societies is authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is however also anachronistic because it is not suitable in enabling Africa to participate effectively in the modern world. He defines authoritarianism as the “unjustified overriding of an individual’s will.” It is crucial for Wiredu that people be properly educated in a particular society so that they may be able to make informed and rational choices. To

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make informed and rational choices means that people are made to be aware of available alternatives. Thus, where people are not aware of the alternatives available, they cannot be said to be making informed and rational choices. Wiredu is aware that sometimes people’s choices are determined for them from birth, such as when children are born into particular religions, but he believes that this should not stop African societies from giving their members the kind of education that makes them aware of conceptual, practical, and other choices in life. It is for this reason that he faults traditional African societies for having been very authoritarian in ways that do not fit our modern context. Thus, instead of justifying practices in society on the grounds of reason, these societies have often fallen back on explaining these practices simply as tradition. This mode of explanation, Wiredu believes, does not promote the kind of imagination conducive for Africa to flourish in the modern world. The political authoritarianism rampant in many African societies, Wiredu points out, is only a symptom of a deeper authoritarianism characteristic of African cultures. Wiredu correctly believes that this attitude must be challenged.

A third “evil” which Wiredu insists should be challenged in Africa is supernaturalism. For him, supernaturalism is not belief in the existence of supernatural beings but rather the “the tendency to seek the basis of morality in some supernatural source.” Wiredu contrasts supernaturalism with humanism “according to which morality is founded exclusively on considerations of human well-being.”71 Wiredu’s main problem with supernaturalism is that it does not always seek human well-being. According to him, when people derive their morality from a supernatural source, it is possible to do things which are clearly inhuman and yet still claim a sense of piety or rectitude. The examples of Christians who go to war or kill abortion providers in the name or God or the Islamic suicide bombers, come to mind. However, when morality is

71 Wiredu, Philosophy and African Culture, 5.
humanistic, Wiredu believes, it is possible to know when one's actions are harmful because they clearly cause harm to people. Wiredu believes that African morality is clearly humanistic because it seeks the well-being of people rather than the satisfaction of a supernatural being. Although Wiredu seems to think that a humanistic vision is more helpful than a theocentric one, honesty demands that we acknowledge that the actual record of both is mixed. His critique of "supernaturalism," however, needs to be taken seriously rather than simply dismissed as an African example of a move toward philosophical and intellectual atheism. We must come to acknowledge in Africa, too, that just as Christianity and other religions carry critical moral compasses, they may also be sources of crimes against human beings.

In addition to anachronism, authoritarianism, and supernaturalism, Wiredu is also concerned with how African thought is compared with Western thought. Robin Horton compared traditional African thought to Western philosophical and scientific thought, claiming that they serve a similar function even though they belong to different ways of thought. Wiredu is at pains to point out that traditional African thought should not be compared with modern Western philosophical and scientific thought but rather with traditional thought in Western societies. For him all traditional thought is pre-scientific so it would be inappropriate to compare the pre-scientific thought of one people to the scientific thought of another, as Horton does. This rebuttal of Horton's comparison of African and Western thought leads Weridu to insist that African thought is not as distinct from Western thought as Horton would like it to be. The mode of thought which is dominant in Africa today, Wiredu insists, is pre-scientific; this is a mode of thought that was dominant in Europe before the emergence of scientific rationality and is still dominant among many people of the West to the present. This means that Africans do not have a

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73 Bediako sees Wiredu as promoting atheism. See Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 439, 443 n. 42.
monopoly on pre-modern ways of thinking and that the West does not have a monopoly on the modern mindset.

Wiredu refers to the mode of thought which is dominant among many Africans as “superstition,” and defines this as “rationally unsupported belief in entities of any sort.” This is therefore not limited to the religious imagination even though it seems to be dominant in this imagination. One can see from this that rational (that is critical questioning) of belief is crucial for Wiredu. The point is therefore not that one (or a group of people) should not believe in entities but rather that one (or a group of people) should critically question what is believed. People should “argue for their beliefs” rather than simply asserting it. In much of Africa, Wiredu avers, beliefs are asserted rather than argued. This tendency has unfortunately been promoted by respectable Africans who intended to foster African dignity and difference thus making this imagination to be a distinctly African phenomenon. Promoting this uncritical mode of thought, as some influential Africans and even non-Africans do, is detrimental to Africa’s development. “To develop in any serious sense,” Wiredu insists, “we in Africa must break with our old uncritical habits of thought: that is to say, we must advance past the stage of traditional thinking.”

Passing this stage of traditional thinking does not mean betraying an African way of thought and embracing a Western one or accepting the Western narrative of evolutionism. This is because although critical philosophical and scientific rationality has grown significantly in Western cultures, this form of rationality is not alien to African thought. Wiredu rightly points out that no people can survive for a significant length of time without the use of scientific imagination. In fact, for him, the quest for knowledge that may enhance well-being “is a characteristically human endeavor.”

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74 Wiredu, Philosophy and African Culture, 41, 47.
75 Wiredu, Philosophy and African Culture, 44.
76 Kwasi Wiredu, “Our Problem of Knowledge: Brief Reflections on Knowledge and Development in Africa,” in African Philosophy as Cultural
The fact of the matter, however, is that Africans are behind the West in the cultivation of this scientific imagination.\textsuperscript{77} It is for this reason that Wiredu has tirelessly called for the institution of critical forms of education that might lead to the growth of science and technology in Africa. He laments the fact that "much of the knowledge we need in Africa now is in the hands, and sometimes in the heads, of non-Africans."\textsuperscript{78} This is because the technological and scientific knowhow which Africa needs in order to better its situation has been better developed by others rather than by Africans. It would however be helpful if Africa could increase its initiative in this endeavour.

This point is also pressed by Hountondji who argues that in order to curtail Africa's painful experience of the "logic of extroversion," the continent must develop its scientific and technological capabilities.\textsuperscript{79} Hountondji describes the logic of extroversion as the various ways Africa's relations with the West has bequeathed on the continent the tendency to be outward looking rather than inward looking. This means that in the global geopolitical and economic context, Africa does not so much serve its own interest but rather the interests of powerful outsiders who have held the continent in thrall. This is intellectually demonstrated by the fact that Africa has become more a consumer of knowledge than a producer of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge. Hountondji laments how many African countries lack high level research laboratories. Even in cases where decent laboratories exist, the instruments used in them are usually manufactured out of Africa so that African countries often rely on outside manufacturers to do what they need to do. Even more, journals, libraries, and periodicals through which knowledge is shared are largely

\textsuperscript{78} Wiredu, "Our Problem of Knowledge," 181.
produced outside the continent so that researchers in the continent have to rely on those outside it in order to do effective work. Economically, Africa has served largely as an exporter of raw materials rather than a manufacturer. This is painfully obvious in the exportation of crude oil by oil rich African countries. Because these countries do not have good oil refineries, the crude oil is refined elsewhere and sold to African countries at exorbitant prices. This is also the case with rubber that led to the death of many in the Belgian Congo, and coffee, cocoa, diamond, gold, and medicinal plants that are extracted from Africa, processed abroad and sold to the people of the continent at higher prices.

It is for this reason that Hountondji insightfully sees what has been described as brain drain, the migration of African intellectuals out of the continent, as merely a reflection of this extroversion. Because Africans have been taught all their lives to look for salvation outside the continent, it is no wonder that they leave for other places. Even those intellectuals who remain in Africa are not exempt from this tendency to look for salvation outside. That is why most of them look for support for their work outside the continent. This is seen especially in the request for research grants from foreign organizations rather than from their own countries and the validation of their work by outsiders. In all this, Hountondji points out, Africa is playing the classic peripheral role which colonialism carved for the continent. This means that because Africa has not developed scientific and technological knowhow that may augment its place in the modern world, Africa is still, by and large under colonialism. Colonialism designed the continent to be outward-looking and to this day, this has not changed. For this to change, Hountondji opines, the continent needs to develop its intellectual, economic and political strength so that it would no longer be the periphery but one of the centres of the modern world. Central to all this, is the development of science and technology on the continent.

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80 Hountondji, ed. *Endogenous Knowledge*, 1–12.
To show that developing science and technology does not mean that Africa is aping the West, Hountondji points out that scientific and technological activities have, in fact, been part of life in ancient, that is, pre-colonial Africa. However, in order to avoid incongruity in its development of science and technology for the modern time, Africa needs to develop what Hountondji calls "endogenous knowledge." Endogenous knowledge is the kind of knowledge which people have made their own. It is perceived as fitting in the context even if it did not originate from that context. Ancient African societies, for example, are known to have conducted iron smelting and many African societies today see working with iron (e.g., blacksmithing) as part of their ancestral heritage. It may well be that iron smelting did not originate in these societies but these societies have made such activity their own. This is also the case with a food crop like maize which originated in the Americas in the 17th century. Because many Africans have made the crop their own, they now see it as somehow indigenous to their societies. That is the nature of endogenous knowledge. It may be developed within a particular context, but again, it may not. What is critical is that particular societies make this knowledge their own rather than seeing it as alien. "That a cultural borrowing is assimilated to the point of being one with the collective heritage thereafter," Hountondji writes, "means that such borrowing is fully mastered and integrated into the initial culture itself."

The idea of endogenous knowledge is meant to indicate that even though Hountondji decries Africa's extroversion, what he wants is not for Africa to be cut off from the world or insist on its own form of knowledge, as some may wish. That is why he makes a distinction between indigenous and endogenous; indigenous being mainly that which is "a purely local curiosity that has no

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82 Hountondji, ed. Endogenous Knowledge, 42.
83 Hountondji, ed. Endogenous Knowledge, 42–43.
effectiveness outside its particular context." Endogenous knowledge, however, moves beyond the local to the multilocal. Africa should therefore endeavour to move from the local to the multilocal, from an unhealthy and conservative stress on difference to the proper embrace of complexity. That is why Africa must move past its pre-colonial science, such as traditional medicine which it sees as quintessentially African, to see how that science can apply outside local communities. Thus, the forms of scientific and technological knowledge which existed in pre-colonial Africa need to be appropriated (where possible) and/or augmented. All this is to say that Africans should not be satisfied with something called "African" if it does not serve the people well in our time. On the other hand, Africans must not just rely on the outside world or ape the outside world; they should rather make a creative mélange between what they develop and what comes from outside so that they may come to see its end product as part of their culture—like maize and cassava in African societies.

African theologians should therefore connect rationality and spirituality rather than severing the two as is currently the case. As has been shown above, rationality is not Western and spirituality African, as some African theologians would like to think. African theologians would do well to learn from African philosophers who have endeavoured to show how Africans may avoid an unhealthy stress on difference and emphasize scientific rationality for the well-being of their people. Modern scientific and technological development did not originate in Africa but appropriating the rationality that brought them about would not undermine a supposedly pristine African spiritualistic identity; rather, it will be a way for the continent to address some of its most pressing felt needs. As these philosophers have correctly argued, it would be foolish not to vigorously appropriate such rationality. Stressing a supposedly African spiritualized cosmology at the expense of critical scientific rationality will only take the continent back,

84 Hountondji, ed. *Endogenous Knowledge*, 18.
subordinating it to the West and Asia. Theologians have to seek ways to creatively bring the two together rather than pitting one against another as is presently the case, especially in Pentecostalism.

Postscript

The central thesis of this essay has been that African theology of inculturation and its current manifestation in Pentecostal Christianity on the continent have not promoted the scientific imagination which is essential to enhancing the economic development of the continent. One of the questions raised when this paper was presented related to the education of some of the founders of neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa and the fact that some of these neo-Pentecostal churches, such as the Redeemed Christian church of God (Nigeria) and International Central Gospel Church (Ghana) have established universities. The fact that some of the founders of these churches are educated people and that they are establishing universities seem to suggest that they may not be accused of promoting the spiritualistic imagination at the expense of the scientific imagination. My reply to this is that the level of education does not really matter; it is the kind of education that matters.

A related question had to do with whether this paper rejected the spiritual ways of understanding the world in general and human beings in particular. It should be stressed that this paper is not intended to reject spirituality. Rather, it insists that Africans have come to make an unfounded claim that they are more spiritual than other people, especially people in the West. Thus, while the West has come to emphasize science and technology, Africans have come to think that their gift to the world is spirituality. The cry of this paper is that the modern world in which Africans live is one that turns on science and technology. Without rejecting spirituality (a thing which Africans have no monopoly over, in spite of what
some scholars tend to think) Africans must come to see that science has a central role in the modern world. For Africans to overcome their low place in current global geopolitics, the development of science and technology should be seen as central and should therefore be promoted by churches.

It was further asked whether I am suggesting that Africans should embrace Enlightenment rationality. Part of what this paper points out is that, as Hountondju and Odera Oruka have shown, science and technology and the critical imagination have been part of African life from ancient times. Enhancing the scientific imagination in Africa will not simply mean adopting Enlightenment rationality. It also means reclaiming part of what it means to be African.

A final question that was raised has to do with where the history of Africa factor in this paper. It appeared, it was queried, that this paper does not take into account the legacy of colonialism as the background to Africa’s contemporary woes. It seemed to place all the blame on the spiritual imagination. My reply to this question is that Africa’s problems have multidimensional causes, all of which cannot be addressed in every single paper or book. Scholars always focus on particular segments of an issue and in this case the pressing issue is the elevation of the spiritual imagination over the scientific in contemporary African Christian discourses. This does not mean that the brutal legacy of colonialism does not have an impact on where Africa finds itself today in the global political economy. What it means is that that legacy is not central to this paper. What is central is what Africans can do now to reclaim their agency and pull themselves out of a situation of perennial dependence and even humiliation.
Witchcraft in Black Communities: Sociological, Philosophical and Theological Deconstruction.

By

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Preamble: Ubiquity of Magic

Four facts to illustrate the ubiquity of magic in the Black communities:

1. In Christiane Charette’s program, Wednesday 10 November 2010 on Radio Canada, Grégoire Ahongbonon from Benin was explaining how Christian sects’ religious dictatorship in Benin and Côte d’Ivoire would push families to quarantine their mentally ill members by tying them to trees for weeks or months and without feeding them. One day, one of these mentally unstable people tied up to a tree for weeks attacked a boy who got too close and wrung his neck mistaking him for prey and meat to be eaten. This fact illustrates the predominance of dangerous and retrograde cultural atavisms in sub-Saharan African countries and in the diaspora black communities of the west (Europe and North America).

2. In Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and in many African countries, albinos are hunted and killed like prey so that their organs (sex parts, hair, kidneys, livers, etc.) can be used in magical practices (making magic potions) to gain political and economic power in societies plagued by chronic economic misery and the rapid decline of state and public institutions.
3. In DRC thousands of kids are abandoned in the streets of Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Kisangani and other cities. They are claimed to be witches/wizards who could kill members of their families. The truth is, the parents, victims of chronic economic poverty, simply are incapable of taking care of them and feeding them. They thus abandon them in the streets with the blessings of Christian leaders influenced by a neo-Mobutuist mentality\(^1\), an instrumentalist mystificatory and fundamentalist reading of the Bible, a misappropriation of funds through an obsessional practice of tithing, as well as an intellectual laziness for which they should be culpable.

4. In Douala, Libreville, Kinshasa, Lagos, Cotonou and other African cities, old women are beaten in public by neighbourhood youth with impunity. The youth claim the women to be witches responsible for the school failures of young students in the neighbourhood or in the village. What a travesty, what an imposture and what aberration? One can view these horrific and terrifying scenes on YouTube.

Interpretative Philosophical Essay on the Increase of Witchcraft in Black Communities

In this article, I will attempt the arduous task of an epistemological deconstruction of witchcraft-sorcery, considering it right away from a philosophical angle of a “mystifying and religious aetiology” to explain, tame and manage evil in traditional and contemporary Black African societies and the “Afro” diaspora. Witchcraft-sorcery is thus an attempt to tame the irrational, due to

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\(^1\) Mobutu Sese Seko, one of the most corrupt Congo (African) rulers, ruled the DRC 32 years after seizing power in 1965; Neo-Mobutism is generally a discourse on African authenticity that enables the ruler, like a witch-wizard, to corruptly keep the wealth of the country. (Editor)
the trivialization of evil and death in the post-colonial Black African “democratures”.² It is suitable then to de-compartmentalize witchcraft-sorcery or magic by making it homologous or analogous with the corruption of certain banking institutions in North America: Bernard Maddof and the other Canadian Madofs or heads of businesses closing factories in Québec and Ontario, while, with impunity they refuse to pay the pensions of workers. These workers have been contributing for more than thirty years; they are seeing their savings and pensions evaporate amidst the shoddy explanations that the banking crisis is to blame.

The international economic recession sweeping through the world, starting with the real estate crisis in the USA and in other international financial institutions, may be analyzed incidentally through magic, the most suitable example of evil. Once bankrupt, the head of the banks and institutions end up with millions of dollars while the poor workers remain empty handed and are forced to rejoin the work force in their sixties. This is exactly the occult system of magic that kills millions of people in the world to preserve the self-interest of a few capitalist predators. This analogy between magic in Africa and the victimization of millions of people throughout the world by predatory and fatal financial speculation constitutes a keystone to decrypt the message of this critical way of thinking; it proposes to attack methodically and with audacity the bull of magic by its horn, in Africa as well as in other western capitalist societies.

² The neologism “démocrature” is an irony to designate dictatorial and autocratic regimes of postcolonial Africa where personality cult is the rule; social terror and institutionalized arbitrary violence give tyrants power to kill their own people. I call this the politics of death (necropolitics) or thanatocracy.
aggressors as well as the victims. This symbolic violence is difficult to discern, since it can become normalized and accepted by its victims who succumb to an attitude of resignation and fatality due to mythico-magical mentality common in the religious and cultural traditions of Africa.

I will now investigate with determination to decipher the hidden mechanisms that are the source of the macabre deployment of witchcraft in societies based on the epistemology of “the politics of the belly” and the sentencing to death of innocent citizens, hostages of bloody dictatorships. We witness in Africa the rise of family dynasties (Morocco, Togo, Gabon, DRC, etc) ruled, in the chaotic management of evanescent African states, by “thanatocratic” and “necropolitical” stratagems. The frontal overlap between the crisis of independence and the crisis of the structural exploitation of Africa by the steamroller neoliberal globalisation only exacerbates the harmful beliefs and practices of witchcraft in Black African communities, in the West Indies, the Caribbean and among numerous diaspora Africans spread throughout the western world (Europe and North America).

I want to state right away with great conviction that the ever-increasing inflation of witchcraft in the black communities is directly tied to the double crisis" suffocating contemporary African societies: the failure of the postcolonial state and the challenge vis-à-vis globalization.

I am also stating that the beliefs, the propaganda and the practices related to the political religious paradigm of witchcraft constitute a third failure of contemporary black African societies. After fifty years of chaotic and disastrous management of postcolony by Africans themselves, they are incapable of implementing a roadmap towards development and the democratization of their political institutions. In light of these two

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initial statements (theses), this article will attempt a theological, sociological and philosophical deconstruction of the system of witchcraft, because it is but a grotesque imposture and a mechanism hiding and blocking forever the emergence of Africans as the main “subjects” and “actors” in their own history; contrary to the accusatory and childish bemoaning directed against the colonizing powers, that some want to hold responsible as the “sole destroyers” of Africa.

I am not attempting to absolve Western capitalist and colonizing powers from any blame in the sad state of affairs of black African societies and their diasporas that reflect a similar plight in other parts of the world. On the contrary, I am stating firmly that indicating the endogenous causes (aetiologies) consists in holding Africans as primarily to blame for their chronic decay. This would be a first step in seeking therapeutic strategies that might lead to a cure of the malaise—a holistic liberation and a reconstruction of the imploding post colonial African societies.

This consists in considering witchcraft as a “transverse phenomenon” that requires a de facto multidisciplinary approach. Through a sociological deconstruction, we will then demonstrate how the aggravation of the postcolonial crisis and globalization favours a mental and social ambiance exacerbating the discourse and practices related to witchcraft attacks. The slumber of the failing postcolonial state leaves citizens to fend for themselves; it results in a dictatorship of the irrational, the rule of the arbitrary and the informal, and the mystification that propels the mechanics of witchcraft. The philosophical deconstruction of witchcraft in part will rely on Marxism to denounce the majority of the so-called churches of “Awakening” spreading throughout the chaos and the anomie that characterize black African postcolonial societies. These churches become “the opium of the African people” by obscuring them from being responsible and conscious subjects fulfilling their obligations towards history. With particular reference to the Congo, these churches are planting seeds of the irrational, of intellectual lethargy and neo-Mobutism; they should
be called rather “Churches of slumber and death”. These churches practice what the sociologist R. Devisch brilliantly and genially calls “The pillaging of Jesus” in Kinshasa.4

The philosophical deconstruction will also rely on resources from phenomenology by showing the necessity to maintain a radical ontological difference between the mode of appearance of the visible (physical realities illustrating the failure of postcolonial states) and the mode of appearance of the invisible (realities that become manifest in the theological regime of faith). Concrete solutions in the political and economic field of postcolony and globalization need to be found to questions and problems relative to the economy and politics. I will close with a theological deconstruction of witchcraft by showing that the devil does not roam the streets; the pastoral and theological priority of African churches should be to promote an ethic of responsibility in the African communities so that Africans are projected locally and globally like subjects, actors and authors of their own destiny. It is not by fasting and praying for weeks and pronouncing magical incantations—“in the name of Jesus, I will break this or that...”, like it is done in the Churches of Awakening—that Africa will face the challenges of the ever increasing Chinese imperialism as the main test that will decide the renaissance or the lasting decline of African nations. The role of African nations, ever since their insertion into the capitalist globalization, since the days of slavery in the 16th century until now, has been one of submission, impotence and escapism into a popular and pathological religiosity.

At the end of this triple deconstruction of the system of witchcraft in the black communities in Africa and the diaspora, we will be able to establish a foundation for an “epistemological rupture” with the mystifying and pathological cultural atavisms, and also establish a foundation for an informed and intelligent leadership to promote new mentalities in Africa as well as in the diaspora. There, reason will be tested as a condition for the

possibility of the reconstruction of new viable societies on the political and economic levels; which is not the case today. We are convinced in our Centre of Research of Black African and Diasporas Communities\(^5\) that the networking of think tanks and all African researchers throughout the world represents a radical alternative for a “transmutation” of the paradigm for studying, understanding and interpreting the protean African crisis. It is a complex ("reticular") leadership based on a radical ethical conversion opening up possibility for a multidisciplinary understanding of the situation by a thorough examination of the anomic societies of the postcolony. Because, prior to being a crisis of political, economic and academic institutions, the African crisis is foremost a fundamental question of the Black African human, of self-consciousness (ipseity) and the imaginary in the endeavour of being recognized in a world dominated by steamrolling neoliberal globalization.

The globalization of Witchcraft in Black Communities

The process of “retraditionalization” of black African societies happens in a chaotic context of collision between the postcolonial crisis and the marginalization of Africa by the neoliberal globalization. The heuristic hypothesis I would like to verify in this section is the one that consists in considering the rise of witchcraft in African communities as a model within which a global understanding of the crisis may be deployed in order to find multidisciplinary solutions to drive the intellectual, ethical and spiritual revolution necessary for any contemporary renaissance of African societies.

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Witchcraft in Black Communities

Witchcraft represents a structural and omnipresent plague in contemporary African societies as well as in African Diasporas scattered in Western Europe, North America (Canada and the U.S) and in the West Indies. The most troubling thing is the trivialization of witchcraft accusations and the accusation of children and old women for practicing witchcraft. The aggravation of the African postcolonial crisis and the international marginalization of African societies due to the mercantilism of neoliberal globalization accelerate the erosion process of the economic, political and mental human conditions in African societies. In this section, I will analyze witchcraft from a sociological point of view as the expression of the severe economic and political crisis present in the majority of contemporary Black African societies. I will then explain the process of "retraditionalization" of contemporary African societies, in spite of the diffusion of modern technological tools and products. Finally, I will propose political and ethical solutions to rid African societies of witchcraft (or to annihilate witchcraft from African societies) because it represents the premier obstacle to the integral development of Africa.

Witchcraft—a Result of the increasing political and economic Crisis in postcolonial African Societies

The failure of the African politics of independence and the increasing deterioration of the economic life conditions create a situation of trivialization and proliferation of beliefs and practices related to witchcraft in black African postcolonial societies and the

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7 It is difficult to capture the full range of meanings of the French Sorcellerie; it means more than "witchcraft"; it also means "sorcery" and "magic". The author often implies one or other of the senses especially in its application to politics and economy; so at times it is translated witchcraft-sorcery (Editor)
African Diasporas throughout the western world. The general and poor masses in African societies live and interpret the miserable and chaotic situation they are experiencing like a situation of exploitation and persecution by the occult and wicked forces of witchcraft, manipulated by the political authorities. This is the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo\(^8\), Cameroon\(^9\), Benin and Nigeria. There the political game board is manipulated by politicians without honour who do not hesitate to use the language and the practices of witchcraft to terrorize and exploit the populations abandoned for 50 years by the African elite that control the power since the departure of the western colonisers after the independences in the sixties.

Witchcraft and sorcery ought to be considered as a specific mode of doing politics these days in African societies. Each political actor finds the absolute necessity to be protected by using a whole range of occult ways provided by magicians and charlatans. This explains why many African presidents surround themselves with and take advice from priests and evangelical exorcists capable of neutralizing occult attacks from political foes. In Côte d'Ivoire, in Uganda\(^{10}\), in Central African Republic, etc., priests manage political decisions of presidents by intervening directly and by being close to them. It will be a mistake to

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\(^{10}\) On how Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, his wife and his daughter, Patience Rwabwogo are implicated in Evangelical Churches of USA, see the article of Anouk Batard, « L’Ouganda découvre le lobby évangélique », *Manière de voir N° 108*, décembre 2009-janvier 2010, pp. 11-14.
minimize the variable of witchcraft in the political radioscopy of the postcolonial African crisis. It is this way that we will be able to make a phenomenological unveiling of the maze of witchcraft-sorcery, which will eradicate it in African societies. No doubt its persistence represents the main source of the actual blockage of the continent and its dizzying regression in all levels of life.

Witchcraft needs to be battled with all the forces in Africa because it is spreading with an extremely deadly intentionality. The grim and sinister practices inherent with witchcraft take on a disproportionate scale because of the aggravation of black African postcolonial crisis. The hastened disappearance of the last institutional remnants of the colonial past and the human economic and cultural disasters caused by postcolonial dictatorships create an anarchic space that encourages bloody confrontations between forces and political actors who fight to establish their supremacy on society as a whole. Monopolizing thus the means of physical and symbolic coercion, as well as the levers of predation of economic resources, the postcolonial political actors guarantee themselves a large and durable domination on the whole sphere of public life.

In this context, the ethical and political critique of postcolonial African dictatorships must necessarily start with a philosophical critique of the essential categories of the energy of the language of witchcraft.
Pierre Geschiere\textsuperscript{11} was accurate when he devoted a whole book on the structural and axiological contacts between witchcraft and politics within the Maka of Cameroon. His conclusions in fact could be applied in the political critique of all bloody dictatorships running wild in Africa for the past 50 years. He indicated with accuracy the ambivalence of witchcraft in the organization of political life on the national level (macro-economic) as well as on the local and family level (micro-economic). Witchcraft-sorcery enables urban elites of Cameroon to accumulate wealth (power of accumulating) because they are “hardened” (“armoured”) by their magician relatives back in the village. At the same time, the elite having just integrated structures of predation and accumulation of wealth have to share their loot with their relatives back in the village or living in misery (equalizing force). This radical ambivalence of witchcraft-sorcery enables at the same time accumulating wealth as well as sharing it within the family; and leads to the inference of a dialectical correlation between family relation and witchcraft in Africa.

Witchcraft-sorcery in black African societies plays the role of distributive justice upheld by the institutions of social balance in western democracies of Europe and North America. To go from the model of witchcraft-sorcery to that of political democracy of modern societies, there are the same contradictions we encounter

\textsuperscript{11} P. Geschiere in\textit{ Sorcellerie et Politique en Afrique, op.cit.}, narrates scenes of anthropophagy among the Maka of East Cameroon. They had always the custom of eating the flesh of adversaries conquered and killed in interethic wars. During the colonial period, before the First World War, Maka villagers ate the flesh of German colonists killed during the wars of resistance against German colonisation. Germany invaded the Eastern part of Cameroon for rubber plantation. In his first chapter « Le ventre plein : les Maka et le ‘djambe’ » (pp. 37-92), Geschiere described public scenes of cannibalism, eating of the flesh of adversaries (German or Cameroonian) killed during the colonial wars. It would seem that eating the knees of a slain adversary is an act of victory celebration against the foe. The imbrications of witchcraft (Djambe) and anthropophagy is a reality socially attested; there is little doubt it exists among the Maka of East Cameroon.
when trying to go from the epistemology of oral tradition regulating traditional black African societies to the bureaucratic epistemology of western societies. My hypothesis is based on the weakness of human memory; one can forget or indeed deform certain memories with the passage of time. On the other hand, the literate researcher in the process of his/her work could at any given moment review the sources from written and viable documents. In saying this, I am only following Paul Ricœur\(^\text{12}\) to draw attention to the specific and irreducible rapport between writing and reading when compared with the rapport between speaking and listening. This suggests in no way any epistemological "primitivism" of orality in Africa as Levy-Bruhl falsely theorized.

Witchcraft-sorcery is then the political manifestation of the radical epistemological rupture between bureaucratic (written) rationality printed by the European colonization and the magical-symbolic (oral) rationality that moves social relations between Africans from within. The epistemological distance between a political rationality based on written texts and a political rationality of palaver, based largely on improvisations and fantasies made possible by oral tradition, leads to disastrous socio-political consequences in contemporary black African communities. The African crisis manifests itself in the clash and the juxtaposition of these two political regimes that coexist without producing a true harmonious synthesis.

Along these lines, the language of witchcraft translates a sort of mental pathology (schizophrenia) caused by increasing traumatisms due to the total failure of the African political independences and the ruin of the postcolonial state. The exponential exploitation of Africa by the great capitalist and military powers that are looting its wealth with the complicity of its corrupt leaders will only aggravate considerably the problems related to the ubiquity of witchcraft-sorcery on all levels of social stratification. The political consequences would be even more

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devastating than the ravages of the AIDS virus in sub-Saharan Africa.

The language of witchcraft is a duplicate, or better a corollary, of the arbitrary and the irrationality that structurally characterize the management of political power in postcolonial dictatorships. In these enslaving regimes, there is no political legitimacy other than that of the nepotistic co-optation in the impenetrable clan of the dictator in power. Within these secret cliques, the only orthodox language is that of witchcraft-sorcery, because everything happens by night in the shrines of the marabouts (dervishes) and the witches at the service of the state's political power that reserves to itself the monopoly of death sentences in all their forms. 13 We saw in the Zaire of Mobutu, the dictator, how the political class is driven by occultic protection against attacks by rivals. In the popular imaginary of the Zairians Mobutu was the greatest wizard-magician; he was able to combine the witchcraft traditions of numerous ethnic groups. Still today, many Congolese imagine Mobutu and his collaborators as wizards who sacrificed life and blood of their people to stay indefinitely in power. Politicians currently in power are perceived in the popular imaginary and in the collective unconscious as witches and wizards who feed on the blood of their victims to stay in power through occultic and magical practices. This ubiquitous presence in the

13 To fully appreciate witchcraft-sorcery as primordial epistemological category to plumb the political and economic crisis of postcolonial Africa see, S. LATOUCHE, « Tirer le diable par la queue à Douala. Sorcellerie et crise économique au Cameroun », L'autre Afrique. Entre don et marché, op. cit., pp. 145-168. See also Pierre JANIN, « Vivre ensemble ou la douleur d'être « en grande famille » », Politique africaine 91 / octobre 2003, pp. 33-50; Alfred Adler, « Les métamorphoses du pouvoir. Politique et sorcellerie en Afrique », L'Homme, 169 / 2004, pp. 7-60. This last article analyses in depth the complex and mobile rapport between witchcraft, magic and political power in many African kingdoms: The king establishes coexistence between political power and witchcraft because he must position himself above the melee to better position his royal authority over the whole society.
imaginary of beliefs and magical practices in the domain of power recurs in most sub-Saharan African countries.

Faced with the accelerated process of disintegration of the moribund postcolonial state and in an ambiance of chronic political anomie, the African extended family remains the last bastion of security for the Africans who refuse to die and give up to the death dealing powers of the postcolonial state and its ghosts. However, the elasticity of the family and blood relationship in Africa increases the frequency of tensions and conflicts made inevitable because of the “consumption needs” of the politics of the belly. In a conjuncture of famine, need and chronic misery, witchcraft-sorcery resurfaces with force as the principal method of economic management of conflicts provoked by the absence of the postcolonial state.

Witchcraft-sorcery is culturally ingrained in the mentality of black Africans. This explains how its reproduction in black communities in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas is easy and worrisome. Young generations of black Africans—torn between Western modernity that escapes them and evanescent African traditions—do not succeed in giving a response to the crucial question of their cultural identity. They thus become an easy prey to drug gangs and car thieves that run wild in large European and North American suburbs. This explains the exponential increase of young black inmates in European and North American prisons.

We are thus stuck in a vicious circle from which it is difficult to disentangle ourselves. The political and economic crisis, that corrupts the moribund postcolonial state from within, forces poor people to seek refuge with close relatives who have socially and economically emerged from the masses living forever in misery; they live mostly in the large and chaotic postcolonial megalopolises in Africa. However, in order to survive, the poor must revive ancestral fears and all kinds of psychological and social pressure tools borrowed from occultism and witchcraft. They must force the wealthiest to share their assets with their poorer relatives. This is why the vicious circle between family and witchcraft is difficult to
break, since both elements are symbiotically intertwined. This also reveals the ambiguity that scars family, along with the notion of kinship solidarity. Today, many Africans who live in the West suffer from diseases (high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, etc.) often caused by the pressure they feel from their relatives in Africa who relentlessly ask for money to meet their basic needs. It is not exaggerated to speak of a new slavery among Africans, a system based on the exploitation of those who climbed the social ladder by their poorer relatives.

In his latest book, *L'Autre Afrique*, S. Latouche explains the ways in which he is obliged to integrate witchcraft-sorcery as a determining factor in his economic research on poverty in Douala. The main fear of Douala’s residents is getting bewitched, spellbound, or poisoned by sorcerers (who are often close relatives). Therefore, the causes for misfortune, unemployment, economic bankruptcy, failure in romantic life, and lack of spectacular financial success are deeply ingrained in the esoteric aetiology of witchcraft. It is thus impossible for an economist studying poverty in large urban centres in postcolonial Africa to consciously ignore witchcraft-sorcery as a determining variable that informs the understanding and description of the ways in which the informal economy operates in postcolonial Africa:

The predominance of the imaginary of gift in African societies leads populations that are victims of the global economy to turn against their wealthier relatives and suspect them of using witchcraft against their poor family members rather than against transnational corporations. Blind suspicion destroys community bonds at all levels. This sense of dereliction is understood as misfortune (in the strong meaning of Fortune, the

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14 Research conducted by McGill University, Montreal, on African immigrants show that these maladies are prevalent among them: high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes.

Since witchcraft has become the new political and economic modus operandi in disorganized societies in postcolonial Africa, it has to be interpreted as a new form of physical and “symbolic violence” against women who are first accused of witchcraft and suffer from physical and psychological abuse that can end up in public lynching. In such countries as Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Benin, an increasing number of women and children are wrongfully accused of witchcraft by disoriented and destitute populations that have been abandoned by corrupt and incompetent political authorities.  

Since the patriarchal model prevails today in most African societies, and since the process of “return to tradition” endures and is strengthened, women are the first to be accused of witchcraft. This can be interpreted as a form of collective psychosis resulting from the collapse of indigenous political management after 50 years of independence. Given the institutionalized and insidious violence against women, the elderly and children, it is important to mobilize all powers nationally and internationally to control this scourge that constitutes the biggest obstacle to the full development of Africa and its efficient and sensible integration into the family of nations. Africans will then be able to be responsible for their destiny and engage in the many partnerships that have been facilitated by technology, trade, and neo-capitalist globalization. But what can be done against this frightening surge of witchcraft in Africa as well as in many African Diasporas around the world?

Before looking for solutions and strategies that would eradicate witchcraft in black communities around the world, let us 

16 Id., Ibid., pp. 166-167. 
17 For accusation of women as witches, see Alfred Adler, « Les métamorphoses du pouvoir. Politique et sorcellerie en Afrique », art. cit.
examine further the correlation between the proliferation of this scourge and the process of "re-traditionalizing" in postcolonial African societies.

**Witchcraft and the Re-traditionalizing Process of African societies**

Despite the emergence of modern Western products in the daily life of African megalopolises (electricity, running water, cars, mobile phones, products of mass consumption, etc.), it is surprising to see the worsening situation with regard to the ubiquity of witchcraft in black societies and communities in postcolonial Africa and Western diasporas.

The resurgence and generalization of harmful witchcraft practices in African societies reflect the social coexistence of two opposed epistemological systems that govern social and political life. On the one hand, we have the theories and practices of Western modernity that are disseminated through technology. On the other hand, we have the traditional and cultural prism that emphasizes the interaction between the visible and invisible worlds. The interaction of these two lines of ideology results in an amphibological atmosphere; this is manifest by schizophrenic superimposition of two completely opposed narratives about the postcolonial African crisis. The juxtaposition of two epistemological and hermeneutical systems leads to an escalation of beliefs and practices related to witchcraft-sorcery in African societies and their Diasporas. Careful observation of the African Diasporas in Europe and North America reveals the increase in witchcraft attacks: The Churches of Awakening are the chief place

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18 For details of the ravages of witchcraft in the Churches of Awakening in the African Diasporas, especially in the Paris region, see my just published, *De la Postcolonie à la Mondialisation néolibérale. Radioscopie éthique de la crise négro-africaine contemporaine.*
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of crystallization of these pathological and irrational practices connected with the witchcraft paradigm.

The violent and bloody fights among politicians in postcolonial African states (DRC, Rwanda, Cameroon, Benin, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Uganda, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, etc.) continue to be seen as nocturnal and occult struggles within the world of witchcraft. It is therefore necessary to take beliefs and practices related to witchcraft into account in order to analyze the ways in which Africans understand the deep crisis that corrupts their societies and Diasporas since the formal independence earned in the 1960s.

The language of witchcraft reflects a kind of mental disease (schizophrenia) caused by increased trauma from the failure of political independence through the collapse and implosion of political, educational, and administrative institutions. The language of witchcraft-sorcery can be understood as a corollary to the arbitrary and irrational nature of political power in postcolonial military dictatorships. In many military dictatorships, political legitimacy is expressed through favouritism and cooptation, or a client-patron dependency from the ruling tyrant’s clique that includes servility and submission. In the struggle to meet the basic needs for one’s extended family—mostly with food supplies—anything goes; there are no limits when it comes to win the favours of a dictator. The use of witchcraft practices in order to eliminate potential rivals is the most common tool in politics.

Faced with an atmosphere of anomie, the most vulnerable constituencies (elderly women, widows, orphans, children, albinos,

etc.) are most often accused of witchcraft. In megalopolises and their unsanitary slums, one can see growing hordes of street children who were abandoned by their families supposedly because they are witches-sorcerers. Scenes of lynching, burning and stoning of women, children, and elderly people become more common in the streets of large African cities. The persistent magical-religious African worldview worsens the situation and generalizes witchcraft practices in political and social life. In this atmosphere of collective phobia, charismatic, evangelical and Pentecostal churches proliferate, both in Africa and in black Diasporas in Europe and North America.

What can be done against the scourge of witchcraft in contemporary black African societies? What are the strategies to fight them efficiently and help lay the foundation for democratic and developed societies in postcolonial Africa?

**Ethical and political Strategies to check Witchcraft in African Societies**

Given the ubiquitous scourge of witchcraft and magical practices in cities and in the countryside, in Africa and Diasporas in the Western world, it is urgent to mobilize all forces in order to eradicate the scourge completely and establish an environment that

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will contribute to individual fulfilment and collective development. The first goal is to educate all constituencies about freedom and responsibility of each human to pursue one’s destiny. It is crucial to deconstruct those traditions that fuel ancestral fears of evil spirits that supposedly interfere with the life of individuals. African cultural traditions tend to believe in the influence of the invisible world on social life. This hinders the development of freestanding subjects who are responsible for their future. Education, from elementary school to university, as well as other agencies for the civic and spiritual formation of adults, is the first step towards building a more dynamic and more responsible understanding of one’s freedom and free-will. Education in freedom and demystification of magical-religious belief in witchcraft constitute the cornerstones towards a holistic liberation of Africans and their empowerment in a competitive world that is governed by the mercantilist rules of capitalist globalization.

In societies where religion is the main prism to understand reality and life events, one should take this specificity into account in order to find practical and contextual solutions to the problem of witchcraft. Given the ubiquity of Christian churches as well as African practices of exorcism and healing, each Church must offer appropriate and efficient pastoral counselling in order to fully eradicate witchcraft in daily practice. Since the Christian faith affirms the complete supremacy of God over the forces of evil and death, it is urgent that the churches educate Africans into believing that God’s power can neutralize and destroy the forces of death by resurrecting Jesus from the dead. In Africa, political and religious life are intertwined; churches must therefore play a major role in the fight against and eradication of witchcraft by offering liberating pastoral care that would extirpate from people’s minds the phobias of the evil spirits, which are subjugated by God’s infinite power. Where God reigns in God’s infinite power there cannot simultaneously be powerful evil spirits; they are completely subjugated by the Only Real God who is Alive and Victorious over death.
In other words, the fight against witchcraft must be grounded simultaneously in sociology, political science, philosophy, and theology so as to implement a holistic culture of liberation and responsibility for one’s own destiny. The rebuilding of democratic and prosperous societies in Africa has to include the eradication of this religious disease called witchcraft, as well as a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary therapy as demonstrated above.

Since the phenomenon of witchcraft is exacerbated by the marginalization and economic “phagocytosis” or consumption\(^\text{23}\) of Sub-Saharan Africa through mercantile politics that promote capitalist globalization, one should undertake a radical epistemological and sociological dismantlement of this far-reaching network that fosters death, wars, poverty, hatred, extremism and fundamentalism worldwide. Demystifying witchcraft requires the establishment of interdisciplinary research centres where experts in various fields bring in their knowledge to educate Africans—wherever they are—and help them develop their critical sense and ethical responsibility, as they shape their destiny in a world struck by economic recession. This educational initiative of establishing a worldwide network of centres for critical and interdisciplinary thinking would constitute what I call “reticular leadership.” This new leadership based on a network of think tanks is relevant in a global world shaped by information technology. It significantly reduces the negative influence of African autocrats’ ideological propaganda on the minds of their “subjects.”

Witchcraft should be eradicated from the minds of Africans since it prevents them from growing as individual subjects, authors and actors of their holistic liberation in a global situation that witnesses the rise of extremism and popular revolutions against corrupt dictatorships (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, etc.). The future of Africa lies in the hands of Africans who must urgently break away from infantilizing, foolish and evasive beliefs and practices of witchcraft. They should start building viable and democratic

\(^{23}\) Like the phagocyte, a cell that engulfs and consumes foreign material (Editor).
societies, and gain respect from international partners who, for
500 years, have considered Africa as a pool (haven) of raw material
indispensable for the development of their own industries and capitalist
economic system. The task is up to Africans to free themselves by
operating a mental and ethical transformation, which will enable them to
understand their destiny in the world.

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The Universal Church and a Wider Notion of the Domestic Church: Approaching Ecumenism from the African Extended Family System

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Our contention in this write-up is that the project of ecumenism or the effort towards achieving Christian unity will be made lighter if the African extended family system is studied, and, in the light of the many good elements in it, the various Christian confessions are taken to stand for the sub families of an extended family representing the universal Church, and they relate to one another as the ancient local Churches, which were formed by the apostles, did in the early years of Christianity, before the unfortunate schisms and cleavages occurred.

Christian Unity – the Parting Wish of Jesus Christ

In his Encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II states categorically: “Christ calls all his followers to unity.”¹ This is because the valedictory prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17 very clearly expresses his ardent desire that all who believe in him should be united, a goal that ecumenism is pursuing. In the prayer Christ portrays both the reason for and the nature of the wished

unity by saying: "...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:21-22). Christian unity will therefore serve as evidence for the world that Christ was sent by God the Father. Then the unity expected to exist among Christians should be like the unity existing among the Trinitarian Persons—unity of purpose, of mutual respect, consideration and cooperation, unity of love and understanding, which means, unity of heart and mind, with the Son glorifying the Father and vice versa (cf. John 17:1-8). There is therefore a very harmonious type of co-existence among the Trinitarian Persons. For instance, the Trinitarian Persons were and are all purposefully active in the work of creation and redemption (cf. Gen 1:1-2:4a; John 5:17).

In the creation narrative, for example, though the Creator-God is one, he is credited with the cohortative plural statement: “Let us make man/human being” (na‘āšēh ’ēḏām – Gen 1:26). It is, however, pertinent to note that some scholars do not regard this statement as having anything to do with the Trinitarian Persons. For instance, Lawrence A. Turner calls it “plural of deliberation.”² It is undeniable that cases of divine majestic plural can occur (cf. Gen 3:22; 11:6-7) or even cases of God sitting in assembly with non-divine spiritual beings (cf. 1 Kings 22:18-22). But none of such seems to be the case here. In the light of the further divine revelation in the NT, the statement in Gen 1:26 can be seen to actually refer to the Trinitarian Persons. In the priestly tradition of the creation narrative (Gen 1:1-2:4a), the work of creation is portrayed as the effect of God’s word, e.g., “Then God said: ‘Let there be light’, and there was light” (Gen 1:3). This word of God is

presented in chapter one of John’s Gospel as the *logos* (Word) that was there “in the beginning” (*en archē*, vv 1-2, a Gk equivalent of the Heb *b're'šiṭ*, Gen 1:1), through which the whole universe was made (v 3), and which eventually took flesh and dwelt among us (v 14), reference being then made to Jesus Christ.\(^3\) One can then say that the creation commands were issued by God the Father while his Word that later took flesh in his Son, Jesus Christ, brought the commands into effect. Regarding the co-operation of the Holy Spirit in the work of creation, we think of the statement: “And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (Gen 1:2). Because the Hebrew word *rua* can be rendered as either *spirit* or *wind*, some Bible versions like the *NAB* and *The African Bible* (published 1999) translate the phrase *we ra'a 'elōhîm (and the Spirit of God)* as “while a mighty wind.” However, as John H. Sailhamer has noted, “Although many modern interpreters have read the clause as ‘a mighty wind,’ the traditional reading ‘Spirit of God’ seems the only reading compatible with the verb ‘hovering’ (*me ra epēt*), a verb not suited to describing the blowing of a wind.”\(^4\) Secondly, such a rendering tends to throw away the word *'elōhîm* (God), thereby bringing in the suspicion that the said *mighty wind* might be part of the problem, i.e., part of the *choa*—the *tōhū wābōhū* (formlessness and void) and the *oshek* (darkness) which the whole work of creation was trying to overcome. But when one reads Zech 4:6-7 where YHWH promises to remove a mighty mountain for Zerubbabel “Not by might, nor by power, but by *my Spirit*”

\(^3\) It may sound odd to some people that we have read back into an OT text the theology of John which is based on the event of Christ. But it is really not out of place to allow an NT text to elucidate an OT text, and vice versa, knowing that both testaments are related to a very large extent, and that there is some progression with regard to God’s revelation found in the Bible as a whole (cf. Heb 1:1-4; Matt 5:21-48).

Universal Church, Ecumenism & African Extended Family

([b'rûa]rî), it becomes clear that it is the same Spirit of YHWH which removes a mighty mountain here that was also at work in the creation activities, helping to remove the tōhû wābōhû and the ḍōshēk, thus bringing the primeval chaos under control.⁵

Coming to the work of redemption, one can say that at the Father’s instance the Son became human for the redemption of humanity (cf. Matt 1:18-23; 26:39). Then having played his part, the Son very honourably announced the advent of the Holy Spirit who would freely make use of what belongs to the Father and the Son (cf. John 16:11-15) to further their common work of the redemption of humankind. One can also think of the instruction by Jesus that baptism be done, not in his name only, but in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt 28:18-20), which depicts both the distinctness and the equality of the Trinitarian Persons, without marring their ontological unity as one God (cf. John 10:30; 14:8-11). However, the equality of the Trinitarian Persons is the type that tends to recognise the Father as the primus inter pares in the sense that the Son is ready to drink the cup the Father gives him (cf. John 18:11), and the Holy Spirit is to be sent by the Father in the name of the Son (cf. John 14:26) in order to realise their common purpose of human redemption. In other words, there is neither competition nor a sense of overlordship and marginalisation in the Trinitarian unity. The unity of the Blessed Trinity is then analogous to the African extended family type of unity in which, as we shall see below, the constituting nuclear families are essentially distinct and equal but still recognise the mother family as a kind of primus inter pares. So the relationship existing among the Trinitarian Persons, which is akin to the relationship in the African extended family system, and also resembles what was practised in the early stage of Christianity,

can serve as a model for the universal Church in its varied extensions through the ages.

The Universal Church as Family of God

The Church as the Assembly of God's people (qôhal-YHWH or ekklēsia tou Theou) is born out of a covenant. In the OT, the qôhal-YHWH was formed through the election of Israel by YHWH with such a covenant formula as: “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:12). In the NT, the ekklēsia tou Theou was formed through the new covenant in the blood of Christ (“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” – Luke 22:20), by which all believers have become God’s people. This is expressed in 1 Pet 2:9-10 thus: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” As Edwin A. Blum has rightly noted, the title “chosen race” stresses God’s loving initiative in bringing the Church to himself, just as the title “royal priesthood” is indicative of the dignity of thus belonging to and ministering in God’s household, because “Jesus is King, and all in his ‘house’ belong to a royal house.” All those titles mentioned in 1 Pet 2:9-10 are taken from such OT passages as Exodus 19 and Isaiah 43 which are associated with the election of Israel as the people of YHWH. William J. Dalton expresses it even more explicitly, referring to Christians as “the new household of God.” Thus, commenting on 1 Pet 2:9, he says: “In this verse four OT titles of Israel are now applied to the new household of God to indicate its unique dignity.

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The first is taken from Isa 43:20. Basic to this dignity is divine election.... The third title is also taken from Exod 19:6. As Israel was holy, chosen, and loved by God (Deut 7:6-9), so also is the new people of God.... Christians have become God's 'possession' by the shedding of the precious blood of Christ (see 1:19)."  

Indeed, the phrases in 1 Pet 2:9-10: laòs eis peripoïēsin (God's own people, i.e., people of his acquisition/possession) and laòs Theoû (people of God), are expressive of ownership by God and belongingness to Christ (cf. Titus 2:13-14) and to his household. So the universal Church, the Assembly of God's people under Christ, is a family of God because, according to 2 Cor 6:16, "...we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'." This shows that the expression "my people" which was applied to the OT people of YHWH is now applicable to the NT Church of Christ, because the phrase laòs mou ("my people") is a Gk rendering of the Heb phrase 'ammi which is usually employed in OT covenants. This phrase 'ammi ("my people") actually means my community, my family. Therefore, the universal Church as the family or household of God is a biblical notion. Commenting on the Pastoral Letters, for instance, David C. Verner notes quite correctly thus: "The author of the Pastoral conceptualizes the


9 Refer to the Hebrew word 'am in: Karl Feyerabend, Langenscheidt's Pocket Hebrew Dictionary to the Old Testament, Hebrew-English (Berlin: Langenscheidt, no date given), pp. 250-251. There we see that the word 'am bears the following semantic nuances: "people, nation, tribe, community, common people, men, inhabitants, populace, mankind" and that its derivative 'ummah means in various contexts "union", "society" and "junction." From the nuances of tribe, community and union, one can sift the idea of intimate or even blood relationship, the image of a family.
church as the household of God. He thus conceptualizes the social structure of the church on the model of the household."\(^{10}\)

Interestingly, the Church as the family of God on earth was the fulcrum on which all the discussions of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops pivoted themselves. As a participant observer, Bishop Hilary Odili Okeke has noted that understanding the Church from the perspective of family was the dominant image in the whole Synod right from the *Lineamenta*, through the *Instrumentum Laboris*, as well as the actual celebration of the Synod, up to the promulgation of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation (*Ecclesia in Africa*) by Pope John Paul II at Yaounde, Cameroon on 14\(^{th}\) September, 1995. He says, *inter alia*: "The Synod Fathers beginning from their concrete experience of the African family present the family as the paradigm of the Church so that the Church-as-Family can draw inspiration from the deeply committed and committing solidarity of the family."\(^{11}\) In *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II states that the African Synod’s description of the Church as Family of God is very symbolic because the idea of family in Africa “emphasises care for one’s neighbour, solidarity, cordiality in relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.”\(^{12}\) It is such ideas which are found in both the nuclear and the extended families in Africa that all the branches of the universal Church need

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\(^{12}\) John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 63 says: "Not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the Church as God's Family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa....For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.”

to realise and inculcate in their relationships and co-existence in order to be true to the wish of Christ.

The Universal Church and its Subdivisions

The privilege of belonging to the household or family of God, which was enjoyed by the Israelites of old, has been extended to humanity as a whole through Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-20). The *qehal-YHWH* has become a universal family; the universal Church. Quite naturally then, it has sub families or local communities spread all over the world. Such can be described as harmonious sub-divisions of the universal Church. By the word *harmonious* is not meant *uniform*. In other words, for the sub-divisions to be harmonious, they do not necessarily need to be uniform in everything. They can afford to differ from one another in some details without opposing one another in any detail. That means that Christian Churches can be united without necessarily being homogeneous. For instance, the Eastern liturgical rites differ from the Western ones and both differ from the Zairian rite, etc., and yet there is no opposition. To a very high extent, such a manner of co-existence resembles the African extended family system in which unity in diversity is found, as we shall shortly see.

Unfortunately, however, there are also non-harmonious sub-divisions of the universal Church through ill-handled misunderstandings and similar human factors which have led to schisms and Protestantism and have kept engendering mutually opposing denominations or confessions. It is however consoling that the members of the various denominations which form the universal Church have realised the harm their disunity or mutual opposition is doing, not only to the prayer of Christ in John 17 but also to the interpersonal relationship of the members themselves. Thus, with a tone of deep regrets, the Second Vatican Council has remarked, concerning the various Christian denominations, saying: "... all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but they differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ himself were divided."
Certainly, such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.”\textsuperscript{13} Jean-Marie Roger Tillard says very correctly that Christian disunity is “not only an internal problem of Christianity but an unfaithfulness which concerns the whole of humanity ... It is a problem ‘before God.’”\textsuperscript{14} This is because if the various Christian confessions waste their time and energy in infighting, then their duty of evangelising the whole of humanity (cf. Matt 28:18-20) will be marred. So realising the amount of harm done by disunity or disharmony\textsuperscript{15} among Christians, the various denominations have started making moves towards reuniting as a family in an extended sense under Christ, and this effort towards reunion is known as ecumenism. Accentuating the importance of the ecumenical movement, Donna Geernaert says: “Christians should not see ecumenism as one task among many others but the way to address the major problem preventing the church from adequately actualizing its role in contemporary society.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{The Universal Church and a Wider Notion of the Domestic Church}

The Second Vatican Council describes the family as “the domestic Church” (\textit{ecclesia domestica}), saying: “In what might be called the

\textsuperscript{13} See “Decree on Ecumenism” (\textit{Unitatis Redintegratio}), no. 1, in Austin Flannery (ed.), \textit{Vatican II} (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975), 452.


\textsuperscript{15} Musical notes are all different but when they combine well there is harmony, when they lack agreement, each sounding \textit{ad libitum}, there occurs cacophony or disharmony.

domestic Church, the parents, by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children."\(^\text{17}\)

Emphasising the point further, it also calls the family “a domestic sanctuary of the Church.” Thus in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 11, we read:

The mission of being the primary cell of society has been given to the family by God himself. This mission will be accomplished if the family, by mutual affection of its members and by family prayer, presents itself as a domestic sanctuary of the Church; if the whole family takes its part in the Church’s liturgical worship; if, finally, it offers active hospitality, and practises justice and other good works for the benefit of all its brothers suffering from want.\(^\text{18}\)

By that is meant that the life of mutual love and praying together which Jesus Christ taught his Church is first and foremost lived in the various families that form the local Churches. Parents have the duty of bringing up their children in the faith of the Church in Christ by making them experience the life of the Church already in their families.

Noteworthy too is the fact that many early Christian Communities or local Churches began as “house Churches,” assembling in personal families, e.g., the family of Prisca and Aquila (1 Cor 16:19) and that of Mary (Acts 12:12). Paul and the other apostles also formed local Churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, and so on. Though all those local Churches were autonomous, they somehow recognised themselves as forming one big family under Christ, and they also regarded the Church in Jerusalem as a kind of *mother Church*. Thus the Churches in

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Macedonia and Achaia had to make collections to help other Christians outside their group (Rom 15:26). Again the dispute in the Church of Antioch was sent to Jerusalem for resolution, with Peter and James presiding (Acts 15). Even after Paul had received direct divine revelation and had preached his revealed Gospel for three years, he still felt like paying a visit to Peter in Jerusalem, during which visit he also saw James (Gal 1:11-19). As Joachim Gnilka underscores, Paul’s visit was aimed at personally meeting with and knowing Peter, he only happened to see James also.\(^\text{19}\)

Later Paul also made another extra journey to Jerusalem, together with Barnabas and Titus. They were prompted by some divine revelation to go and consult with the acknowledged leaders of the Church, just to make sure that what they were teaching the Gentiles was in accord with the true Gospel of Christ. After listening to him, Peter, James John (and perhaps some other apostles there in Jerusalem) gave them the right hand of fellowship, thus approving what they were teaching among the Gentiles (cf. Gal 2:1-9). We can take just three verses from that, where Paul narrates thus:

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.... and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised (Gal 2:1-2, 9).

Again, in his narration of the appearances of the risen Lord, Paul mentions Peter (Cephas) first before mentioning the other apostles (the Twelve) en bloc, and also the rest of the disciples (cf. 1 Cor 15:5). It is clear then that right from the earliest days of Christianity, the duty of being the first among the apostles and the other disciples which was conferred on Peter (cf. Matt 16:18-19; John 21:15-17) was recognised, despite the fact that the local Churches formed by the various apostles were to a large extent autonomous. That means that the leading role of Peter went beyond his immediate community, touching the whole Ecclesia, the Assembly of God under Christ. From biblical narratives, it is evident that his fellow apostles did not have any problem allowing him to preside or to act as their chairperson in their gatherings. For instance, in the choice of Matthias to replace Judas as one of the Twelve, it was Peter who presided (cf. Acts 1:15-26). Even his reply in John 6:68 to the question posed by Jesus to the Twelve sounds representative for all: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Thus talking about the circle of the Twelve Apostles, Jürgen Becker notes that Peter remained their spokesman before and after the Easter event. Peter is said to have eventually moved to Rome about the year 62 A.D., where he worked as a missionary and later suffered martyrdom under Emperor Nero about 67/68 A.D.

Since Christianity was conceived to outlive both Peter and the other apostles, it is only natural that their duty of leading in the

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20 Cf. ibid, p. 86, where Gnilka says „Die leitende Stellung des Petrus betraf die gesamte Versammlung (Ekklesia) Gottes.”
21 See Jürgen Becker, Simon Petrus im Urchristentum (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), p. 28. There he says: „Petrus bleibt wie vor Ostern so auch nach Ostern zunächst der Sprecher dieses Kreises (Apg 1,15; Mk 16,7).“
23 Cf. ibid., p. 225.
evangelisation of the world (cf. Mark 3:14-19; Matt 28:16-20) rolled over to their successors in office. Thus Peter’s specially assigned duty of being the first among the shepherds had to be exercised by his successors, and it was so recognised in some ancient days. For instance, it is quite interesting that during the Fourth Ecumenical Council held at Chalcedon (October 8 to 31, 451), Pope Leo I was not personally present, but was represented by only three Roman legates and two African Bishops, in contrast to about 630 participants from the East. But despite this lop-sided ratio (5 vs. ca. 630), the Roman legates were allowed to preside. As P. T. Camelot reports, “The Council commenced on Oct. 8, 451, in the basilica of St. Euphemia... under the effective presidency of the Roman legates (Bps. Paschasinus of Lilybeum and Lucentius of Ascoli, and Boniface the priest).”\textsuperscript{24} Among the acts of the Council, he notes: “The two synodical letters of St. Cyril were solemnly approved.... Likewise, Leo’s Tome was accepted with the cry, ‘Peter has spoken through Leo’.”\textsuperscript{25}

This view about Peter and his office is, however, opposed by some scholars. For instance, Martin Hengel tends to accept the tradition that Peter extended his missionary work from Jerusalem to Rome.\textsuperscript{26} But he does not accept the idea of the “office of Peter” which purports that Peter worked and died, leaving this specially assigned duty to his successors. For him, the apostolic witness and authority of Peter as well as that of his co-apostles are neither replaceable nor extendable.\textsuperscript{27} However, this idea that the witness

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 162. Regarding Peter and Paul, he says: „Wie ihr Zeugnis, auf dem die Kirche ihren Glauben gründet, sich nicht beliebig weiterführen und ausweiten läßt, so sind auch die apostolischen Zeugen selbst einzigartig und in
and authority of the apostles are irreplaceable, but rather ended with them, seems to nullify the action of electing Matthias to replace Judas (cf. Acts 1:15-26) because though he was a witness, he lacked direct authority from Christ. The view also does violence to the wish of Jesus that his mission should not end with his contemporary disciples, but should rather extend to the ends of the earth (cf. Matt 28:18-20). If John 17:20 reports Jesus as saying: “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word,” it means that he expects to keep having followers even after the days of Peter and the other apostles, and such later disciples will continue to need guidance. Therefore, although the eye-witnessing may be practically non-transferable, the traditional witnessing or the teaching/leadership authority (cf. Luke 10:16) is extendable; it is meant to be handed over from generation to generation.

However, the exercise of this traditional witnessing has not been very smooth throughout the history of Christianity. According to Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, “From the time the church came under the influence of the Graeco-Roman world, she married her theology so well with the laws, policies, and philosophy of this world that she virtually excluded other possible versions of the same world.”28 That means that through culture contact, some of the successors of Peter got influenced by the Roman system of governance and their manner of exercising leadership authority which did not lay enough emphasis on the leadership as service which was taught by Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 20:25-28). Thus, according to Georges Tavard:

In the history of councils and the papacy, affirmation of authority has been the principle, discovery of the inherent limits of power being left to later experience. Such was the

case when Leo I formulated the principle that Peter's voice is heard in that of the bishop of Rome, or when Nicholas I opposed Patriarch Photius, or when Gregory VII composed the Dictatus papae, or when Boniface VIII proclaimed that it is necessary to salvation for every human being to submit to papal authority. On each of these occasions the principle was formulated absolutely, and only later was it relativised by adjustment to reality and feasibility.\(^29\)

Perhaps one of the points that needed the said "adjustment to reality and feasibility" was the relative equality and autonomy of the local Churches, especially the five historic Sees of Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople. It took the Councils of Chalcedon and Nicaea to call attention back to their equality in jurisdiction. Along the same line, the collegiality of all the Bishops had to be clarified later by the Second Vatican Council, which states that just as Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a unique apostolic college, so also the Roman Pontiff and the other Bishops are related with and unite to one another "...in a bond of unity, charity and peace; likewise the holding of councils in order to settle conjointly, in a decision rendered balanced and equitable by the advice of many, in questions of major importance...."\(^30\) It all means that rather than acting as a monarch, the Council requires that the Roman Pontiff simply acts as a chairperson vis-à-vis the other Bishops.

The problem has always been that of extremities both from the side of the Roman See and from the side of the aggrieved local Churches and Christian denominations. Thus discussing the stance of the mainline Anglicans vis-à-vis Papal authority, Georges Tavard says, "Following the example of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I had denied the bishop of Rome any authority in her realm.... As she was eager to maintain peace with the Puritan faction in England,


Elizabeth did not allow any Roman jurisdiction in her kingdom and forbade all appeals to Rome. By contrast, the Roman system of authority during the counter-reformation developed in the opposite direction, away from all forms of conciliarism.\(^{31}\)

Despite the aforementioned adjustment to reality and feasibility or mellowing down in the recent times with regard to the exercise of authority in the Church, the effects of the past still linger. Many Christian denominations seem not to have sufficiently appreciated or not to have even noticed any positive change in the papal exercise of authority. So they still regard the Pope and the Vatican as autocratic and so they refuse to recognise the primacy of the Pope or to regard his See as the centre, contrary to what Paul and the other members of the early Christianity did vis-à-vis Peter (see Diagram 1). The situation calls then for an alternative paradigm of relationship that will accommodate both the necessary unity and the equally necessary diversity, i.e., a paradigm which engenders among Christians such visible unity that treasures both communion and distinct expressions of the faith. This alternative is what the organisational model of the African extended family system can offer.

**The African Extended Family System**

By the African extended family system we mean the fairly general family system in the continent of Africa in which several nuclear families of a particular ancestral descent maintain an abiding bond of socio-religious relationship; all the off-shoot families regarding the ancestral or mother family as their centre and base, and the individual members feeling the need to be helpful to one another both materially and morally. As noted by Demitri B. Shimkin and Victor Uchendu, "The extended family is the most pervasive and

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most durable corporate structure in the African kinship system.”

Elmer P. Martin and Joanne Mitchell Martin have made an elaborate description of the extended family system among the African Americans in these words:

When we speak of a black extended family, we mean a multigenerational, interdependent kinship system which is welded together by a sense of obligation to relatives; is organized around a “family base” household; is generally guided by a “dominant family figure”; extends across geographical boundaries to connect family units to an extended family network; and has a built-in mutual aid system for the welfare of its members and the maintenance of the family as a whole.

Since Africa is a large continent, we use the Igbo people of Nigeria in West Africa as a representative sample in discussing the African extended family system. Among the Igbo people, an extended family develops gradually as children born in a nuclear family marry and form their own sub-families, then their own children later do the same. All the various off-shoot families are then hooked to the mother-family or the ancestral household known as the Obi, which functions as the family base (see Diagram 2). The Obi is the home for all the sub-nuclear families, all of which make up an extended family or what is known in Igbo as umu-nna.

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34 While nuclear families tracing their origin to an ancestor form an extended family (umu-nna), a number of umu-nna emanating from a more ancient ancestor constitute a village (ogbe) and a number of consanguineous
which literally means children of a father or children of a great ancestor. All the constituting nuclear families relate to one another in very tight solidarity. According to Hilary Odili Okeke, “The intimate bond of solidarity of the extended family is manifested in every aspect of social life, especially in various celebrations of the community. The members share their joys at birth, marriages, festivals and title-taking. They share their sorrow at misfortunes and death. They have the sense of co-responsibility in bearing the burdens of one another.”

The first-born male (or the oldest man)\(^35\) of the mother-family is known as the Okpala (Okpara or Opara in some dialects). The office of the Okpala is also attached to the first-born male qua persona, no matter his age. Where he is too young to exercise the office effectively, he retains the respect due to the office as the Okpala, but an elderly relation would then act as a regent on his behalf until he is mature enough to exercise his office. He resides with his family in the extended family-base known as the Obi, and he is often also addressed as Obi. He convokes and directs the periodic meetings of the extended family. He arbitrates and ensures peace in case of any quarrel.

All the nuclear families of an extended family are generally autonomous but the mother-family serves as their rallying point and the Okpala, who can be described a primus inter pares among the other first-born males of the other nuclear families, acts as the chairperson. Both the mother-family and the Okpala are visible villages make up a town (obodo), etc, a pointer to the ultimate interconnectivity of humanity as a whole.


\(^36\) Cf. Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976), p. 22. There, she says: “Perhaps the most universal institution was the role of the family head. He was the oldest man of the oldest surviving generation, in the family, or in the quarter. He would settle family disputes, and commanded respect and reverence, because he controlled the channel of communication with ancestors.” This channel of communication is the Ofọ discussed in the text.
symbols of unity for the members of the extended family which in some cases number more than one hundred persons and involve more than thirty nuclear families. Adopted people and their families are absorbed as full members of an extended family (see the underlining in Diagram 2).

After extending to about ten generations, new offshoots or new extended families develop from the old ones, eventually constituting a village, a town, etc. In the gathering of all the Okpala of the related extended families making up a village or a town, the Okpala of the most ancient mother-family acts as the chairperson or a primus inter pares among the rest. A typical example is my town, Nnewi, which is made up of four major villages—Otolo, Uruagu, Umudim and Nnewichi, Otolo being the eldest. The four quarters are quite autonomous and equal in jurisdiction, but when their four Obi or Okpala gather for any deliberation with their councils of elders, there is no discussion about who acts as the chairperson; the Obi of Otolo who ipso facto doubles as the Igwe (leader) of Nnewi town presides. If for some reasons he is personally absent, his delegate takes over on his behalf.

In the Igbo traditional setting, one of the main functions of the Okpala is to keep custody of a ritual symbol known as Ofo. This is a specially prepared branch of a tree called Ofo. This tree is laden with symbolisms due to its natural features; for instance, it secrets red juice, which is for the Igbo people symbolic of family or blood-relationship. Again, its branches attach themselves to the trunk in a ball and socket manner and when mature or dry, they also disengage themselves very naturally so; what for the people is again symbolic of how nuclear families in an extended family system attach themselves to, and also separate themselves from the

37 Nnewi is used as an example because it is one of the towns still running on the traditional level with regard to leadership. Some towns have changed their system in the recent time, granting the leadership of a town on the merits of wealth or through election.
mother-family.\textsuperscript{38} Branches of this \textit{Ofọ} tree are then cut and shaped in a special way, then, they are ritually consecrated and used in almost every ritual ceremony as a means of communicating with deities and ancestors, the inhabitants of the spirit world.\textsuperscript{39} The so consecrated pieces from \textit{Ofọ} tree are themselves known as \textit{Ofọ} and they serve as Igbo symbol of unity, authority, righteousness and innocence.\textsuperscript{40} There are various grades or categories of it, consecrated according to envisaged use. There is for instance the personal \textit{Ofọ} which is carried by grown-up males of proven integrity, who are also heads of various nuclear families. There is also the titular \textit{Ofọ} carried by titled members of the society. But above all, there is the \textit{Ofọ} of a lineage or an extended family known as \textit{Ofọ umu-nna} which is in the custody of the \textit{Okpala} as the head. It is the duty of the \textit{Okpala} to consecrate all the \textit{Ofọ} sticks to be used by the heads of nuclear families within his jurisdiction. In the words of Chris Ifeanyi Ejizu, “Normally the kindred elder (\textit{Okpara}) is the right person to consecrate and hand over all personal and lineage \textit{Ofọ}-types to be used in his lineage.”\textsuperscript{41}

It is his possession of the said lineage \textit{Ofọ} (the \textit{Ofọ umu-nna}) that confers on the \textit{Okpala} the authority to exercise leadership role and to arbitrate in cases of dispute or misunderstanding within the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} The \textit{Ofọ} is held in the hand by elders while offering prayers, while making judgments and while taking serious decisions. It functions as a channel linking the elders with the deities and the ancestors who are called upon to show favour to the people or to witness to the uprightness of the judgment and decision being taken. \textit{Ofọ} involves a lot of taboos or rules of conduct for its holder. Cf. Ejizu, \textit{Ofọ: Igbo Ritual Symbol}, pp. 121-128.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Cf. Ejizu, \textit{Ofọ: Igbo Ritual Symbol}, p. 122. There he notes that for the Igbo people, “\textit{Ofọ} symbolizes the natural bond of unity which exists in their social experience between members of individual kin-groups usually of the same lineage.” Furthermore, on the same page (122), Prof. Ejizu reports that he has gathered from respectable Igbo elders that in its various ritual usages, \textit{Ofọ} embodies symbolically the concepts of “truth, justice, righteousness, power, authority, wholeness and moral innocence.”
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ejizu, \textit{Ofọ: Igbo Ritual Symbol}, p. 123.
\end{itemize}
extended family. For the same reason also, he is consulted for decision on serious matters. Emefie Ikenga Metuh, a renowned researcher on the traditional Igbo philosophical anthropology and theological concepts has expressed it thus:

The most important symbol of the ancestors is Qfọ, a small branch of the Qfọ tree (*Detarium Senegalense*). This is believed to have been set aside by Chukwu [God] as a symbol of authority. An inherited Qfọ becomes a symbol of inherited authority. The lineage Qfọ is the outward symbol of the presence of the ancestors and must therefore be displayed when the living are assembled for important family discussions. In very serious and controversial issues which could threaten the peace and solidarity of the clan, the Okpala or the head of the family may decide to impose a decision with the Qfọ, in which case, he may hit the ground four times with it and say, ‘Anyone who disobeys this decision, may this Qfọ kill him’, and all present respond simultaneously Ihaa ‘Let it be so’.  

However, the Okpala usually takes such a decision in conjunction with, or at least in consultation with all the elders in the extended family. Autocracy is totally unacceptable by the Igbo people.  

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43 Cf. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, p. 15, where he writes: “The head of the eldest or principal clan presides over the assemblies of the village-group attended by other heads. But decisions that affect the life of all the clans constituting the village-group necessarily involve consultation on family, kindred and clan levels. Orders which come from top without prior discussion or negotiation are ignored. The saying *igbo enweghi eze* (Igbo have no king) simply means that Igbo do not tolerate autocracy.”
voices of the elders representing the various nuclear families that make up the extended family, and also as the symbol of the support of the ancestors for the decision in question.

Because the decisions promulgated by the Okpala are usually consensus opinion, the members of an Igbo extended family do not wait for the Ofo to punish a wilful non-conformist or a criminal member who intentionally flouts the good values cherished by the group, thereby smearing the group with a bad external colour. Such a fellow is punished either physically by flogging him or through paying a fine. Ostracism is imposed in an extreme case of a contumacious will to remain in error; the person is ex-communicated through denial of the very much cherished commensality and other social interactions until he begins to behave well. This is because, an Igbo extended family is an interest and value group in which admittance to commensality or common meal symbolizes belongingness and ex-communication or ostracism is almost like death itself. Individualism is abhorred, community is priced highly as the Igbo axiom igwe bu ike (group is strength) portrays.

Noteworthy also is the fact that the Obi, or the extended family home-base, is normally immovable (Obi adi mbugha). The immobilism of an Obi is in two senses; namely, that it cannot be transferred to a possible richer member-nuclear family, and also that the locus remains the same. But if for certain ecological reasons or for some other serious reasons, the Okpala relocates the extended family base, the new location automatically becomes the

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44 Cf. Osmund A. C. Anigbo, *Commensality and Human Relationship Among the Igbo: An Ethnographic Study of Ibeagwa Aka, Igboeze L.G.A. Anambra State, Nigeria* (Nsukka, Nigeria: University of Nigeria Press, 1987), p. 18. There he says: “Commensality is assertive and contains within itself vital force which guarantees not only its purity but also its continuity. This is because a commensal group is not only an interest group but also a value group. Most commensal groups have an in-built defensive mechanism which protects the values treasured by the group.”
But in such a case, he can only effect the relocation after due consultation with the elders of the particular extended family or *umu-nna*.

A few aspects of the system under discussion will however require the light of Christ. For instance, as Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna has rightly remarked, there is need to guard against tribalism and develop such a family system "in which the water of baptism would be thicker than the blood of natural relationship." Also, our sample area (Igbo part of Africa) is generally patrilineal, so the men-folk exert more authoritative influence on the society than the women. For instance, a few elderly women are allowed to carry the *Ofo*, but they use it only in their governance of fellow women, as Chris. Ejizu has noted: "They use the *Ofo* in the conduct of the affairs of the women group." The Igbo system of government can be described as gerontocracy, in which only the men elders meet and decide on matters affecting their community. Women may take part in such meetings but only on invitation, an aspect of the culture that needs a review. There is however a group of women known as the *Umu-ada*, whose authority in Igbo communities is as strong as that of the men-elders, and even stronger, at times. They are the daughters of an extended family married out to various places, but they form themselves into a formidable group. These married daughters (with their children) somehow still form parts of the extended family, but rather *loosely*

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45 The extended family home-base or the *Obi* is different from a possible private and temporary residence which the *Okpala* may have with his own nuclear family in a town or somewhere outside the extended family home-base. He can relocate this private residence at will without any consultation with the elders, but not the *Obi*.


(represented by the broken arrows in Diagram 2). They belong more strongly to the extended families of their places of marriage. But when a problem arises in their home-extended family, which defies solution even by the elders, the decision of the *Umada* is very often accepted as final.

**Evaluation and Conclusion**

From our discussions above and from the two diagrams one can see that there is evident affinity between what happened at the inception and early years of Christianity and the points mentioned about the African extended family system. For instance, the gratuitous commissioning of Peter by Jesus Christ to act as the leading shepherd (or bishop in modern parlance—John 21:16-17; Matt 16:18) is akin to the (non-merited) prime position of the *Okpala* with the concomitant inheritance of the kindred *Ofo* (*Ofo umu-nna*) by him. Peter (with his successors) is *ipso facto* the first among the apostles and so he can be regarded as the *Okpala* in the extended family which is the household of God or the universal Church. The analogy may sound imperfect because the office of the *Okpala* goes along the line of descent while Peter’s was by appointment, but the emphasis is really on the office, moreover even the descent line is also a divine appointment since no one chooses where and when to be born. As was made clear in our discussion, the early Christian communities recognised Peter’s special position and consulted or made reference to him (and some other leading apostles) that time in Jerusalem. They knew that he had the custody of the Christianity’s *Ofo* (*Ofo umu-nna n’ime Kristi*—the *Ofo* of the brethren in Christ). Then since he is said to have later worked and died in Rome, his See there can also be regarded as the *Obi* or the centre for Christendom (despite the mentioned negative influences of the Greco-Roman world on the Church in the past, which can be discussed in Ecumenical Councils, as some of them have already been addressed in some Councils).
The various Christian confessions will then be like the many virtually equal and autonomous nuclear families making up an extended family. Our common ancestry in Jesus Christ will then serve as the invisible symbol of unity, while the See of Peter serves as the visible symbol of the unity for the universal Church. The Patriarchs of the aforementioned five ancient Sees will be like four Okpala or Obi of the four quarters of Nnewi town (used as an example), who are equal in jurisdiction but still recognise the primacy to the Obi of Otolo, because he holds the Ofọ of Nnewi. So, like the Okpala of an extended family, the primacy of the Pope will then be recognised by all Christians, while on his part, he leads the universal Church in collegiality or in union with the heads of the local Churches who are equally Okpala in their capacity. Again, as the nuclear families of an extended family are autonomous in handling their affairs but always pay attention to the norms and traditions of the extended family, so will unity in diversity be the guiding principle in the universal Church.

Our conclusion then is that the project of ecumenism or the efforts towards achieving Christian unity, in accord with the prayer of Jesus in John 17, will be easier if, in the light of the African extended family system, the various Christian confessions are taken to stand for the various nuclear families of an extended family, which are united through mutual love and help, regularly referring back to their family home-base (Obi) and having special respect for the primus inter pares, the Okpala. The case will be the same if the various Christian confessions see themselves as mirroring the ancient local Churches formed by the apostle, which were also united through mutual love and help, referring back to their base, Jerusalem (later Rome) and having special respect for the primus inter pares, Peter/his successors, as well as the other apostles.
THE TABLE OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ (The Great Ancestor)

The Chief Shepherd of his Church

Paul
Co-shepherd

Peter (Shepherd) Vicar of Christ – Okpala

The rest of the 12 Co-shepherds

The Church in Jerusalem
Peter & James (Obi)

Churches formed by Paul

Churches formed by the Twelve

Church of Rome
Peter's See (New Obi)

Orthodox Church (+ off-shoots)

Protestant Churches (+off-shoots)
Diagram 2

**THE TABLE OF AFRICAN (IGBO) EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM**

(Umu-nna, lit. children of a father or an ancestor)

A Great Ancestor & his family

(Extended family base – Obi)

- Second son & family
- Adopted son & family
- 1st daughter & family
- 2nd daughter & family

- His children (SEF)
- His children (SEF)
- His other children (SEF)
- Her children (SEF)
- Her children (SEF)

- NSEF NSEF NSEF NSEF NSEF NSEF NSEF NSEF NSEF NSEF
- ETC ETC ETC ETC ETC ETC ETC ETC ETC ETC
Key:

SEF = Sub extended families

NSEF = New sub extended families

ETC = *et cetera* (other sub extended families, up to about ten generations)

There are broken arrows on the side of the daughters because they belong rather loosely after marriage.
REVIEW ARTICLE

African Theology: Local Insight, Scientific Instinct, and Liberative Appropriation

This piece reviews the recent publications of three African theologians.


Theology in context emerges from local insight. All three authors will agree to this statement; but the viewpoint is very strongly argued by Clifton Clarke. Following the thesis of Robert Schreiter, Clarke understands local theology as a “dynamic interaction among gospel, church, and culture” (p. 68, note 4): Theology embraces the faith of the local community. African Initiated Churches (AIC), in their traditional and, recently, more charismatic forms, are the focus of Clarke’s study. He argues throughout *African Christology* that researchers (historians of AICs and theologians) fail to take full account of the local. They therefore overstate the Spirit-dimension of the so-called “spirit-churches”, ignoring AICs’ rich oral Christology. Clarke contends that patient work and life among the Akan AICs reveal how profoundly they anchor Christological reflection on the Bible, “re-oralized”; i.e. the Bible accessed through reading, preaching, prayers and testimonies.
On another note, despite rootedness in the Bible, Clarke’s field experience leads him to the fundamental conclusion that African (Akan) cosmology undergirds Akan AIC practices and beliefs. True, AIC rhetoric and practices are modified in reaction to accusations of “syncretism” or “paganism” by mainline churches, and, more recently, by neo-Pentecostalism; but the underlying cosmology remains Akan. Clarke therefore classifies his study of their Christology under African theology of “inculturation”. To analyze Akan AICs’ Christology, Clarke draws from his life with them and from research conducted throughout Ghana (by questionnaire and focus group discussions in different Akan AIC communities). The living faith of the Christian (AIC) community reveals their theology and constitutes the takeoff point of professional theological reflection. By embracing and closely analyzing their “inculturation” of Christianity, Clarke argues that this is legitimate theology on its own right. He insists, against Parrat, that true theology is not for professionals alone. However, Clarke does not go out of his way to critique the Akan cosmology that undergirds all versions of AICs’ vision of the universe and salvation in Christ.

This is precisely where David Tonghou Ngong brings the critical scientific instinct to bear on theology. Ngong values scientific theology and guards a place of choice for the professional theologian: Not every Christian or every local AIC leader should be called a theologian. Critical scientific rules must be applied in the evaluation of AICs’ notion of salvation—be they the traditional AICs or the recent charismatic types. They, along with the new African Pentecostalism under American influence, embrace “endorsement pneumatological soteriology” by collapsing into ATR cosmology their appropriation of the Christian meaning of salvation.

The accolades and encomiums poured on AICs by sociologists, historians and theologians as representing the true African approach to Christianity needs a radical rethink. This brand of Pentecostalism should be judged by its fruit—its contribution to postcolonial African development in material and spiritual terms. AICs are declining in numbers all over Africa with the exception of South Africa (Paul Gifford); and Pentecostalism is on the rise. But both patterns, Ngong argues, supposedly represent true African Christianity, if one believes the experts, only because they transmit a pneumatology that is anti-
rational or anti-modernist: They simply endorse the African cosmology of spirits, especially malevolent spirits that used to be caged or expelled through ancestral ritual. AICs and Pentecostals now cage this evil-spirit-infested universe through the Holy Spirit of Christianity. Ngong is upset that some of the best minds in African theology, John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako, and generally the influential theologians of inculturation, are short sighted and wrong in pouring encomiums on the AICs.

Anthropologists and historians of Christianity in Africa direct research away from what the churches should be doing to reduce suffering and poverty and concentrate on praising and analyzing the spirit-churches and Pentecostals whose principal popularity is based on casting out evil spirits. AICs and Pentecostalism project a church and theology that fail to discern the task of the church in fighting poverty and moving Africa away from being the laughingstock of the world. This wrongheaded scenario, Ngong passionately argues, should be replaced by scientific inquiry and critical philosophical research (as opposed to the ethnosophy of theologians of inculturation). Scientific inquiry and critical philosophical research, recognized as important sites for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit (the spirit of truth and inquiry), according to our author, embody a research ethos that refuses to endorse ATR cosmology of spirits but rather debunks this cosmology. The alternative is a new "soteriological pneumatology" that sees the action of the Holy Spirit in rational scientific research and in the philosophical critique of ATR cosmology: This is the Spirit of wisdom that enables one to question the "taken-for-grantedness" of reality. Ngong calls on the mainline churches to come out of the shadows and reclaim their leadership position; pursue a theology of reconstruction that focuses on re-engineering a new African imagination that appropriates the true sense of the Spirit that transforms the material and spiritual life of Africans.

Caroline N. Mbonu, the third theologian in this review, will agree with Ngong on the relevance of critical rationality, on debunking wild cultural claims or fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible (a book dear to Africans) and on countering life-denying attitudes toward women propagated by patriarchy. Telling alternative stories from the perspective of women, and re-dreaming the world is, today, the way
forward for Africa: the reconstruction or the “life in abundance” that inculturation theologians favour. But for Mbonu, the archetype for this new story is the self-described (self-named) servant and prophetic leader, Mary the maiden from Nazareth. Following Mary and other women servant-leaders, who “claimed full humanity with full voice agency” (p.34), African women today find “Voice” and radically reinterpret both the Bible and the Igbo ancestral naming tradition that at times derogate the identity of women. Nevertheless, Mbonu’s critical feminist reading of the Lucan Annunciation text, Luke 1:26-38, like Ngong’s critique of inculturation theologians, firstly goes against some feminist/womanist interpreters who denigrate the liberative potential of the “Virgin Mary” for women.

Secondly, Mbonu radically distances herself from the representatives of patriarchy in the female religious communities who propagate passive and instant obedience supposedly like Mary the “Handmaid”. Rather, in passionately assuming the task of deconstructing the misleading but dominant misinterpretations of “Handmaid” as the submissive, passive, and acquiescing Mary of Nazareth, Mbonu intends to transform the “instruments of exclusion” into “instruments that can further liberative causes” (p.xvi). Working from the compelling truth of Mary’s self-description as “servant of the LORD”, our author overtly dons the habit of the prophet, precisely the garb of Jeremiah, to root out, tear down, and destroy the untrue patriarchal interpretations of Luke 1:26-38, as well as the untruth in the denigrating female names given by patriarchal Igbo.

The final step is the reconstruction of a better world for all women and men through retelling African and Igbo “women’s stories” by appropriating, in a liberative way, the retold story of the Annunciation. The maiden from Nazareth, Mary, the servant of the LORD, doulé kyriou, far from being the passive and submissive slave-handmaid (paidiskē), describes or “names” herself as the servant-leader. Her voice was clearly heard in the dialogue with Gabriel, God’s messenger, in the process of mediating the Incarnation of the Word (Luke 1:34: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"). This was the “first voice of a woman in the Synoptics”. “Voice” is crucial for Mbonu’s metaphorical analysis of biblical and Igbo patriarchal traditions; it must be claimed by contemporary African women. The
silence, reflection and response of Mary, in the context of Trinitarian revelation, confirm her agency and responsibility; a highly risky posture for women in a staunchly patriarchal society. Mary is servant/slave of the Lord at the Incarnation just like Moses at the beginning of Israel's Exodus from Egypt. Telling and retelling the liberating stories of women, rooted in Mary’s self-designation and appropriated along with models of women self-designation (naming) in reformed Igbo society (captured in Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*), will set aside the prejudices against women in the Christian church and African (Igbo) society; this is the shot in the arm needed by contemporary feminist liberation theology. Feminist cultural critique and critical New Testament exegesis enable Mbonu to uproot the prejudicial English rendering of “Handmaid” *doulē* in Luke 1:38 as *paidiskē* (one who plays a mere supportive and secondary role), and the derogatory Igbo naming of women, to display the maiden from Nazareth as a powerful servant of God.

Certainly Mbonu’s project confirms Ngong in his rejection of AICs-Pentecostal uncritical collapse of the Christian story of salvation into ATR idea of salvation. Ngong will applaud Mbonu’s patient, persistent and even repetitive projection of the image of the “new woman who challenges tradition in its incapacitating aspects” (Mbonu, p. 86). However, one has the right to take another look at Mbonu and Ngong, not only from the perspective of Clarke’s pattern of reading the AIC reality on the ground but also from the perspective of the interest of the three authors in the progress of postcolonial African societies through reconstruction or re-dreaming. First, a comment on the role of cosmology in the three authors; and, secondly, the importance they attach to a new African imagination.

**Cosmology, Worldview, World-sense:**

Worldview or cosmology is the bone of contention for Ngong. It dominates *The Holy Spirit and Salvation*. He picks holes in the arguments of stalwarts in African theology, like John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako, and those he generally refers to as “theologians of inculturation”. Even liberation theologian Jean-Marc Ela is not free from criticism: They endorse the African cosmology of spirits without
critically disputing the reality of the spirits; and they are negative towards the Western Enlightenment. Allied with these theologians are sociologists and historians of the new African Pentecost—Philip Jenkins, Paul Gifford, Allan Anderson and Ogbu Kalu. Since Anderson was the thesis supervisor of Clifton Clarke and wrote the foreword to Clarke's *African Christology*, the viewpoint of Clarke on cosmology will be brought into conversation with Ngong. Ngong contends that these African theologians have a very limited perception of African cosmology.

Secondly, researchers have not critically examined the neo-Pentecostalist rhetoric: It failed to liberate Africans from poverty and misery; it even failed to liberate them from spiritual or occultic forces. Rather the human development index is hurtling down the cliff, witchcraft and witch-hunting are on the increase, so are incredible crimes, prodded by Pentecostal pastors in places like DRC and Nigeria, where children are abusively accused of witchcraft. Is this true liberation by Christ? Certainly not! Rather than believe that African Pentecostalism will help the re-enchantment of rationalist Europe, it is the rationality of Enlightenment Europe that should enable renewal in the African theology of the Holy Spirit—a new "soteriological pneumatology" directed by the spirit of reason and enquiry: "[T]he spirit has to be seen as the Spirit of wisdom and truth that problematizes discourses that are being taken for granted" (Ngong, p.37), like discourses of ATR world of spirits. To realize this, one must clearly move away from endorsing the "dominant elements of African imagination" to reconstructing and reengineering a new "African imagination" (p. 69).

Though Clarke published *African Christology* a year after Ngong's *The Holy Spirit and Salvation*, his study of AICs led him to acknowledge Akan (ATR) cosmology as undergirding AIC Christology. Therefore Clarke is implicated in Ngong's critique of Pentecostalism as collapsing the Christian worldview into ATR cosmology. To tease out AIC Christology, Clarke assumes that every Christology is a "cultural construct" embracing social, political, economic and historical dimensions of the society. His methodological assumptions fall under Ngong's hammer: Clarke takes Akan ancestral tradition as a very helpful resource; he is in agreement with Akan
theologians, Kwame Bediako and John Pobee, who theorized on ancestral Christology and who claimed that AICs appropriated Christianity in a creative way. Bediako and Pobee applaud AICs’ use of “traditional resources in order to proclaim the Christian faith meaningfully, thereby allowing Jesus Christ to remove the fears that Africans traditionally have towards their clan-ancestors” (Clarke, p.39). This is a position that irks Cameroonian theologian Ngong as well as Nigerian theologian Mbonu. Ngong respects the ATR cosmology and its insight into salvation, but the ATR differs from the Christian; therefore he rejects collapsing the Christian into the ancestral without the mediation of critical rationality of modernity. On her part Mbonu, from the feminist hermeneutic of suspension, holds the idea of worldview that is visual suspect; rather she favours “world-sense” that enables intuiting a new world “from below” in radical and creative ways. New storytelling by ordinary women, their reinvention and reinterpretation of Igbo myths and names re-dream the world from below; therefore the ordinary woman does theology (in agreement with Clarke); and theology is not specifically for, nor is it best done by, the professionals, especially under patriarchal influence.

Nevertheless, one must grant Clarke’s viewpoint, and the scholarly opinion on the matter: despite the AICs’ significant decline because of the swelling ranks of neo-Pentecostalism with their acerbic critique of AICs’ Christology (proposing an alternative one that is more charismatic and social in tone—prosperity gospel and breakthroughs), yet AICs’ attentiveness to ATR world-vision and their adoption of the reality of evil spirits and witchcraft that can be exorcised led to their exponential growth in the 19th and 20th centuries and to the popularity of prophet-founders like William Wade Harris. The theologians of reconstruction, whom Ngong include among helpful candidates to midwife the reengineering of the African imagination such as Kā Mana, would count Harris among the galaxy of prophets and founders of churches that were part and parcel of the creative African response to western modernity. Mbonu is sympathetic to this view. The only evocation of AICs in her Handmaid is in relationship to the creativity of the Congolese servant-leader, Dona Beatrice, who, though executed by Italian capuchins for heresy, remained an inspiration to AICs. In addition, Ngong does not ignore
the fact that within the mainline churches, charismatic healing assemblies address the ubiquitous presence of spirits and the occultic. Unfortunately, his very insightful book fails to mention fellow Cameroonian, the late Father Meinrad Hebga, whose scientific research on the paranormal and commitment to deliverance ministry concretized in the Ephphata foundation, with branches all over Cameroon and Europe: Hebga adopts, though with critical distance, the ATR cosmology. Hebga’s Ephphata has been closely studied and evaluated by Ludovic Lado in Catholic Pentecostalism and the Paradoxes of Africanization: Processes of Localization in a Catholic Charismatic Movement in Cameroon. The conversation certainly continues. However, an uncritical affirmation of ATR worldview, on the one hand, and a cavalier dismissal of that cosmology, on the other hand, both fail, in my view, the test of the scientific instinct.

Reconstruction or Re-Dreaming a New World

The reconstruction Ngong proposes is way ahead of the thinking of those who adopted this methodology in African theology in 1991. It was adopted by the All African Conference of Churches and defended by some theologians as a post-Cold War and post-Apartheid theological strategy. Ngong clearly differs from theologians of reconstruction; he takes a distance from those of them he admires such as Kâ Mana and Emmanuel Kantangole. Their proposal of reconstruction, as reinvention or a new utopia, is helpful but does not go far enough: These theologians restrict the movement of the Holy Spirit within Christianity; they fail to see the operation of the Spirit in the religions, in atheistic sites and in science and technology.

Ngong’s “soteriological pneumatology” has great merits; especially the way pneumatology is connected to reconstructing and re-engineering a new African imagination. His predilection is for philosophers like Marcien Towa and Odera Oruka, opposed to the “cult of difference” that locks one within a “deadly particularity” (Ngong, 76). These African philosophers, better than theologians of inculturation, show how to appropriate critical rationality and scientific thinking: These are the “sage” philosophers, comparable to
the sages of Israelite and African wisdom traditions that question the taken-for-granted-ness of reality.

Ngong’s pattern of reconstruction embodies a new African imagination. It has the potential to move Africans, materially, away from the “bottom billion” of the world population wallowing in poverty and economic regress (Paul Collier). It enables Africans, spiritually, to encounter the Holy Spirit as Person within the Triune God: Who the Spirit is becomes crucial not just what the Spirit does—the spirit of truth that generates research and questioning, that enables communion between the Father and the Son, that enables communion within the Church, puts an end to ethnic and national cleavages and engenders cosmic unity, the unity of creation that is the sense of salvation. Ngong advises Pentecostalism, now in expansion, to adopt this new African imagination with its prophetic intent or risk becoming more and more irrelevant as it clings to proposing and creating “spiritual hospitals” (Ngong, p.143).

Clarke does agonize over the focus of AICs on the “spiritual”. His research results record very limited direct interest of Akan AICs in the social and political realities of life. They are accused of being “too ‘spiritually minded to be of any earthly good’” (Clarke, p. 75). This echoes the accusation of Ngong. For example, in analyzing the Christological title “Conqueror”, Clarke notes that the victory of Christ happens first and primarily in the “spiritual domain”; it is then a matter of time before it comes to the human level. This is also very well illustrated in healing and wholeness rooted in AIC (ATR) multidimensional and integrated cosmology. Healing, which is perhaps the hub of AIC spirituality, revolves around a cosmology of simultaneous geography embracing “the physical and spiritual universe”: The cosmology does not “fragment the cause, effects, and the need for restoration but believes them to be interrelated” (Clarke, p.128). This integral relationship ensures that “curing” is not confused with “healing” that is holistic. This multidimensional and integrated approach, in my view, must be recognized as a potent factor in re-engineering the African imagination; it connects the spiritual, social, economic and political. If this cosmovision does indeed belong to the AICs, as Clarke claims from the findings of his field research, then AICs do provide a strategic insight to respond to the complex evil of
material and spiritual poverty. But one still looks askance at AICs: Why are they oftentimes non-prophetic? Why are they not overtly involved in challenging socio-political evils?

Mbonu will agree that very strong prophetic action is required to re-dream the world from the feminist perspective of world-sense; but this presupposes that the integrated received universe of Igbo tradition and the Bible are deconstructed in order to reconstruct. One deconstructs the negative and pejorative names Igbo give to the girl-child in order to reconstruct: Reconstruction is energized by new forms of women storytelling that transform instruments of oppression into instruments of liberation. For instance, the creative appropriation of "metaphorical motherhood" captures the universal service of women, those who hear and keep the word; this is sharply distinguished from "biological motherhood" intent on begetting male children for patriarchy. This way of dreaming the new world into existence challenges, like Ngong’s "sage philosophy", the taken-for-granted-ness of reality. Mbonu, aided by the imaginative creativity of Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*, demonstrates that women in Igbo society will rise up and reclaim their society and reclaim their church (from patriarchy and from those women representatives of patriarchy in female religious communities). This was done by Igbo and Ibibio women of Nigeria in the 1929 women riot; it was done by the foundress of the congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus (HHCJ), Mother Mary Charles Walker, and can be done again.

Like the proverbial tortoise that has been in the cesspool for seven years (Igbo mythology), Mbonu and Ngong are impatient; they are in a hurry to be relieved and to relieve Africans of endless suffering that have been on the increase since 50 years of African independence. They will agree with aspects of the field research of Clarke; but they will have little patience with the overt non-prophetic Christianity of AICs, Pentecostals, and religious communities whose women leaders are agents of patriarchy. Strong viewpoint! But in the view of Mbonu, the evocation of the very courageous and indefatigable foundress of her religious congregation, HHCJ, Mother Mary Charles Walker, and many other servant-prophets of Africa and the Bible, makes it imperative for women to rise up, claim Voice like the maiden from Nazareth. And for Ngong, one may not have paid full attention to the
evils traduced by science, but the evils traduced by no science and the refusal to challenge African spiritualized cosmology, are more debilitating for Africa and should be rejected. But Clarke cannot be faulted for insisting that one should build a theological research base on the living faith of the Christian (AIC) communities. Their Christian faith based on the Bible, intensely re-oralized through preaching, prayer and testimonies, appears a defensible introduction to a prophetic theology that re-dreams the world.

But one must pick up these books and read them in order to judge for oneself: They are good for pastors in the field; they are good for students of theology and the ordinary reader, and certainly they are good for the professional theologian.

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References—Related Literature:


This is a remarkable, timely and provocative book. Written as a theological response to the abyss of human suffering, particularly in Africa, the book is for the oppressed and suffering individuals and communities in Africa whose lament, forgiveness, reconciliation, and doxology constitute the first act of theology. This book is also important for theologians the world over; it challenges not only the meaning of relevant theology, but also the direction of theological method. Joe Egan guides the Christian community through its primary theology of prayer/liturgy, in the context of abysmal human suffering; and he insists that it is from the same context of the disasters besetting the human community and the world that the necessary but secondary theological reflection arises. He convincingly makes the point that theology is not done simply after Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda or Auschwitz: We do theology as the Church at Prayer and as liberation theologians during Auschwitz, Liberia, Rwanda.... Perhaps there is no better way to insist that theology is done within abysmal suffering than the way Egan concludes this study with the touching but, in human terms, incomprehensible doxology of Auschwitz.... (p. 328)

Egan harps on two polar abysses that keep the attention of the reader: the abyss of abysmal human misery in suffering, and the abyss of God’s gifted hope to humans mediated in the abysmal “hell on earth” of suffering women and men and oppressed communities. The radical reversal of abysmal human suffering is wrought in Christ, the slaughtered lamb that keeps on being slaughtered daily in the victimized and oppressed individuals and communities. Through him “God’s hope in us and love for us can be glimpsed even when all appears to be lost” (p. 303).

All hope appeared indeed lost in the bloody massacres of Liberia and Sierra Leone and in the horrors of the wars and genocides of Sudan, Congo, Rwanda, and back to the Congo. Liberia, Christmas Eve 1989, is the starting point of Egan’s remarkable story; he was an eyewitness of Charles Taylor’s war. The pathetic account of the suffering of Africans
from wars, natural disasters and diseases, evokes similar suffering the world over. This hell on earth provokes the gnawing question of the "absence" of God. Who/What is to blame? Does one blame the intractable African terrain and uneven climate, or the dehumanization and brutalization through slavery, colonization and postcolonial dictatorships, or the absence of the international community?

How does one do theology in this situation? Where is God? Questions asked by philosophers, by Job and the wisdom literature, questions that the Servant in Isaiah tries to answer! Is the hellish experience in Africa and elsewhere in the world the "mirror" of the darkness of the human heart, of original sin? Egan takes seriously the reality of original sin, in its deep Augustinian pessimistic sense: the 20th century characterized by the denial of original sin displayed profoundly the evil of the human heart, unleashing outrageous and limitless violence. Egan appeals to René Girard’s theory of “acquisitive mimesis” and “victimizing mechanism”, and also to the findings of psychology and biology to firm his argument on the “evil that afflict the human heart”. He concludes pessimistically: “the self is ‘hardwired’ for aggression, ‘programmed’ as a result of our evolutionary heritage...to retaliate” (p.72).

The solution, from the faith perspective, is God’s grace and mercy, revealed in the paradoxical “sordid affair” of Jesus’ death by crucifixion: His cry of dereliction is Godforsakeness writ large. Egan probes with passion the aporia of human suffering in the suffering of Jesus. How does one interpret the suffering of Jesus as grace? How relate it to the abysmal human suffering? Using excellent resources of exegesis and biblical theology, Egan reinterprets the agony and humiliating death of Jesus as a walk in freedom to fulfil the Father’s will, rather than satisfy a vengeful and angry God. Nevertheless, the profound rejection by God leaves open more questions than providing answers. Egan uses the term “mysterious” or “mystery” to engage theological interpretation: The Easter Preface provides the best description of the mystery of the resurrection—the risen Jesus lives “forever slain” (p. 132); so there will be scars in heaven (p. 150). Mysteriously, “God’s loving embrace of the crucified body of Jesus”, resurrection, fills Jesus’ “lifeless corpse not with human life...but rather much more radically with the infinitely greater divine life that had always belonged to Jesus” (p. 133).
How does this speak to suffering humanity? On the one hand, the depth of sinfulness in the human heart and in the world is revealed—"a crucifying world" and "crucifying people" endlessly adopt the victimising mechanism. On the other hand, Jesus, the Servant of God, the Son of God, took the burden of this sinfulness, experienced God-forsakenness to reveal "mysteriously" how God really suffers: God's heart is revealed in Jesus and, mysteriously, answers the question of the suffering of the innocent today. From this perspective one appreciates the memorial of Jesus in the liturgy as subversive, and the paradox of forgiveness opposed to vengeance as grace: in the Christ, God's forgiveness precedes repentance; the victims receive the gift of forgiving themselves and diffusing the gift of forgiveness to the criminals, the offended to the offender; liturgical celebration as dangerous memorial makes present the risen one who, in the power of the Spirit overcomes, but in utter weakness, in the suffering of the innocent who mirror the absent-present God.

In an interesting way Egan concludes his book with the imagery of "mirror": The victimized and oppressed "mirror" the true reality of our society and world; at the same time they "mirror" the oppressed who, in their suffering, intercede in prayer to save all humankind, oppressed and oppressor. In the daring language of liberation theology, the scars of Jesus, carried by witnesses like Paul and the martyrs, are borne by the crucified and oppressed communities, groups and individuals of our time. Forgiveness, hope and ultimate redemption is given to the poor and is mediated by the poor: Their redemptive suffering mediates salvation for the oppressor and the oppressed. Therefore in the abyss of suffering, the mirror of our world, hope incarnates: Daring, but convincing! A subtitle summarizes the theology of liberation that is espoused by Egan, and is the great merit of this book—"Invitation to the Kingdom of God: RSVP through the Poor" (p. 317). Take it up and read!

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The task Melnyk set for himself is herculean: a study of Vatican diplomacy at the United Nations. In a way, his book is a study of the two organizations which have dominated world events in contemporary times, even if on different levels—the spiritual and the temporal. On the one hand, there is the Vatican, understood in this context as the Holy See, the government of the Catholic Church whose mission in the world is not political, economic or social, but religious and spiritual. On the other hand, there is the United Nations Organization which emerged from the ruins of the Second World War, and whose primary goal has always been the defence and maintenance of global peace and security. Its Charter was adopted in 1945 (23).

The author is a canon lawyer with a good appreciation of the ability of the past to illuminate the present. Institutions evolve. So do the laws, canon and civil, which govern institutions and specify the roles of the human subjects active in them. It is understandable, therefore, that his work is an historical juridical study of the pontifical legates as Permanent Observers of the Holy See Mission at the United Nations. The emphasis is on the development of their legal status and on their contributions to the work of the United Nations in the service of humanity (4). He weaves into his overall argument an image of a Church which, though in the world but not of the world, remains true to its Christ-given mission.

The book has four chapters. It has, in addition, a preface, an introduction, an afterward, an addendum, two appendices which provide a complete list of International and regional intergovernmental organizations and bodies of which the Holy See is either a member, or a Permanent Observer, or simply an observer, a delegate or simply a guest of honour. Its bibliography is comprehensive and invaluable.

In the first chapter, a critical study of the development of pre-UN international structures leading up to the creation the UNO, grounds the conclusion that the Holy See "was present as an observer in the process of bringing the community of nations of the world together at the United Nations table of peace, cooperation and development" (50-51). And ever since, the Holy See has been present at the United Nations. The "why?" and the "how?" of this presence is taken up in chapters two and three.
where he examines a number of related issues: the legal foundations of Pontifical Legation to the United Nations, and Pontifical Legates as Representatives of the Roman Pontiff, etc. These legates, according to Paul VI’s motu proprio, Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum, are “ecclesiastics, often endowed with the Episcopal dignity, to whom the Roman Pontiff entrusts the office of representing him in a permanent manner in various nations and regions of the world” (81). This definition, Melnyk rightly observed, is too restrictive. A critique of the canons which define the nature and function of pontifical legates opens up a space for the following interesting positions he urges: a) that there should be more room for “more substantive participation” of the laity in the Holy See’s Mission at the UN. (108); and b) that “Changes to special laws affecting pontifical legates may need to be formulated” or a new special law enacted to reflect changes in their role in our 21st century (214). In the last chapter, canon 747 #2 provides the framework for the discussion of the Holy See Missions at the United Nations. According to this canon, “It belongs to the Church always and everywhere to announce moral principles, even about social order, and to render judgment concerning any human affairs insofar as the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvations of souls require it.” (155-156). The Church’s active and constructive engagement with the United Nations through the work of the legates at the various offices of the United nations is in the interest of this mission. Thanks to its legates, the Holy See is directly involved in over 27 UN-related international organizations. And wherever they are, these legates serve as “a nexus between the spiritual and the temporal” (212), and as “witnesses to the truth, providing hope, inspiration and the light of peace to the ‘family of nations’ at the United Nations” (214).

By all accounts, Melnyk’s work is a good and insightful study of Vatican diplomacy at the United Nations, and a critical examination of the relevant laws framing the Holy See’s presence at the United Nations, and the pontifical legates and their role. The reader is left with unambiguous answers to a number of related questions: How is the Holy See involved in the work of the United Nations, and why? Why does the Holy See settle for an observer status even though it is the government of the Vatican City State and a fee-paying member of the UNO? In addition, the work provides an argument to the effect that Vatican diplomacy at the United Nations is consistent with the Church’s mission. The author’s call for a redefinition of pontifical legates and a reformulation of the laws that
delimit their role to reflect the dynamics of our world today is a part of the conclusion to which the argument of his work leads.

It is a measure of Melnyk’s appreciable degree of objectivity as a researcher that he does not paper over the views of those opposed to the Holy See’s peculiar presence at the United Nations. He notes, for example, that although the great majority of nations acknowledge the right of papal legation and the Holy See’s important contribution at the United Nations, certain Non-governmental Organizations challenge the Holy See’s privileged position at the UN. (66). It seems, though, that for him, the views of such people are not something to worry about. He dismisses, as unconvincing, their “peripheral arguments about the separation of Church and State, Vatican statehood and the status of the Permanent Observer Mission at the United Nations....” (66). It is however not clear why he considers their arguments unconvincing and peripheral especially since the arguments in question are neither stated nor evaluated. It is obvious that those who object to the Holy See’s presence are ultimately objecting to the privileged position given to one organized religion, i.e. the Roman Catholic Church, and the role of this religion as the custodian of spiritual values at the summit of the nations of the world. And we do not want to forget that these values are informed, in the main, by North Atlantic ontology—claims to their universality notwithstanding. I think that their concerns need to be addressed if the Holy See’s presence and mission are to be appreciated by more people than is the case now. Dr. Melnyk should consider devoting more time and space to this in a later edition of so important a work.

In the final analysis, the book is an insightful analysis of Vatican diplomacy at the UN against the background of a detailed account of the origin, the nature and role of the United Nations. For years to come, it will remain an indispensable resource material for all interested in knowing more about what the Holy See is doing at the United Nations and, by implication, about the United Nations Organization.

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