From the God of the Ancestors to the God of Western Christianity: The Political Question of God in Postcolonial Africa.

By
Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua

Before I give a summary of the epistemological, theological and political argumentations developed in my book, Le Dieu Crucifié en Afrique. Esquisse d’une Christologie négro-africaine de la libération holistique, it is necessary to state my hermeneutical situation (Sitz im Leben). It is the basis from where I tackle the question of God in postcolonial Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa that is politically, economically and ideologically marginalised by political and economic powers that preside over the planetary expression of the consumerist and neo-liberal ideology.

My hermeneutical situation could be stated in the following question: Which God do African Christians worship in their enthusiastic and inculturated liturgies? In other words, has the God of Christians, which is also the God of the victors of the colonial confrontation, completely dethroned the God of the Ancestors? Are they one and the same God, if yes, under which theological and epistemological conditions? What transformation must the missionary and western Christianity undergo in order to vibrate at the same level with the therapeutic, cultural, political and spiritual demands of African Christians or Africans in search of God in this new phase of aggravation of the crisis of postcolonial Africa in the context of global economic recession whose consequences for postcolonial Africa are disastrous? I started writing this article the same day the G20 Summit opened in order to find solutions to the global economic recession. The quasi absence of Africa in this

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1 Kungua is Professor of Philosophy and Theology at St Paul’s University Ottatwa, Canada, and also teaches French.
summit of economic super powers of the planet is evident through the insignificant representation of the continent by South Africa.

The question of the “God of the Blacks” is more and more omnipresent in communities of Africa and the Diaspora. This question is inseparable from the history of four centuries of black slave trade, slavery in North America and the Near East as well as the detonation of corrupt postcolonial dictators. It is not rare to see among the black communities of the West Indies and the Caribbean a popular and violent movement of rejection of western Christianity and her “god” associated (rightly or wrongly) with the imperial politics of white supremacy in the world. In the French West Indies where I lived for 12 months (October 2003 to December 2004), many descendants of African slaves embrace the African traditional religions (ATR) such as the vodun and the religions of pharaonic Egypt as distinctive marks of their disalienation from Christianity assimilated to the religion of domination of whites upon blacks.

Clarifying my Hermeneutical Assumptions:
I will start this research work on the God of the Blacks by stating the three concrete situations through which the “Black question” is expressed today. (a) The Ivorian Journalist Serge Bilé, known worldwide through his audacious and controversial books on the exploitation and racism which blacks suffered and continue to suffer in the world, has again published a book entitled *Et si Dieu n’aimait pas les Noirs? Enquête sur le racism aujourd’hui au Vatican.* We see in this book revolting and absolutely unacceptable events in which black priests and religious women continue to suffer open, structural and daily racism from Vatican authorities and in numerous churches in Europe. The events narrated in the book do not need any commentary and may push somebody to ask whether Blacks are at home when they claim to be

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3 [Suppose God does not love Blacks? Research into Racism today in the Vatican!]
“Roman Catholic”. The book opens with a first chapter entitled “A black bishop attacked in John Paul II’s house.” Here are some extracts from the first chapter:

“Wednesday 8 June 2005. A Nigerian priest, John Okoro Egbulefu comes out of the Vatican in the company of an Italian apostolic Nuncio. They take the principal avenue, the famous Via della Concilliazone, talking about so many things when a red motor scooter pulls up close to them. A young man dismounts, immediately runs towards the African priest, a knife at hand, stabs him and leaving him for dead disappears into the night.”4 Few years earlier, the Zairian bishop who was a secretary to Pope John Paul II was attacked.

“The misfortune of Egbulefu reminds the African community at the Vatican of another attack, even more mysterious, suffered some years earlier by the Zairian bishop Emery Kabongo, found on 12th August 1988 at Castel Gondolfo, the summer residence of the pope. He lay in a pool of blood; his ribs and jaw broken and his face shattered.”5

The book continues with testimonies of priests, religious women and other Africans that are victims of open racism in the Vatican. I quote this book because of the wide publicity it received in Canada where I live right now and reminds us of the malaise of a good number of Africans in the structures of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa as well as in the black Diaspora of Europe and North America. There are even cases where African nuns go into prostitution in order to survive and escape the bad treatments from the convents that brought them to Europe. There are also cases

5 Ibid. p. 13.
where priests live as illegal aliens because they could not renew their papers and are summoned by Vatican or the local churches which welcome or employ them to go back to their countries.

(b) The second element of my hermeneutical situation is the critique of western and missionary Christianity. I do not intend to reiterate this because I exposed it extensively in my book, *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. There I studied the works of African theologians of liberation, such as Mveng, Eboussi, Ela, Hebga, Mbemba and Milingo. In this article, I wish to recall that the evangelisation of Africa took place in the political and ideological context of systematic “devaluation” of cultures and peoples of Africa and this determined for better or for worse the multiple and contradictory trajectories of Christian faith in Africa. Achille Mbembe whose critique reaches extreme limits writes:

This suffering was explained in terms of malediction. Indeed, among all the races of the earth, only the Black was “evangelized” from the dramatic perspective of the theology of malediction. The black slave trade and colonisation were almost presented as expiatory events necessary because destined to serve as manifestation of the glory of the God of western Christianity and as a place of anticipation of his promises for the cursed race. It is difficult to understand the conflict between Christianity and the black world if one does not take note of what, from “below” is still considered as a costly enterprise of authoritative definition of the status of the African all through the years.

(c) The third and last element of my hermeneutical situation is the situation of open epistemological and theological rupture between the African masses and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa. We are witnessing the massive

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departure of Catholics and Protestants from the missionary churches that came from the West to join Pentecostal churches where charismatic pastors propose religious therapies to problems like witchcraft, poverty, sickness and search for happiness. It is impossible to ignore this movement of internal rupture in Africa and the black Diasporas of the West. The attention of theologians must focus on this massive phenomenon which has become the order of the day. Why all these massive departures of African Christians from churches of western missionary allegiance towards churches very close to Pentecostalism and radical evangelicalism? How do these Christians live and appropriate their faith in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour? Is it possible to treat these agitating questions without taking into account the phenomenological and theological knowledge of African Traditional Religion (ATR)? An evangelical theologian like Byang Kato demonises all the theological and symbolical dimensions of ATR as idolatrous and pagan in favour of the absolute unicity of Christianity while Bolaji Idowu promotes the divinities and cultural practices of Yoruba traditional religions and that of the Igbo in the elaboration of a Christianity inculturated in black African soil. I gave an account of this in my book on Anglophone Black African theologies. It will be good to read the whole book especially the part consecrated to West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana...).

After a narrative and phenomenological recapture of the questions and problems which provoked my reflections and constitute my initial problematic, I will note three heuristic and hermeneutic grounds on which the argumentation of my book (Le Dieu Crucifié en Afrique. Esquisse d'une Christology négro-africaine de la liberation holistique) is grounded. First: the political question of the role of the Christian faith in the process of the total liberation of Africa, without which there will be neither

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profound inculturation in Africa nor the reconstruction of democratic societies in Africa. This question calls for a demonstration of the prophetic and critical nature of the Christian faith vis-à-vis despotic and idolatrous powers of the postcolonial era. Second: the theological and exegetical question of reading the whole Bible in order to anchor the Christian faith in Africa on African cultural thought pattern. In order to solve this problem, I propose a narrative, phenomenological, mystical and Black African interpretation of I Kings 19, 1-21. This will help to illustrate an African re-appropriation of the biblical text. The choice of this text is motivated by the prophetic and therapeutic lessons that emerge from it. Problems concerning holistic and religious healing in all the Christian confessions in Africa and in all the African traditional religions call for the urgent therapeutic and mystical reading of biblical prophetism. The third and last argument of my book borders on the field of mystical experience of God by contemporary Africans. This point is the most original of all though it appears last. It is from the depth of the mystical experience that Africans have about the God of Jesus Christ—which cannot be the monopoly of nor can it be manipulated by any culture, be it western—that they will find the basis for the emergence of a Christianity of full life. This is a Christianity of holistic liberation from all idolatrous powers that lead postcolonial Africa and the black diaspora to death and political and spiritual decadence.

My book reposes on a tripod; three poles that are resolutely political, theological and mystical. Let us now analyse succinctly each of these poles that constitute my “hermeneutical situation”. Without retracing the stages of the argumentation of my book, I will briefly summarise the major moments while underlining the challenges and questions that persist. I will do this descriptive work together with a phenomenological exposition of my thought taking as point of departure the results of my phenomenological and mystical interpretation of the story of the journey of the prophet Elijah to the mountain of God, Horeb in I Kings 19,1-21. My presentation is in three points: the political dimension (prophetic),
the theological dimension (exegetic), and the mystical dimension (doxological) of Black African Christology of holistic liberation.

**Political and Prophetic Dimension of Black African Christology of Holistic Liberation:**

This section is largely inspired by the dynamic retrospective and prospective presentation of liberation theologies in Africa by the Nigerian theologian Eugene Uzukwu in his article “‘From Nobody to Somebody’, Pertinence of African Liberation Theology. Has Medellin Impact on Liberation Theology in Africa?”

Borrowing from the political theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and J.B. Metz, I underlined the political, critical and prophetic dimension of a Trinitarian theology of the cross. Faith in the Crucified God brings Christians to face “deep crisis” of their Christian identity. It obliges them to a radical conversion of their lives and to enter the movement of radical transvaluation of values provoked by the scandal of the crucified God. A theology of the cross like the one developed by Jürgen Moltmann brings out the urgency of promoting an internal critique of the church and the society in the name of the “critical and dangerous memory” of Jesus of Nazareth who was condemned as blasphemer by the religious authorities of Jerusalem and as seditious and revolutionary by the political authorities of Rome. The preaching of the Kingdom of God led Jesus to a fatal confrontation with the political and religious authorities locked up in the idolatrous cult of personality, money and power. By denouncing the hypocrisy and

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8 Conference delivered at Milltown Institute, Dublin, during a symposium on *Theology of Liberation, Movement or Moment?*, October 4, 2008.
idolatry of the religious and political authorities of his époque Jesus sets the poor and oppressed free from the yoke of the despots and tyrants of his époque as well as those of the present day.

For the church of the crucified, the preaching of the Messiah, crucified as blasphemer and seditious, must lead to a deep examination of conscience and a profound posture of conversion of her rigid and authoritarian structures to the values of the Gospel beatitudes. All through her history, the church had to face the idolatrous sin her members committed due to the neglect of the dramatic and critical character of the crucified God. The Church of Jesus Christ must avoid aligning with the powerful and the tyrants of the society who promote, at the planetary level, an idolatrous and pagan religion of money, power, social prestige, race and economic growth. If in the secularised societies of western Europe Moltmann and Metz criticize the privatisation of the Christian faith and individualism as plagues of the Christian churches, in postcolonial Africa the prophetic and iconoclastic dimension of Black African Christology of liberation consists in fighting the dictatorial and oppressive structures which present themselves to the people as “divinities” of money, blood and tribe to be worshiped as such. The fifty years of postcolonial Africa have been marked by the bloody and kleptocratic dictatorships. This is based on robbery, killing, tribalism and the idolatrous political personality cults of Africans dictators rendered by dehumanised and zombified masses. Black African Christology of holistic liberation toes the line of the acts of great prophetic and religious leaders who shed their blood for daring to confront the bloody and diabolic powers which continue to bleed African peoples mercilessly. Leaders like Nelson Mandela, Thomas Sankara, Bishop Munzihirwa, Bishop Emmanuel Kataliko, Fr. Jean-Marc Ela, Fr. Engelbert Mveng, are actors and witnesses of a political and prophetic critique of dehumanisation and immoral regimes which proliferate in postcolonial Africa and push African societies to the margins of history and away from places where the major political and economic orientations of the planet are decided.
At the moment when we are experiencing a world economic recession, it is worrying to see the absence of sub-Saharan Africa at the G20 summit on 20th April 2009 in London. Given the structural and political exclusion of postcolonial African societies and the exploitative logic that dominates the relationship the powerful western powers entertains with them, one fears an increase in the number of victims of war, famine and catastrophic management of African countries. In this moment of despair and dread, Christian churches have the mission to remind the dictators and their peoples who “worship them” that faith in the crucified God is a dangerous and scandalous memory which subjects all authorities and institutions of this world to the impartial and just paradoxical judgment of the crucified and risen God. As a religion of crisis, Christianity acts radically as a subversive memory which sets people free from idolatrous religions of power, money, race, consumption and blood in the name of the eschatological sovereignty of God whose ultimate power manifests itself in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Before this God who raises the dead on the last day all the victims of slavery, diverse genocides perpetrated in the history of the world, victims of wars of colonial exploitation and of violence towards the dominated classes of our societies remain subjects who ask for justice and whose memory remains alive in the heart of God. By raising Jesus from the dead, God opens the reign of grace and justice by demonstrating his absolute sovereignty over all that exists and all that is not yet visible. This eschatological reserve sets men free from compulsive and mechanical worship of idolatrous powers which preside over the neo-liberal globalisation and generate wars, genocides, slavery, and economic recession, all sorts of physical and symbolical violence of the information technology network.

Because of its radically critical and iconoclastic dimension, Black African Christology of liberation is elaborated in proximity with the prophetic gestures of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus of Nazareth who accomplishes in the paschal event the Law and the Prophets. I want to insist here on the figure of Elijah
because of his paradigmatic position both in the Jewish mysticism of Merkabah (the throne or chariot of God, Ezk 1-3) and in Christianity. Is he not one of the prophets who together with Moses appeared during the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor? Let us briefly explore the theological resources that the emblematic figure of Elijah the Tishbite opens for the Black African Christology of holistic liberation.

**Prophetic and Exegetical Dimension of Black African Christology of holistic Liberation**

I cannot reproduce all the stages and results11 of my exegetical and theological study of the story of the journey of the prophet Elijah to the mountain of God, Horeb in I Kings 19, 1-21. In verse 12, God appears in the paradoxical mode of the “sound of a sheer silence” and after three violent cosmic events in which he was not. In reality God is neither in the strong wind nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire that consumes the mountain. These three events precede the acoustic apparition of God because the “sound of sheer silence” invokes the domain of hearing and not that of seeing. Properly speaking, there is no theophany in this story, but the interior hearing of a “sound of sheer silence”.

The first thing I want to note is the theological intention of the story to make an absolute differentiation between the Lord and the cosmic apparitions of Baal which was worshiped as the “God of

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11 See my work « Une lecture négro-africaine, phénoménologique et Mystique de 1 R 19, 1-21 in my book, Le Dieu Crucifié, op. cit. pp. 226-289. For a Black African interpretation of the 400 years of the monarchical and dramatic history of Israel as recounted in the book of Kings, see my homage to the Spiritan exegete Fr. Pierre Buis, C.S.Sp (1929-2005) in Nouvelle Revue Théologique under the title “Exégèse et vie missionnaire: Essai de relecture théologique et spirituelle de la vie du père Pierre Buis, C.S.Sp (18/3/1929 à Paris – 23/7/2005 à Rome). In this article, I establish a theologico-political correlation between the 4 centuries of chaotic history of monarchy in Israel (X-VI centuries) and 4 centuries of the tragic history of Africa from the 16th to the 20th century whose different features are: black slave trade, slavery, European military colonization and postcolonial diabolic dictatorship
Thunder”. The fight between the Baals and YHWH constitutes the focal point of the whole cycle of Elijah; just as in the preceding chapter (1Kg 18) Elijah triumphed over and beheaded the prophets of Baal at the foot of Mount Carmel. This first remark puts us before an open question: the status of the “divinities” of the ATR (e.g. Vodun of Adja-Fon of Benin, Orisha of Yoruba of Nigeria and Bwiti of the Fang of Gabon) vis-à-vis the Trinitarian God of missionary Christianity. Is there properly speaking polytheism or monotheism in the aforementioned traditional religions?

I would like to refer the reader to the debate between Byang Kato and Bolaji Idowu as well as other theologians from Nigeria and Ghana who have worked on this question. It seems to me that the colonial and neo-colonial demonization of ATR and its practices by western missionaries and the implicit theology of malediction of Cham which accompanied the evangelisation of African peoples constitute pejorative factors as regards ATR. I refer also to the work on the Vodun of Benin from a Christian perspective by a theologian from Benin Barthelemy Adoukonou: Jalons pour une théologie africaine: Essai d’une herméneutique chrétienne du Vodun Dahoméen. In this work, Adoukonou shows the existence of a supreme God Mahou, but who is far from human affairs. But there is a plethora of vodun and loa (spirits or deities) responsible for thunder, rain, healing and who demand sacrifices from human beings who are beneficiaries of their generosity in daily affairs.

Adoukonou talks also of the “magic” ceremony for the prevention of the King’s death at the beginning of the year through the sacrifice of a young child. This sacrifice is contrary to the biblical revelation as it is taught in the Torah and the prophets, as well as to the essence of Christianity in which God himself gives or sacrifices his only Son so that human beings may be saved by pure abundant grace. From this point of view I submit that the Vodun and other ATR must absolutely “convert” to the religion of love.

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and grace which is the confession of the crucified and risen God. An adept of the Vodun who wants to become Christian has to shed off a lot of things and convert because Christianity is a religion of “metanoia”, the conversion of the heart.

On the other hand, I am much more at home with the position of Bimwenyi Kweshi in his book, Discours théologique négro-africaine, problèmes des fondements, when he affirms that the God of ATR ( Nzambe, Mungu, Nzam…) is identical to the Christian God. However, one has to recognize the absolute novelty of the missionary proclamation of the Gospel which is based on the Trinitarian and Christological revelation. That the God of our ancestors has a Son, who came in the “human condition” preached the Gospel of the reign of God, suffered, died and rose from the dead is a novelty conveyed by Christian revelation. My personal position consists in saying that the God of ATR is the same as that of western Christianity. However, the Trinitarian Christology constitutes a radical novelty which calls for “paradigm shift” in the African religious universe and requires the elaboration of a Black African Christology of holistic liberation. That is what I tried to demonstrate in my book, Le Dieu crucifie en Afrique.

The second remark about the “sound of sheer silence” in 1 Kg 19, 1-21 consists in showing the call to conversion that YHWH addressed to the turbulent and violent prophet Elijah the Tishbite. In fact chapter 19 is in contrast with chapter 18 where Elijah calls down fire from heaven to demonstrate the oneness of YHWH and the efficacy of the prophet’s prayer to YHWH. However, a chapter later, Elijah could no longer recognize the paradoxical presence of YHWH and asks to die in view of the total failure of his mission to bring back the Israelites to the one cult of YHWH which is the mark of the covenant with the fathers in the desert. The total absence of YHWH in the three cosmic phenomena mentioned

above (wind, earthquake and fire) constitutes a call to "conversion" in two complementary directions. First, Elijah realises that he has no control over the freedom and sovereignty of YHWH which safeguards his absolute transcendence in the midst of his paradoxical manifestation (immanence). But, second, at the same time, the people must make a clear distinction between YHWH and the cosmic divinities of Canaan and the surrounding peoples. This paradoxical manifestation of YHWH by a "sound of sheer silence" can also constitute a call to conversion addressed to western Christianity and to all Christian churches in the world, for those occasions when they have attempted to "domesticate" and "confiscate" the dangerous memory of the crucified and risen God.

No particular culture or church can claim the monopoly of the confession and celebration of the Christian faith. It is for this intrinsically theological reason that African Christian churches must elaborate their dogmatic theology, their liturgies and healing ministries according to the spiritual and sociological demands of African peoples. We have passed the time of sterile polemics about whether or not African theologians should slavishly obtain permission from Rome and the Vatican in order to think, express and live their faith in Christ, Lord and Saviour. It is left for African theologians to mobilize all the rhythms of their theologies in order to help African peoples to worship God in Spirit and in Truth and find in their Christian praxis responses to their spiritual and therapeutic demands. That is why in my book, I borrowed from the Jewish mysticism of Merkabah and the Kabbalah and from the "theology of pathos" of Abraham Heschel\textsuperscript{15} in order to ground the mystical, theological and symbolic bases of Black African Christology of holistic liberation.

It is no longer necessary to show the cultural and religious specificity of ATR and afro-Christian churches centred on the practice of healing and exorcism. Contrary to western theologies marked by the historico-critical method, positivism, scepticism and

the scienticism of western modernity, African theologies reflect the religious dimensions of African cultures and the impossibility of separating the invisible sphere of the God of the ancestors and the visible sphere of human beings and the cosmos.

We want to draw attention to a subtle imposition of western exegetical and theological methods on African Catholics churches affiliated to Rome, by a rigid and pyramidal hierarchy which sacrifices the cultural specificity of non western peoples on the altar of an imperial and canonical catholicity. To solve this grave theological and political problem, the church must become a church which listens to the aspirations, sufferings and cries of the people oppressed under the wheels of neo-liberal politics and military imperialism of western powers. This is what the Nigerian theologian Eugene Uzukwu calls *A Listening Church. Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*\(^{16}\). I gave an insight into Uzukwu’s thought in my book, *Panorama des theologies négro-africaines anglophones*\(^{17}\). I endorse the critical, prophetic and courageous dimension of Uzukwu’s works for the emergence of churches strongly anchored on the African cultural terrain and involved in the work of democratisation of the structures of the church and of corrupt putrefying postcolonial State.

Why hide the growing demands of religious healing in African churches in the name of western monolithic and rationalistic interpretation of the message of Jesus Christ while the Gospels are filled with scenes of healing and exorcism? Why must catholic seminarians from Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroun slavishly accept the dubious results of Bultmann’s demythologization or the theological minimalism of the historico-critical method while Christians around them who frequent the independent African churches, free from Roman influence, live their faith as they search for spiritual healing, in communion with the spirit of God in order to cast out evil spirits at the origin of their sickness and social

\(^{16}\) Orbis Books, New York, 1996  
\(^{17}\) Op. cit.
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There is no need to restate here the urgency of Black African Christology of holistic liberation in accord with the spiritual, cultural, therapeutic and religious demands of Africans.

The arrogance of Rome, her intransigence as regards the uniform and mechanical observance of the canons of western catholicity independently of the internal cultural dynamics of each people has led to the massive departure of millions of African Catholics to found African independent churches in Africa and the Diaspora among the black Africans of Europe and North America. The schism of Bishop Milingo\(^\text{18}\) is not unrelated to this will to power of Rome and the Vatican over the so called “mission countries” as if Europe and North America were not in need of evangelisation (mission) and hence of conversion (metanoia) to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The charismatic and therapeutic concentration of ATR and African initiated churches lead me to the last part of this article which is resolutely mystical and therapeutic. My researches in the story of I kings 19, 1-21 led me to consult many works of erudite western exegetes that helped me to establish the connection between the liturgy of the Sabbath in the Essene communities of Qumran and the text of I Kings 19, 1-21. It is in the works of French exegetes, Jacques Briend\(^\text{19}\) and Pierre Buis\(^\text{20}\) that I discovered the mystical significance of the paradoxical expression *sound of sheer silence* or *Qol De Mama Daqqa*. What is the connection between the scarcity of this expression in the OT and its omnipresence in the texts on Sabbath offering at Qumran? Is there a rapport between the paradoxical expression and the “celestial

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liturgy where angels worship God without words, hence imitating the silence of God? If yes, what is the role of angels in the Jewish mysticism of Merkabah and in the ATR? How can a close religious connection between Jewish mysticism of Qumran and the ATR open heuristic and decisive avenues for the emergence of a Black African Christology of holistic liberation?

**The Mystical and Doxological Dimension of Negro-African Christology of Holistic Liberation**

The expression, “a sound of sheer silence” which appears in v.12 of I Kings 19 helps to move from the theological and exegetic dimension to the mystical and doxological dimension of Black African Christology of holistic liberation. As I noted above, Old Testament exegetes (Jacques Briend and Pierre Buis) testify to the frequency of the paradoxical expression *sound of sheer silence* in the manuscripts of Essenes of Qumran. It is a liturgical expression in the context of songs for the Sabbath holocaust in the community of Qumran. For Jacques Briend:

The expression “sound of sheer silence” is an incontestable recapture I Kings 19, 1-12 in the context of the heavenly liturgy. The description of the angelic service contains a paradox well underlined by C. Newson and D.C. Allison. The angels praise and bless God without the content of the song being given. The focus is the silence of the angels that is modelled in a way on God’s silence. Their jubilation is done without words. The interest for these songs for Sabbath holocaust goes beyond what can be said about them. These texts help to understand the place of these angels in Jewish liturgy and the development of a Jewish mysticism around the Merkabah”

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Merkabah is the divine “throne-chariot” in Ezk 1-3 and constitutes the central pivot in the Jewish mysticism of the same name. Through an ecstatic incursion in the celestial spheres and thrones, Jewish mysticism anticipates the eschatological liturgy through its presence in synagogal liturgy of the Sabbath. Moreover, we have seen the determinant role of angels as messenger of God to the prophet Elijah in the context of 1Kg19, 1-21. This omnipresence has to be correlated with the omnipresence of spirits in ATR. I draw a connection here between angels in Jewish mysticism and spirits in the therapeutic liturgies of afro-Christian churches and the ATR. This analogy is determinant in the sense that in the two contexts (Jewish and Black African) divine healing constitutes the central aspect of the liturgy. Although one must reject in strong terms fundamentalist deviations, authoritarian impostors and all sorts of mental manipulations found in the therapeutic practices of ATR and the African initiated churches, it is important to underline healing as a characteristic proper to ATR. It resists fiercely the technological, ideological and nihilistic uniformization which is produced by the planetary display of the scientific and consumerist religion of neo-liberal globalisation. The multiplication of spontaneous syncretism by Africans between western Christianity and the spiritual elements of ATR constitute the basis of a Christianity rooted in the mystical genus of African cultures.

While churches are emptying in Europe and North America, while Christianity is being attacked politically and in the media by anti-Christian lobbies(of the Anti-Christ) in technologically advanced societies, while big segments of western societies lose the memory of Christian faith in favour of the acceleration of the process of de-Christianisation and secularisation, it is important to note the charismatic and therapeutic effervescence of churches in Asia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa which become de facto the most dynamic and numerous churches of the 21st Century. This sensitive transfer of the centre of gravity of Christianity from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere constitutes a
decisive reality with extraordinary theological and political consequences. For the first time in its global expansion, the gospel of the Crucified and Risen God is no longer the monopoly of western civilisation of Greco-Latin origin, but has been totally transformed by the people of Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Concerning African Christian theology, I am convinced that an in-depth exploration of Jewish mysticism and an African appropriation of the whole Bible (with particular attention to the cultural, religious and symbolical universe of the Hebrews in the OT which starts in Africa with Moses) constitute the major pivots capable of dis-alienating us from mental, scholastic and ideological schemes of Greco-Latin culture in which Africa received the Good news of Jesus Christ. In my book, *Le Dieu Crucifié en Afrique*, I tried to draw inspiration from rabbinic, prophetic and pathos-filled theology of Jewish mystics (A. Heschel, G. Scholem, I. Louria) in order to elaborate a Christology of holistic liberation in which ecstatic contemplation of the “throne-chariot of God” (the Merkabah) helps the contemplative and the praying faithful to be irradiated by divine energies coming out from the celestial court through the angels who mysteriously mediate between the two worlds that are closely connected in the global world vision of ATR.

This reality is very important for the “necessary dialogue” that must be carried out between African churches and western churches outside the primitive biases of colonial and neo-colonial ethnography, which support the works of some western africanist theologians. This Black African and centrist appropriation of the Bible is massively promoted by Afro-American theologians of liberation (Cone, Wright, Hopkins) for whom a mystical and cultural return to Africa constitutes a primordial axis in the process of Black Church development. This situation has been illustrated in *Blow the Trumpet in Zion. Global Vision and Action for the 21st Century Black Church*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2005.

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of their dis-alienation and their holistic liberation from the epistemological schema of the dominant white and Eurocentric theology. This Afrocentric appropriation of the Bible is a visceral characteristic of Black theologies of liberation produced by the black churches of USA:

...it is no less true that American black people have a tradition of their own that stretches back to Africa and its traditional religions. We are an African people, at least to the degree that our grandparents came from Africa and not from Europe. They brought with them their stories and combined them with the Christian story, thereby creating a black religious tradition unique to North America. African culture informed black people’s perspective on Christianity and made it impossible for many slaves to accept an interpretation of the Jesus story that violated their will for freedom. The passive Christ of white Christianity when combined with African culture became the Liberator of the oppressed from socio-political oppression.23

The terrain of spiritual, religious and mystical return to traditional Africa federates theologians from Africa and the Diaspora in Europe, America and the Caribbean against the epistemological uniformization and domination of conservative theologies of European and American churches which have proved to be incapable to denounce and fight against oppressive systems that support the contemporary American society.

It is here that one must recognize and praise the vitality of festive and enthusiastic liturgies of African churches, all denominations, which express fundamentally the doxological and mystical orientations of ATR. If God is continuously worshiped by Africans and constitutes their first recourse independently of their

religions and beliefs, it is because of the strong mystical foundation of ATR. At the moment when we are witnessing the closure of Christian churches in secularized, nihilistic and atheistic Western Europe and North America, one must recognize the charismatic and therapeutic effervescence of black African societies. Although one must be careful about the deviations, simony, charlatanism, dupery and mental manipulations in some of the independent churches, it is important to underline the therapeutic specificity of these churches vis-à-vis churches in Europe and North America.

Exegetical studies on the omnipresence of the expression “Sound of sheer silence” in the manuscripts of Qumran show a connection between the celestial liturgy and the eschatological liturgy in the celestial court where angels worship without words, hence through the “sound of sheer silence”. This mysterious articulation between the divine transcendence (heavenly liturgy) and his immanence in the world (terrestrial liturgy) show the strong resistance that ATR presents against atheistic and materialistic currents being diffused in the world through new technologies of the consumerist and mediatised religion. The agony and gradual disappearance of ecclesial institutions and Christian memory in European and American societies must be seen by Africans as a permanent challenge and a theological provocation that call for an elaboration of a Christianity of the 21st Century on the basis of prophetic, therapeutic and critical theologies of holistic liberation. Without a strong and lively mystical basis, no theology can give birth to a Christianity of life, of divine compassion and of holistic liberation of human beings created in the image and likeness of God.

[Translated from French by Bede Ukwuije c.s.sp. (SIST, Attakwu Enugu)]