

Editorial

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL RELEVANCE

A recent back page comment on *Thisday*, a leading Nigerian daily, noted the high rate of unemployment in the poorest state in Nigeria, Zamfara State. Over 33% of the youth are unemployed. This underestimates the crisis. Conversations with industrialists, importers and traders show that the general insecurity in Nigeria is fuelling violence, unemployment, and poverty. This is the story of Africa: the increasing poverty, inequality and wars plague the continent. Statistics show that 70% of the “bottom billion”¹ or poorest countries of the world are African. The continent is inconsequential in economic terms and is “excluded in the search for solutions to the present international financial crisis”²

The *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* has considered, in past issues, the impact of the Gospel and the Christian Church on society. The generalised economic downturn, the massive corruption in the mega finance systems have drawn Church organisations and NGOs to call for a review or reform of the international financial system. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, for example, has called for a “general public authority”. Is this desirable or even possible? Is there a way institutions can be renewed to enable humans created in the image of God to fully accept one another as “brother” and “sister”? Can one even lay down rules to guide capitalistic multinationals to become “citizens”? These and similar questions informed the articles in this issue of the *Bulletin*.

The lead article by Ikenna Okafor grapples with the inspirational dynamics of the cultural experience of being “brother” or “sister”; this forms the template for a creative reinterpretation of solidarity in the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Augustin

¹ Paul Collier, *The bottom billion: why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). xi

² Second Synod of Bishops for Africa, *Instrumentum Laboris* art. 29.

Ramazani Bishwende discusses in the second article the possibility and ethical relevance of multinational capitalistic oil mining corporations functioning as citizens wherever they are found in Africa. Without undermining the profit motive that drives the companies, the health and human developmental imperatives become top priority for the “citizen” corporation. Is the globalized world we live in today capable of the type of “revolutionary power of forward-looking imagination” that can “transform not only institutions but also lifestyles and encourage a better future for all peoples?” Critiquing this and similar proposals by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Anna Floerke Scheid recognizes the insight of the Council but favours a bottom-up approach. This will involve all stakeholders, especially the indigenous communities, check abuses that arise from structural sin, and maximize human rights and dignity. Finally, arguing from the political structures of African nations, Emeka Nwosuh proposes a radical move to restructure, reconfigure, and reconstitute the States of Africa. The political courage to move away from the colonial structures, as in the creation of South Sudan, may not resolve *all* the crises in the continent, but may reduce the crisis, reduce the suffering and poverty.

Two contributions are presented in the Features section of this issue of our *Bulletin*. Are there images of God that dehumanize and are psychologically destructive? Ursula Glienecke draws attention to, and condemns, such negative images. Following closely the study of Karl Frielingsdorf, she underlines the destructive character and gender insensitivity of negative images of God, and proposes positive images that are inclusive of all humans and respectful of religions and cultures. Finally, Peter Osuji presents a special study on informed consent in African Traditional medicine and compares it with the Western demands of consent.

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