AFRICAN THEOLOGY OR BLACK THEOLOGY? TOWARD AN INTEGRAL AFRICAN THEOLOGY

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Itumeleng Mosala concludes his essay on "The Relevance of Traditional African Religions and Their Challenge to Black Theology" in the words:

> ... without a creative reappropriation of traditional African religions and societies [sic] both African and Black Theologies will build their houses on sand. A Black Theology of liberation must draw its cultural hermeneutics of struggle from a critical reappropriation of black culture just as an African Theology must arm itself with the political hermeneutics that arise from the contemporary social struggles of black people under apartheid capitalism.[2]

This statement has serious implications for the existence of Black Theology in South Africa, more so than of African Theology.

For almost two decades now African Theology has acknowledged the need to broaden its scope in accordance with Mosala's recommendations. This was even before Mosala himself started thinking about or writing on Black Theology. Through their involvement in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians African theologians are working with other theologians to find ways of addressing common issues, particularly those that keep all third world countries and their people under various forms of bondage and suppression. As far as Black Theology in South Africa is concerned, there are two classical positions on this recommendation in this country. One of the positions is in agreement with, while the other is opposed to, the idea of reappropriating African culture, albeit critically. There is also a third tendency, which proceeds with its work merely along the "traditional" approach

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2 Itumeleng Mosala, "The Relevance of African Traditional Religions and their Challenge to Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free*, edited by Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 99.

to Black Theology in South Africa, as if the issue raised by the two positions is irrelevant.

The aim of this paper is to examine the implications of Mosala's statement on both African and Black Theologies, particularly in the light of what I have chosen to call the South African classical debate on the subject. The position adopted here is, naturally, in agreement with Mosala's position. However, it goes a step further. It draws the logical conclusion that if South African Black Theology is to extend its scope of reflection to traditional and current religio-cultural aspects, on the one hand, and African Theology to contemporary liberation concerns, on the other, then there would be no need to have two main, distinct "indigenous" theologies on the African continent. What would be needed would be a single theology, having common concerns, but responsive to the particular needs of different situations and conditions experienced in different African countries. The question is, which of the two theologies will it be - Black Theology or African Theology? This question leads us back to one of the early questions regarding Black Theology in this country. It was raised by Manas Buthelezi in an article entitled: "A Black Theology or an African Theology [?]"[3]

The answer given to this question will itself lead to further implications, namely, the need for the theology selected as the more fitting to deliberate on and to adjust to a new scope, content, and method of engagement. In scope it will have to cover the issues addressed by the present Black Theology and African Theology combined, and more. In content it will obviously transcend the present Christian theological and Christological considerations to include considerations of the theology of African religion, with all its relevant belief aspects and how they relate as well as contribute to Christian faith and theology. As far as its method is concerned, it will be all at once radical (in the literal etymological sense of going to the roots of and appropriating aspects of African culture and beliefs); contextual (in the sense of addressing current and immediate concerns, whatever their nature); and liberative (in the sense of being engaged in struggle for liberation from the trilogy of contemporary causes of human suffering and oppression, namely,,

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3 See Manas Buthelezi, "A Black Theology or an African Theology," in *Essays on Black Theology,* edited by Mokgethi Motlhabi (Johannesburg: University Christian Movement, 1972).

sexism). The present paper hopes to offer a minor contribution in the discussion, if only to revive the debate that has seemingly become dormant today.

1 THE "CLASSICAL" DEBATE

The "classical" debate on Black Theology and African Theology originates in the article by Manas Buthelezi already referred to. He extended this article under a different title later.[4] An indirect response to Buthelezi comes from Desmond Tutu - indirect because the two theologians were not consciously engaged in an open debate but were writing under various settings and responding to various theological challenges.

1.1 A Black Theology or an African Theology?

While Buthelezi's original article poses a question with two alternatives - "A Black Theology or an African Theology [?]" - Tutu's article places the two theologies side by side but, in turn, poses its own question in the subtitle: "Soul Mates or Antagonists?" Buthelezi's challenge focuses on two kinds of approach to theology - with specific reference to African and Black Theologies - which he identifies. The first approach, which he attributes to African Theology, he refers to as the "ethnographical approach." The second, followed by Black Theology, is referred to as the "anthropological approach." Buthelezi is strongly opposed to the ethnographical approach for a number of reasons. Instead, he favours the anthropological approach, as will soon be seen why.

The major reason for his opposition to the former, apart from seeing it as suspect because it was, in his opinion, conceived by foreigners (missionaries) and not by Africans themselves, is that it is based on false assumptions. It uses as its point of departure "elements of the traditional African 'worldview.'" In doing so, it assumes that

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4 See Manas Buthelezi, "Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader,* edited by Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), pp. 205ff.

by analyzing and characterizing cultural factors with regard to their historical development in the African church milieu, it becomes possible by means of the 'sifting' medium of the gospel to root out 'unchristian' practices and 'baptize' those that are consonant with the Gospel.[5]

However, as ethnography is, by definition, concerned with the "cultures of non-literate peoples" (Kroeber), the kind of African worldview brought up for analysis becomes an "ethnographical reconstruction." The question is whether such a reconstruction - notwithstanding the extent of its accuracy - can be regarded as a "valid postulate" for African Theology. It is "too presumptuous," according to Buthelezi, "to claim to know how much of their past Africans will allow to shape their future, once they are given the chance to participate in the wholeness of life, that the contemporary world offers."[6] Buthelezi's main fear is that such an ethnographically reconstructed African past may be "romanticized and conceived in isolation from the realities of the present."[7] Such realities, for South Africans, include deprivation, socio-political and economic oppression and the suffering of black people, as well as the need to struggle tirelessly against these evils for total human liberation.

To engage in such struggle a different approach to theology is required. This is what Buthelezi refers to as the anthropological approach. While the chief concern of the ethnographical approach is the African worldview (*res indiginae*), the anthropological approach focuses on persons themselves and on how they can work toward their own liberation and fulfillment as human beings. It focuses on the *causa efficiens* of theology.[8] Buthelezi concludes that inasmuch as African Theology is identified with the former approach, it cannot be a suitable theology for South African black people. Since Black Theology answers to the requirements of the anthropological approach, it is the proper theological method for South Africa.[9]

At the time when Buthelezi first wrote his essay, African Theology was still almost exclusively concerned with issues of indigenization and Africanization

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5 Ibid., p. 208.
6 Ibid., p. 212.
7 Ibid., p. 210.
8 Ibid., pp. 213-214.
9 Ibid., p. 220.

in the "traditional" sense. There was, at the same time, confusion about the precise meaning of the term "indigenization" itself. Did it mean the mere translation of Christianity or the Gospel as it was received from the missionaries into the African idiom and forms of expression? Did it mean a new way of appropriating the Gospel by striving for the "essential Gospel" through some process of "deculturizing" it from its western cloak and substituting the African cloak? Or did it mean merely the substitution of African leadership for foreign leadership in the missionary churches? The common words used in the debate were "indigenization," "adaptation," "translation," "incarnation," and "Africanization."[10] While often used interchangeably, these words often revealed different tendencies in approaches to the end in view regarding the state of the Church in Africa.

It is perhaps not surprising that this kind of campaign took place in the context of independent Africa, mainly from central to northern Africa. Not surprisingly, also, Southern Africa was not much involved in the debate. Its concerns were different from those of fellow Africans to the north. Southern African countries were still struggling against colonialism and its accompanying socio-political and economic oppression. They were seeking answers more directly relevant to their condition and problems, problems of racism, induced landlessness, deprivation, poverty in the midst of plenty, and general suffering and oppression. Theologically, some of the answers to these questions came with Black Theology.

The idea and method of a Black Theology were first received by black South Africans from African-Americans, but its content and concerns were local. It was understood as a theology of liberation, wielding a capital "No!"-signal to oppression and other sins issuing mainly from racism. It advocated a re-interpretation of the Gospel in accordance with the requirements of the situation of black people in South Africa. It sought to understand the meaning of Christ's incarnation in such a situation: was it incarnation for the purpose of suffering unto death; or was it incarnation for redemption, symbolized in Christ's death and particularly his resurrection? If the former, then the incarnation had no meaning for black people and there was no hope for them ever to be free of their oppressors. If the latter, then black people had

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10 See Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 116-117.

to accept actively the good news of their imminent liberation. This meant resisting their oppression as well as the anti-Christ with his gospel of submissiveness and resignation.

Stated as such, the concerns of African Theology and Black Theology were poles apart, and it is in this context that Buthelezi objected to African Theology as a possible "indigenous theology for South Africa." The question, however, is: Are the concerns of these two theologies as incompatible and mutually exclusive as they may appear at first sight? Upon further reflection, it does appear that Buthelezi overreacted somewhat - and perhaps understandably - in the heat of the moment. So did we all, under the pressure of apartheid. In answer to some of his questions, it is necessary to emphasize the need for interaction between the Gospel and the cultural setting where it is preached. Whether the ultimate appropriation of the Gospel will result from a "sifting medium" or some other method is irrelevant to this initial understanding. Secondly, is Buthelezi entirely correct in relegating African culture to an "ethnographical reconstruction" which can only become a "postulate" for African Theology? Are Africans so completely deculturized and westernized that coming to terms with their culture can only involve making "'platonic' flights to an imagined past, where there was still an ordered system of ideas and indigenous concepts[?]"[11] Are we, indeed, so completely denuded of our cultural heritage that we absolutely do not have anything presently to build upon? Is this a necessary consequence of acknowledging the concept of cultural dynamism?

One may accept the fact that many Africans, particularly in the urban areas, might have outgrown some aspects of their past cultural heritage. However, to suggest that they have no vestige of African culture left in their system amounts to reducing them to creatures of western culture - born again in the latter's image, as it were. The majority of the African people, particularly in the rural areas, remain rich in traditional culture which can serve as a starting point for a fully intergrated African Theology - even Black Theology. It is important, however, to bear in mind that "culture" does not refer only to a past reality but is an ongoing reality. Thirdly, therefore, reclaiming this heritage is not a matter of allowing the past to shape the future of Africans. As it turns out, the "past" itself is not so past, after all. Nay, it is

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11 See Buthelezi, "Toward Indigenous Theology," p. 216.

part of us; it lives in us. Thus reclaiming the African heritage is, in fact, a matter of integrating the erstwhile African cultural heritage into the "wholeness of life that the contemporary world offers," to use Buthelezi's own words. Consequently, there is, it seems, absolutely no danger of romanticizing the supposedly "distant African past" - "what once was" - and conceiving it "in isolation" from present realities.[12] For behold, the "past" is still with us.

1.2 Soul Mates or Antagonists?

Unlike Buthelezi, Tutu sees no conflict between African Theology and Black Theology, except to the extent that there are certain shortcomings, particularly in the former. His response to Mosala's recommendation can be viewed as one-sided, though. While he takes African Theology to task for its omissions of the socio-political and economic aspects of struggle, he does not take Black Theology - in its South African version - similarly to task for neglecting the cultural aspect. He might, of course, be compensating such omission with implicit reference to American Black Theology, which does not have the same problem. This is not quite excusable, however, for he is obviously writing from his experience as a South African. As he states,

> I myself believe I am an exponent of black theology coming as I do from South Africa. I believe I am also an exponent of African theology coming as I do from Africa. I contend that black theology is like the inner and smaller circle in a series of concentric circles.[13]

The last sentence of this statement is, of course, only applicable to Black Theology in South Africa and not in America.

Speaking of the differences between African Theology and Black Theology in his article, Tutu states that African Theology arose from politically independent Africa, even though he finds Africa's freedom questionable. The positive contribution of African Theology has been, he

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12 Ibid., p. 210.

13 Desmond Tutu, "African Theology/Black Theology: Soul Mates or Antagonists?" in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, edited by Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 262.

states, to expose the lie that "worthwhile religion in Africa had to await the advent of the white person." It has also done a "wonderful service in rehabilitating the African religious consciousness."[14] Yet African Theology has, at the same time, failed to address contemporary human problems of suffering, exploitation, and dehumanization.

> It has seemed to advocate disengagement from the hectic business of life because very little has been offered that is pertinent, say, about the theology of power in the face of the epidemic of coups and military rule, about development, about poverty and disease and other equally urgent present-day issues.

Black Theology, on the other hand, is understood by Tutu as having arisen in a situation of oppression and racism; in a context of "suffering at the hands of rampant white racism." Hence its concern with liberation. In this sense, Black Theology is "more thoroughly and explicitly political than African Theology." Not only is it anti-domination and anti-oppression, on the one hand, and pro-liberation, on the other, but it is also anti-transcendentalist in a sense which denies an equal balance to the immanence of God. It is thus not a theology of pie-in-the-sky (the vertical aspect) but takes seriously the incarnation of Christ (the horizontal aspect). Symbollically, we may say that the vertical and the horizontal equal the cross, through which humankind was reconciled to God and potentially liberated from the ills of this world.

Given the above position, particularly the view of Black Theology as the lesser of two partners, the following conclusion would seem inevitable. Were the deficiencies perceived as inherent in African Theology to be addressed and its scope broadened, it would then be in a position to address directly the concerns presently attributed to Black Theology. In other words, African Theology would no longer be confined to issues of cultural appropriation and indigenization. It would also address issues of liberation in response to the various manifestations of oppression. If this happened, and Black Theology continued to confine itself to the latter issues, in accordance with Buthelezi's protestations, African Theology would become the more representative of the two theologies.

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14 Ibid., p. 261.

No one might begrudge Black Theology its limited program, especially if it was thought to be more effective as such. In this way it would be exactly as Tutu sees it, namely, the lesser of two partners. However, it would also be somewhat redundant, for it would be devoted to a task which African Theology has now also appropriated. If, on the other hand, Black Theology also heeded Mosala's call and, in turn, extended its concerns to religio-cultural issues, then there would no longer be any difference between itself and African Theology. They would be two separate theologies with the same concerns, often existing side by side in the same African countries. This, it seems to me, is where Buthelezi's question becomes pertinent. First, is it necessary to have two theologies in the same country concerned with exactly the same issues and having the same scope? Is it necessary to have such a name-difference only, while the content and method remain the same? Second, if a choice for one had to be made, which one would it be: Black Theology or African Theology?

As already stated at the beginning of this paper, African Theology has, in fact, already extended its scope in accordance with the above argument. In South Africa, a few Black Theologians have begun to think along the lines suggested by Mosala, but seemingly not enthusiastically enough. This may be the only reason why the continued separate existence of Black Theology is justified. For logic would seem to demand that a relevant theology for Africa should be African Theology, particularly if its primary goal is to meet the overall needs of all the peoples of the continent. Some of the reasons for separation cited by Buthelezi may not be easily overcome, particularly if one's attitude to one's cultural heritage is negative. Whatever the extent, at least Tutu's objections to African Theology, as discussed above, have been fulfilled. It is appropriate also to mention that Black Theology in America is far ahead of its South African counterpart in trying to develop a "wholistic theological approach." It is a theology concerned not only with present-day liberational issues but also with the socio-cultural and religious rooting of the African-American struggle. Unless, therefore, black theologians in this country begin to take Mosala's warning more seriously - and also decide once and for all on their true theological identity - their theology will remain at the tail-end of both African Theology and American Black Theology in development.

1.3 Need for More Creative Dialogue Among South African Black Theologians

It is significant that since Buthelezi and Tutu wrote their articles there has been apparently no direct follow-up to their "dialogue" in South Africa. Their essays were originally discussed at international conferences, particularly those of African and other Third World theologians. It is for this reason that they have been promoted, in this paper, to the status of a "debate" and also that they may be considered as a dialogue, even though they were not in themselves a direct dialogue.

While there has been no such follow-up to this "dialogue" in South Africa, there have been individual attempts to address Mosala's recommendations, though not in conscious response to him. Publications and articles that try to address the subject include those by Mosala himself, Bonganjalo Goba, J. B. Ngubane, Khoza Mgojo, and perhaps also the author of this paper.[15] Some of their discussions also include the role of the African Indigenous Churches in Black Theology. Most of the above authors, however, do not seem to learn from one another's insights - if they read one another at all - and to build on these insights by way of debate and further reflection on issues raised in the debate. Unless this kind of attitude changes, there will be no serious development in this area of theological reflection in South Africa.

Of even greater concern in this matter are the "silent majority" of black theologians, who continue to slumber through this "theological cultural revolution." They continue to speak and write as if nothing is happening around them - or at least as if they have never heard of this debate. Some of them find a trusted ally in Marxist analysis, which they seem to see as self-sufficient. It is only in Marxist analysis - as the "new hand-maiden of theology" - that they find solutions to contemporary problems of socio-political and economic oppression. We agree that no serious Third World theologian today can deny or ignore the importance of Marxist analysis. To them, however, as to Buthelezi, cultural heritage remains a remote factor, a flight into the past and almost totally irrelevant to the here and now. They have yet to heed the

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15 See some of their articles in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free.* Also Buti Tlhagale and Itumeleng Mosala, eds., *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986).

warning that they might be "setting up their theological buildings on sand." While African Theology and Black Theology are fast approaching convergence in their concerns, which may soon render their separate identities in Africa meaningless, these slumbering theologians are in danger of remaining - for lack of a better expression - a theological "sect" in the midst of a broader theology ultimately, it seems, to be represented by a united African Theology.

2 TOWARD A REAPPROPRIATION OF THE AFRICAN HERITAGE

African Theology is necessarily a contextual theology. It is so called because it is intended to relate to the situation or context of the African people. To relate meaningfully it must speak about God in a way that is understandable to the African people, taking into account their background, culture, traditions, customs, history, and their ongoing life experience. In other words, the God about whom African Theology must address the African people must be an African God: God must be God incarnate in Africa as well as in each distinct context of the African continent. Such a God must reveal Godself in the African medium.

The main charge that has been laid against early missionary Christianity in Africa and other Third World countries was that it came - pardon the trite expression - dressed in western garb. It was totally foreign to colonial peoples and was expected to be encompassed as such. For African Theology the ideal, whether practically achievable or not, was that Christianity must be stripped naked of its foreignness and redressed in African garb. Not only must it assume African form, but it must also be completely African in character and values. The question that arises from this is where the Bible and the Christian tradition fit in in such a theology. Do they have any place at all or are they purely accidental or complementary?

2.1 Sources of African Theology

African theologians have identified a number of sources which, in their opinion, need to be taken into account for African Theology to be a meaningful exercise. Typically, at the top of these sources is said to be the Bible

and the Christian heritage. Other sources named are: African anthropology, African traditional religions, African Indigenous Churches, other African realities - e.g., experiences of cultural forms of life and arts, extended family, hospitality, communal life, etc.[16] Given the priority that the Bible and Christian tradition are given, the real question is not whether they fit in at all in African "incarnate theology" but how they fit in.

One may begin by questioning the way these sources have been prioritized, even though this is not our primary concern. The placing of the Bible and the Christian heritage first reflects the bondage to which many African theologians are still subject. Logically and practically these sources are not first in the life of the African - or any other Christian, for that matter. They are added realities to the African's life and existence. It may be better to speak of their centrality than their priority. Centrality implies indispensability, though not necessarily first in order of happening. If this is accepted, one may say that African anthropology, which is placed second on the priority list, may be conceived within the context of African culture and "other African realities," including African traditional religions. Only after these sources can the Bible and Christian heritage be placed, followed by the African Indigenous Churches. This would answer the question of Where the Bible and the Christian heritage fit in, but not necessarily How they fit - that is, how they make their contribution - in what we may call a "home-grown" African Theology . It is not within the scope of this paper to attempt an answer to this question. Hence it will be set aside for the moment.

In the "Final Communique" of the second conference of Third World theologians, held in Accra, Ghana, in 1977, the above list of sources is followed by three approaches which are recommended for African Theology. The first one "admits the inherent values in the traditional African religions and sees in them a preparation for the Gospel." Why these values should be seen merely as preparatory for the Gospel is questionable. It seems more appropriate to affirm them as consonant with the Gospel, whatever else the Gospel may be considered to contribute in addition. The second approach is one of a critical, dialectical theology that draws a relationship between the

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16 "Final Communique: Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana," in *African Theology En Route,* edited by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 192-193.

Bible and African realities. This means that to perform its tasks, African Theology "needs an interdisciplinary methodology of social analysis, biblical reflection, and active commitment to be with the peoples in their endeavours to build a better society."[17] The third is represented by Black Theology in South Africa.

On the whole, it is felt that for African Theology to address the freedom struggles of the African people, it must be both contextual and liberative. Although liberation is implied in contextuality in this instance, the former term is used narrowly to refer to freedom from racism, socio-political and economic oppression, as well as sexism. In this respect it is felt that "African theologians outside South Africa cannot legitimately ignore situations that affect the humanity of people adversely."[18] Contextuality is used broadly to refer to accountability to the context in which African people live. Hence "Contextualization," the Communique concludes, "will mean that theology will deal with the liberation of our people from cultural captivity."[19] "Cultural captivity" here seems to carry a double meaning. Not only does it refer to the refusal to accept change or cultural dynamism, but it also refers to cultural domination of the African people, particularly by the West and Western theology.

One of the foremost African theologians, Kwesi Dickson, thus argues for a more inclusive theological approach that would aim not only at winning the socio-economic and political freedom, but also - "and more importantly - [at winning] the cultural battle, for it is," according to him, "the latter which defines, more fundamentally, the humanity of a people."[20] This position, and the rest of the foregoing, is summarized effectively in the "Final Communique" of the 1977 Pan African conference:

> We believe that African Theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African peoples to share a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present. The African situation requires a new theological methodology that is different from the approaches of the dominant theologies of the West. African theology must reject, therefore, the prefab-

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17 Ibid., p. 195.
18 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 136.
19 "Final Communique," p. 194.
20 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 139.

ricated ideas of North Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.[21]

2.2 African Traditional Religions

As the centrality of the Bible and Christian tradition in African Theology have never been in question, they can safely be put aside as we examine the contribution that can be derived from some of the sources named. We will begin by isolating the African traditional religions.

Traditional Christian theology has tended to look down upon other world religions and generally to associate them with paganism and superstition. Only Christianity was considered to be a "true" religion; only Christianity possessed authentic revelation; only the God of Christianity was the true God, spelled with a capital "G." God as spoken about in other religions - "false religions" - represented a false god or false gods, spelled with a small "g." If the term "religion" itself was conceded to them at all, it was given up by Christianity in favour of seeing itself as a "faith," and thus not as a religion. The implication of such a concession was that those subscribing to the faith rather than to religion were superior.

In accordance with this attitude, Christian evangelization to colonial peoples meant persuading them to turn away from their "false beliefs" and to throw away their "false gods" in favour of Christianity and the Christian God. This is what conversion meant primarily. Turning away from "evil ways" in conversion focused more on indigenous cultures, their religions, and the God worshipped in the various religions, than on evil behaviour and general immorality. Little was it recognized that this was not necessarily the "battle of religions and their gods" but more the battle of cultures: the Western desire to assert its general cultural superiority in the name of Christianity. Had this not been the case, Christian missionaries would have first made objective studies of the areas they identified for evangelization. They would have determined which aspects of their religions and cultures complied with Christian norms and ideals, and proceeded "respectfully" with their task of evangelization. This would have been along the lines of affirm-

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21 "Final Communique," p. 193.

ing what was not inconsistent with the Gospel in these religions;[22] trying harder to understand what seemed mysterious and "mumbo-jumboish" in them; and noting what was contradictory to Christian teaching, offering, in its place, Christian alternatives . Such an approach was not, however, in accordance with Western arrogance and superiority complex. The Western approach was to recreate everything strange in the Western image: to transform and refashion all that was different and that the missionaries and their colonizing companions did not understand.

It is seemingly in reaction to this attitude that Dickson states, regarding the task of African Theology, that "there can be a meaningful theology only when account is taken of the African religio-cultural situation as one of the source materials for theologising."[23] While this does not mean advocating, according to Muzorewa, a return to the past, it is for him an acknowledgement that God's revelation cannot be dismissed as irrelevant merely because it happens to be pre-Christian. As Muzorewa puts it, "a backward drift is unnecessary because what God reveals continues to live."[24] Noting that Western traditional theology has remained a "resident alien" among most African Christians, Muzorewa states that their majority are "turning to the traditional religious beliefs for clarification on Christian doctrine." This is done because the former are found to be "more concrete and spiritual" than the latter as it is currently presented to Africans.[25]

Mbiti argues along the same lines that revelation is not given in a vacuum but within particular historical experiences and reflections. Hence, "salvation history must widen its outreach in order to embrace the horizons of other people's histories."[26] He questions the distinction made between "special revelation" and "general revelation," emphasizing that God's revelation is not confined to the Biblical record. As the Bible itself declares that God is the creator of all things, it seems to follow, for Mbiti, that God's activities in the world must go beyond what is recorded in the Bible. God must have been

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22 This, as will be noticed, is in direct contradiction to the view expressed by Buthelezi above.

23 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 124.

24 Gwinyai Muzorewa, "The Future of African Theology," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 4 (November 1990): 37.

25 Ibid., p. 39.

26 John S. Mbiti, "The Encounter of Christian Faith and African Religion," in *Third World Liberation Theologies,* p. 201.

active among African peoples, as God was in Biblical records. God must have been present in places like Mount Kenya and Mount Fuji (Japan), among other places, as God was supposedly in Mount Sinai.[27] In light of this, the above distinction is "inadequate and unfreeing," apart from not being a biblically-based distinction.[28]

As a source of African Theology, African traditional religions are seen implicitly to involve "reflection on the beliefs of a people,"[29] that is, the African people. This is so notwithstanding the claim by some of their detractors that these religions are "danced out, not thought out."[30] The real basis of African Theology, according to African theologians, is the conviction that "there is one God of the whole earth." All peoples, in their distinctive religions, seek after this God, "so that all religions enshrine an encounter between God and man."[31] (This issue will be elaborated upon below, with its implicit claims to monotheism.) Because all religions involve the manifestation of deity (in greater or lesser degree), it is thought conceivable that they "would not exist had not God revealed [Godself]." Their groping for God or divinity is believed to find foremost expression in worship.[32]

Speaking with specific reference to Christian theology, but with implications for the foregoing discussion, Dickson states that "Christians in Africa have been theologising all along, even if not in any formal way." Such "informal theologising is done in various ways, such as in song, prayer, and preaching."[33] It would be more accurate not to restrict this kind of theologizing to Christians but to attribute it to Africans in general and their religions. In traditional African religions, it would mean that God's interaction with the African people is recorded in "living form," which also includes forms of oral communication, rituals, symbols, ceremonies, community faith, among other activities.[34] Theologizing in prayer by African Christians takes the form of "praising God; recalling his deeds of salvation, both ancient and

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27 Ibid., p. 200.
28 Ibid., p. 201.
29 John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 29.
30 Ibid.
31 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 123.
32 Pobee, *Toward an African Theology,* p. 73.
33 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 109.
34 Mbiti, "Encounter," p. 200.

present; petitions; and expressions of confidence in God's ability to save." In this way, the worshippers express their understanding of God and the Christian faith.[35]

The Akan people of Ghana are said to employ also their lyrics to express such understanding of God. In the Methodist Church, in particular, such lyrics are placed alongside traditional church hymns. Further theologizing in African beliefs in general is found in such references to God as: "the one on whom 'you lean and do not fall'; ... he it is who responds when called, ... the one who has always been there, 'the old, old one'."[36] In view of all this, only an outdated attempt to mystify and extol Christianity beyond necessary proportion can lead to the maintenance of the claim that theology is strictly a Christian enterprise. For theology in its elementary sense simply means thinking about, talking - that is, verbalizing - about God. This leads us to the question of who God is for Africans and: How is God perceived in African Theology?

2.3. God In African Traditional Religions

According to Mbiti, the God about whom the Bible speaks is the very God who was already known in traditional African religiosity. For this reason, it can be asserted in faith that those who supposedly brought God to the African people, the missionaries, were, rather, themselves sent by God-Self to Africa.[37] It may have been for the purpose of bringing the "new covenant," as the old one was already implicit in the African people's beliefs. Whatever else may be said about African religious beliefs, the supremacy of God - by whatever name God is called - is unquestionable. God is the Supreme Being. As such, not only is God above all other beings, but God is also accepted as "Creator, the Sustainer of the universe, the final authority and Overlord of society who has power of life and death."[38]

In the Akan (Ghana) worldview, below God in the hierarchy of divinities are lesser gods, the ancestors, and a host of spirit beings. Whether the name

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35 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 115.
36 Ibid., p. 55. See also p. 109.
37 See Mbiti, "Encounter," p. 201.
38 Pobee, *Toward an African Theology,* p. 46.

"gods" is the correct translation is a question, in view of strong claims made of "traditional monotheism" especially by African Theologians.[39] According to Setiloane, the plural for the Sotho/Tswana term "Modimo," that is, God, is not "Badimo." "Badimo" (ancestors) apparently does not have a singular. On the other hand, the plural "Medimo" ("Gods") does not refer to a plurality of gods worshipped, in the Sotho/Tswana religion, but rather to the various conceptions of God by different peoples and their religions. Thus we may talk about the "Gods" of different religions, meaning not many gods but, for instance, the Christian God, the Moslem God, the God of Hinduism, etc.

Whatever the real meaning of the term "gods" in the Akan religion, the relation of these divinities to God, the Supreme Being, may be likened to that of angels and saints in the Bible and Christian religion. God is believed to have delegated authority to the "gods" and to the ancestors - they act *in loco dei*. The reason for this, it is believed, is that God may not be approached lightly or "bothered with trivialities." In Akan society the "gods" are called children of the Supreme Being. Their power is considered both beneficent and dangerous. Yet although they stand between God and the ancestors, they are more dispensable than the latter.[40] On the one hand, they seem to be adhered to only for the favours they grant to their adherents, failing which they may be dispensed with; on the other, they are "believed to be interested in the moral living of humans." Like the ancestors, they are offended when there is a breach of conduct." They are the Supreme Being's executioners.[41]

The ancestors, for their part, are believed to influence the course of life on earth for good or for ill. Vilakazi refers to the ancestors as the equivalent of patron saints. He writes, "There is in Zulu cosmology the assimilation of parents into divinities, and this assimilation is via death; for death is an act of instant canonization'." Accordingly,

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39 See Gabriel Setiloane's explanation of the terms "Modimo," "Medimo," "Badimo," and their significance among the Sotho-Tswana. *African Theology: An Introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986).

40 See Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, pp. 46, 48.

41 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 56.

> the dead emerge from death through the *ukubuyisa* custom as the saints and the lesser divinities who commune with *umvelinqangi* [Creator] on behalf of the living progeny and with the living themselves, bringing messages and conveying various moods and desires to those who are diseased.[42]

It is in this acquired divine state that they "give children to the living; they give good harvest; they provide sanctions for the moral life of the nation and accordingly punish, exonerate, or reward the living, as the case may be." Their authority is, nevertheless, derived from God. Such dependence of the living upon the ancestors seems, to Pobee, so much as to imply that the attitude of the former toward the latter is "more than veneration."[43] Because of the ridicule they often suffered for allegedly worshipping ancestors, Africans insisted in their own defence that they *venerated* rather than *worshipped* ancestors. The "more" in Pobee's statement obviously refers to this perception.

It may be relevant to ask at this stage: How thick or thin is or should be the line between "veneration" and "worship?" Are not Catholics, for instance, also often ridiculed for "worshipping" the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints? How does their response differ, if at all, from that of those who have to defend their belief in and attitude toward ancestors? This is not an attempt to equate the two kinds of belief; but it is meant to show that while certain practices may be condoned or "understood" among the different forms of Christian faith, there is, among Christians, a general tendency to judge non-Christian religions more harshly and rather disparagingly simply because they are different. It is because of this attitude that African theology has tended to be a somewhat apologetic and defensive kind of theology. Suffice it to note that African Theology now sees the need to understand and explain certain aspects of African traditional religions in order both to learn from them and to discover in what way they can contribute in rendering the Christian faith and theological reflection meaningful to the African people.

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42 See, Absolom Vilakazi with Bongani Mthethwa and Mthembeni Mpanza, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986), p. 37.

43 See Pobee, *Toward an African Theology,* p. 46.

2.4. The Question of Culture

It was earlier suggested that the ideal view of African Theology was originally that Christianity must be denuded of its foreign cultural cloak and donned anew in the dress of African culture. This was a suggestion to "deculturize" Christianity of its foreignness, if only to "reculturize" it in accordance with the demands of its new African context. It was also a call parallel, if not similar, to the call made by Bultmann many years ago for the demythologization of the Gospel in order to render it more understandable to modern society. As the latter call seemingly ended in space, so is it doubtful that there can be any success in removing the Western cultural cloak in Christianity in order to relate it meaningfully to the African context. The problem is, How does one distinguish cultural content from the Gospel itself before separating the two; is it as easy as peeling an orange? In other words, "Is there a core of the Gospel which is not culturally coloured?"[44]

While this may not necessarily be the case, surely it is not so difficult to tell that it is not part of the Gospel, for instance, that one should wear a jacket and shoes to go to worship. This is rendering the issue quite simplistic; and yet it is precisely such simplistic legalisms on the part of the Western missionary church which in the past created obstacles for the Gospel, making it an inseparable part of Western culture. The issue is more serious than this; but this is sufficient to illustrate what we mean by the need to "deculturize" the Christian message before it can be Africanized. This, as well as the idea of Africanization itself - or "reculturization" - at the same time acknowledges Dickson's warning that the assumption that "there can be a proclamation of the gospel that does not have a cultural particularity" is false.[45] Hence, while it may be possible to present the gospel "within indigenous cultural presuppositions," it is obviously doubtful that it can be completely removed from its Western "cultural sheath [in order,]" as Muzorewa suggests, "to speak and remain with the essential gospel."[46] Just as an African or any other "foreigner" speaks English with a foreign accent, the Gospel itself comes to Africa with a "foreign accent" (its foreign cultural cloak). It must, as much as

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44 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 118.
45 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 119.
46 Muzorewa, "The Future of African Theology," p. 39.

possible, be understood within and in spite of that "foreign accent." This must not, however, prevent its being indigenized and rendered relevant and meaningful to the African people and context.

The concept of indigenization in Africa, according to Pobee, "acknowledges that there is a whole heritage in the non-Christian culture and consciously attempts to come to terms with that heritage."[47] It should be emphasized, though, that indigenization, as already stated, cannot simply mean "adapting an existing theology to contemporary or local taste."[48] Indigenization cannot mean mere translation. A much better term for this process is perhaps "incarnation," meaning to "take up flesh," or to "take form" - doing so specifically within and in accordance with the context of African culture. Taking form in this way, in the context of African culture, does not simply mean becoming part of African culture but also means "the need for African Theology to address itself to the totality of the African existence." Theology, states Dickson, both judges and affirms. What it affirms "ranges from the African humanity to the Christ, ..."[49] As African humanity is part of African culture, we may conclude, its affirmation is an affirmation of African culture. It is this very culture which is ultimately the African's vehicle to Christian faith and fulfillment.

2.5 African Indigenous Churches As Forerunners in Christian Indigenization

The African Indigenous Churches are often alluded to as forerunners among the African Christian churches in reappropriating the African cultural heritage and so indigenizing Christianity. Among the reasons cited for their original secessions from the missionary churches are not only political and economic ones but also cultural and theological reasons. They sought freedom both from "an oppressive church situation," and "from 'deculturising', de-Africanizing, detribalizing treatment, and reacted . . . against 'a foreign,

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47 Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, p. 57.
48 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 120.
49 Ibid., p. 136.

unadapted, western-oriented church which [did] not take note of the African approach and worldview'."[50]

While being generally positive about these churches, however, Dickson warns that they sometimes misinterpret the Bible. He also wonders whether the "facets of African culture adopted by [them] are always the most meaningful in terms of their care, value, or indeed, whether they are not so employed as to obscure the centrality of Christ."[51] One would, of course, be careful about accusing other Christian churches of biblical misinterpretation (for who has the monopoly to correct interpretation?). Yet it may be true that they often deviate from some of the Christian dogmatic tenets. For example, some of them question the divinity of Christ, while others question His equality with the Father on cultural grounds.[52]

Isaiah Shembe, founder and leader of one of the largest Indigenous Churches in South Africa, is recorded as having "stressed the Father in his teachings" while seeming to ignore the Son. His reason for doing so, it is said, was that it seemed to him as a Zulu "to offend against the dignity of the Father to stress the importance of the Son."

> In Zulu thought, the omission of the son is in no way regarded as a derogation of his status because the son's good works redound to the father's honour and because, by Zulu conceptions, the son is the extension of the father's personality."[53]

The divinity of Christ is also questioned by others on the grounds of difficulties with the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Immaculate Conception.[54] Such difficulties arise because of differences in cultural outlook.

As a consequence, Shembe, as also some of the other Indigenous Church leaders, did not accept the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Yet this rejection of the divinity of one person of the Trinity poses a problem. When acts like

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50 See J. B. Ngubane, "Theological Roots of the African Independent Churches and Their Challenge to Black Theology," in *The Unquestionabled Right to Be Free,* p. 80.

51 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 113.

52 See Paul Makhubu, *Who Are the African Independent Churches* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988), pp 61-62.

53 Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 39.

54 See Makhubu, *Who Are the African Independent Churches,* pp. 61-62.

baptism have to be performed, the three persons of the Trinity have to be invoked. Hence Makhubu comes close to saying that it is primarily this dilemma which renders Christ indispensable in his group of indigenous churches - even though Christ is seemingly still deprived of his divinity. There can also be no healing and holy communion without the invocation of Christ's name.[55] This attitude, unfortunately, seems to reduce Christ to a mere instrument, without which these churches may not function. It thus becomes easy to see why they have often been accused of heresy. In the early church, with its dogmatism and intolerance, they certainly would not have survived the stake because of this. It is also in this light that Dickson's caution may be understood.

It follows that the contribution of the African Indigenous Churches in African Christianity is not in their "dogmatic excellence," nor in their "expert blending" of faith and culture. Rather, their contribution is said to be found chiefly in the following aspects, among others: in their doctrine of the spirit; in their apostolic zeal and missionary power; in their sense of belonging - a new community; in their belief in the universality of the Church; in their tolerance, worship, faith healing, counselling, prophetic advice, sacramental life and symbolism, and generosity - the art of joyful giving.[56] There is, certainly, no doubt that they draw most of their insights from African culture and traditional religion.[57] It has to be noted from the foregoing, though, that such insights can either be a hindrance or a facilitator to traditional Christian faith. The aforenamed aspects reflect the areas of strength of these religio-cultural insights, while the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation represent their (insights) inhibiting nature and serious weakness. The question arising from this observation is: How far can a church deny some of the traditional Christian tenets and still be regarded as a Christian Church? This leads to another question, namely, Who is the judge?

It seems obvious that the response of those affected African Indigenous Churches to the last question would be that the Bible, as the "word of God," is the judge. They would continue to say that inasmuch as traditional Christian tenets were formulated within the Western cultural context, they

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55 See ibid., pp. 63-64.

56 See A. R. Sprunger, "The Contribution of the African Independent Churches to a Relevant Theology," cited by Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 112.

57 See Muzorewa, *"The Future of African Theology,"* p. 41.

reflect the Western cultural bias. Hence, African Christians are also entitled to use their own "cultural tools" and outlook to interpret and appropriate the Bible. Some of their interpretations might not be acceptable to the Western Church and its theology, but this would not necessarily mean that they are not Christian, they would say. Essential to Christianity is the centrality of Jesus Christ, the extent of his divinity notwithstanding. What is more crucial is the inspiration that is believed to flow from him and his relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

Might we not, from this argument, speak of some form of indigenous African Christianity in the same way as we speak of Eastern and Western Christianity - the latter divided into Catholic and Protestant Christianity? Yet there is another question still to be answered: What, exactly, is involved in the concept of Christianity or in being a Christian? Is it merely a matter of accepting the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, or does it also include subscribing to the Christian tradition as it has developed through the ages? The answer seems to be that both the Bible and Tradition are imperative to qualify one as a Christian, or a church as a Christian church. The more pertinent question, however, lies hidden in the assumption contained in the alternative question posed above: how the Christian tradition itself developed through the ages.

From their own development, it seems obvious that the African Indigenous Churches do not question the entire tradition of the Christian church but only some aspects of it. Ngubane seems, without any dogmatic commitment, to make a case for them through the following comment on the development of the early church:

> Paul and the early church leaders did not simply condemn and jettison the Greek mystery religions and Greek philosophy. But these provided the matrix for the theologizing of the early church. This theologizing was translated and communicated in Greek religious and philosophical frames of reference ...[58]

It was perhaps in an implicit attempt to follow this example that "leading African Christians" sought to "rehabilitate African culture and the African

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58 Ngubane, *Theological Roots,* p. 76.

way of life in the context of their new faith."[59] Their interpretation of reality was quite different from the Western Christian interpretations because their traditions and customs were different. Because they were not convinced about the inferiority of their religious and cultural values, the majority of them remained - in some respects - "only partially converted according to missionary expectations."[60] Where Christianity could not provide the required explanation and results, they resorted to traditional beliefs and practices. This happened, for instance, in the major crises of life such as birth, illness, death, and in the performance of rites of passage. Shembe's church also openly embraced the practice of veneration of the dead (ancestors), who were viewed as part of the communion of saints.[61]

Ngubane makes the point that most of the traditional values and needs affirmed by some leaders of the indigenous churches were (are?) "recognized and sanctioned by either the Old Testament or the New Testament." Those sanctioned by the Old Testament are revelations through dreams and visions; complex rituals, purification, polygamy, the descent of God's spirit on the prophets, among other similar needs. Those santioned by the New Testament are healing, exorcism, apocalyptic and eschatological doctrines, denunciation of the Pharisees, *inter alia.*[62] On the other hand, most of these churches are also regarded as syncretistic insofar as they accept African "cosmological ideas and patterns of thought" while, at the same time, accepting the Biblical God as the "numinous." In this way, they attempt to make "creative synthesis of traditional and Christian beliefs, creatively formulating a truly African Christianity" which helps in the development of an African identity. Hence they represent, according to Ngubane, "radical indigenization and Africanization of Christianity."[63] Without such Africanization, it was felt, Christianity would remain an alien doctrine, devoid of any serious significance to the African.[64]

It is this desire in the African Indigenous Churches to make the Christian faith meaningful to the Africans through its blending with African culture

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59 Ibid., p. 77.
60 Ibid., pp. 76, 75.
61 See ibid., p. 76; Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 76.
62 Ngubane, *Theological Roots,* p. 76.
63 See Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 37; Ngubane, *Theological Roots,* p. 80.
64 See Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 72.

that makes them challenging to African Theology. In this challenge African Theology will, following Dickson's warning, have to be selective as well as to steer clear of their seemingly "heretical doubt" - in terms of the history of dogma - with regard to some of the aspects of traditional Christian faith. It is in response to this challenge that Dickson, in spite of his caution, states that no study of Christianity in Africa would be complete "without serious account being taken of the life and thought of [these] Churches."[65] Hence, while they do not, strictly speaking, necessarily constitute one of the sources for African Theology, as some have suggested, African Theology can learn from their concerns as well as from the way they try to address some of these concerns. At the same time, African Theology will need to go further and contemporize its approach to indigenization. To do this it must, as it has already acknowledged, take into account not only traditional religio-cultural needs but also present contextual and liberational demands.

In this way it will be able to overcome some of the pitfalls of a mere "ethnographical approach," strongly condemned by Buthelezi, and satisfy his requirements for an "anthropological approach." Not only, following Tutu, will African Theology become a soul-mate of Black Theology, but the latter will also easily blend into the former as an integral part of it. This means that Black Theology in South Africa will not relate to African Theology only as a species to a genus - the "smaller in a series of concentric circles" - as Tutu sees it. It will be fully integrated into the method of African Theology, thus ceasing to exist as a separate entity. In this way African Theology will have entered a period of maturity, and could now seriously engage in the business of real and substantive theologizing - not merely building a case for its own existence, as seems to have been largely the case so far.

3 CONCLUSION

An African Theology come of age, it follows, necessarily renders the separate existence of Black Theology in South Africa redundant. A relevant theology for Africa must not only arise out of and focus on the total reality of African life from south to north of the continent, but it must also be "African" by name.

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65 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 114.

There is nothing wrong with the name "Black Theology." American Black Theology was more relevant and inspirational to South African black theologians at the time when African Theology, with its emphasis on "religio-cultural indigenization," thought it had overcome problems similar to those common to Africans in South Africa and to African-Americans. Hence it was understandable that the name "Black Theology" would have more appeal and relevance to blacks in South Africa than "African Theology." The issues Black Theology dealt with were also more meaningful to South African black theologians than those addressed by African Theology. However, the situation has now changed. African Theology has been significantly rehabilitated and must continue to be rendered more responsive to all the existential problems of African Christians.

Both African and black theologians share in membership of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), a body which has challenged both and other third world theologians to be more critical and more inclusive in their outlook on problems affecting their different contexts. As a result of these challenges, some of the old conflicts between African Theology and Black Theology have been overcome and efforts are continuing to address remaining obstacles.

South African Black Theology continues to share commonalities with both African Theology and American Black Theology. It has also come to acknowledge that it cannot sacrifice the concerns stressed by either, insofar as they relate to the black South African context, for any single one of them. It must address both; that is, it must both work at indigenizing theology and at implementing its liberative mission. It is to this task that a genuine African Theology, as an African-grown and African-based theology, is called.

In the final analysis, the issue is not between a more relevant and a less relevant theology: an African Theology or a Black Theology. For Black Theology in South Africa is called to the same mission. In its development, however, it has tended to be one-sided and so less relevant. So has African Theology. With this recognition and the determination to address the challenge more fully, the question of relevance becomes less crucial for the moment. The issue that still has to be addressed is one of choosing the more appropriate name, bearing in mind that this is a name for a theology operative in Africa. Such an appropriate name appears to be "African Theology."

The "total reality of African life" to be addressed by this theology refers to all aspects of life as experienced in Africa: religious, socio-cultural, political, economic, sexual, ethnic and racial. These aspects of life call for a three-fold approach by the gospel, hence by African Theology. Such an approach includes affirmation, liberation, and transformation. Insofar as religion and culture belong to the very essence of a people, that is, insofar as they emerge from society and contain within them concrete and transcendent elements, the latter pointing to a higher reality than the present reality, they need affirmation. Insofar as they may be imprisoned in the other-worldly or in the past, refusing to accept their dynamism and need to adjust in accordance with concrete needs of the here-and-now, they need liberation. Liberation itself must necessarily lead to transformation; for we can hardly speak of liberation if life continues as before. New wine in old skins tastes as old.

Insofar as there are positive sides to developments in politics; the economy; gender, ethnic and race issues; they are to be welcomed and affirmed. Unfortunately, these aspects of life seem to be more in need of liberation and transformation than affirmation. There is far too much that is negative in them than what is positive, even to this day. Political liberation in most of Africa has mostly resulted in economic neocolonialism, elitism, corruption, and continued "internal oppression" of the masses. Sexual and ethnic oppression are universal sins from which Africa is not immune. The former is worse because of its subtelty and tacit acceptance as a "way of life." Africa must find its own way of liberating itself from this evil. It may have to begin by liberating itself from related cultural aspects, if this is where the evil is perceived to be embedded. The oppression of ethnic minorities is also universal, though it has often been made to seem worse in Africa through the tag of "tribalism" (all evils are equal but some evils are more equal than others!). A sin by another name, however, remains a sin. Here also African Theology must find ways to help address this problem in Africa.

Racism is a more selective form of ethnicism. It is more than merely ethnic- or colour-bound. It goes so far as to deny the humanity of other people because of their colour and/or racial origin. It dehumanizes and depersonalizes. Consequently, it exploits and suppresses. Black people the world over have been the chief victims of racism, either overtly or covertly expressed. Until recently, it was overtly sanctioned by law in South Africa, and this often gave the impression that it did not exist elsewhere in the world. There re-

mains in South Africa and all over the world groups of overt racists amidst contexts of covert racism. Thus the whole world has a vocation to continue fighting against racism, especially if half of this world calls itself Christian. With the changes currently taking place in South Africa, it remains to be seen what covert forms racism will take in this country.

African theologians must remain alert to confront this evil in all its forms and to demonstrate, as Boesak did in 1981 to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, that it is "irreconcilable with the gospel of Jesus Christ." Hence it is a heresy.[66] Not only apartheid but racism as a whole is heretical, for it denies the image of God in other human beings because of their race or colour. Indeed, it is because of the dehumanizing nature of all these forms of oppression that they are to be challenged by African Theology. For the primary task of theology is to translate into concrete form the humanizing message of the gospel for God's people in their worldly existence. Such humanization results from their liberation from all forms of bondage.

Finally, speaking of a single, integrated African Theology to address the totality of the African reality is not to imply identity of experience in all of Africa. African Theology, as stated at the beginning of this paper, is contextual (as well as situational). It must, therefore, respond and address itself to the idiosyncracies and typical demands of individual situations and the experiences of people in such situations. Its content and method will, accordingly, remain to be adjusted and to develop in accordance with the demands of different situations or different countries. The overall thrust, however, must be the same.

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66 See Allan A. Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1984), pp. 108-119.