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Biblical revelation to the contemporary situation. If this takes place, then Caribbean Theology will be “both an evangelical and ethical theology, a proclamatory and practical theology, a theology expressed in both the indicative and imperative moods and a theology that would be both authentic and relevant.”³⁷

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Towards an Evangelical African Theology

Tokunboh Adeyemo

In this essay our attention is focused not so much on the questions of how, where, what and who should do theology for the Church in Africa as on the discipline itself. Because of this, we have given more space to part two of the paper than to its first part. Nevertheless part one is necessary since it serves as compass in the task before us.

(Editor)

PART ONE: PROLEGOMENA

As evangelicals we define ourselves as Bible-believing Christians and identify ourselves with those who have come to a personal dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Doing theology for us therefore is not a matter of cold academic speculation nor of unprofitable sterile debate nor of curious tourist adventure. Rather, it is an obedient spirit-led reflection upon God’s revelatory words and acts, culminating in Jesus Christ, an honest application of the same to our lives, and consequent sincere communication of it for perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry (see [Ezra 7:10](#); [Eph. 4:12](#)).

Equally, as Africans, we share the historical past of our people, cherish our cultural heritage, identify with our present struggles and aspirations and, under God, are determined to bring God’s righteousness and justice to bear on all forms of life as our future is shaped. In this discipline we are, without any apology, strongly committed to the following:

The Holy Scriptures

That the Scriptures are given by God’s inspiration and are therefore not only profitable but basic for theologising is assumed. God’s eternal and unchanging message is both relevant and true to our ever-changing situations. It cannot be over-emphasized that as God is absolute, so is His message. This God’s self-disclosure of Himself—the Scriptures—forms our primary source for theology.

³⁷ Taylor, “Caribbean Theology,” p.19.

Of course, Biblical revelation did not take place in a vacuum. Like all revelations, it was a divine-human drama embodied in history and open for empirical verification. Our commitment takes the historical and cultural contexts under which the Scriptures were given seriously. Our investigation reveals that African history and cultural complexity have a lot in common with the Bible world, a fact which makes theological bridges easier for us to construct. p. 148

The Lordship of Christ

The centre of Biblical revelation is the historical and living Christ, who manifested the fullness of the Godhead bodily. God got himself involved in human history, thus destroying Grecian classical dualism and metaphysical chasm characteristic of African myths. People heard him, saw him, gazed at him and touched him—Emmanuel, the climax of God’s revelation! By the Christ-event (Incarnation, life and ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation), it is demonstrated that God is not absent from human history and struggles. Christ-centred theology cannot help but be functional, dynamic and relevant.

Our commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as our Mediator par excellence can only be as the one who has absolute authority and power over all flesh. His example—became flesh and dwelt among us—has become our model in doing theology. And as He came not to do his own will but his Father’s, so also our theology must be one of obedience whatever the cost.

The Supremacy of the Holy Spirit

“The Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit ... shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance” ([John 14:26](#)). We err if we ever think that we can develop a theology for the Church which will glorify God and perfect the saints all by our own education and training. As the Christian community of the New Testament lived in the dimension of the Spirit’s immediate operations, so must we. We must constantly seek his fresh anointing; his in-filling; his leading; his insights; his enablement, even as our Lord did throughout his life and ministry.

The dynamic operation of the Holy Spirit, bestowing gifts freely as He pleases, takes theology away from the monopoly of the “specialists” and makes it the business of the whole Church. Paradoxically, since gifts differ (see [1 Cor. 12:28–30](#)), there is plenty of room in the community for gifted theologians to exercise their gifts for the edifying of the body of Christ. Our commitment to the supremacy of the Holy Spirit in doing theology reminds us of our utter inadequacy and of our need for total dependence on Him.

Personal Spiritual Discipline

Karl Barth recognised prayer as the first and basic act of theological work. We cannot but agree with him. Prayer is more than asking and receiving. It is a vehicle for fellowship and communion with God. Who knows the mind of God, and who can speak with authority for p. 149 Him? Only those who practise God’s presence, who wait upon Him in solitude, away from the noise and busyness of everyday life. Study the prayer life of Jesus in the Gospels and of the Apostles in Acts and you will see that prayer is hard work. It is a discipline.

Together with prayer, evangelical theologising calls for serious meditation upon God’s Word and work. There is no other key to knowing God, enriching faith and deepening commitment than habitual meditation in God’s word. It opens up doors of understanding into Biblical mysteries and the deep spiritual realities of life.

Commitment to spiritual discipline shall be incomplete if it stops with prayer and meditation. Vital to it is involvement and identification with people in their struggles and

affliction. True spirituality does not isolate us from people. On the contrary, it brings us in touch with the fatherless and widows in their affliction; takes us to the prisons, hospitals and refugee camps to minister Christ's compassion and power to the needy; and compels us to do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God and proclaim the good news to the poor. Jesus was a man for the other. And in the words of Bonhoeffer, His Church must be the Church for others.

The Christian Community

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith ... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" ([Eph. 4:13](#)) expresses our commitment to healthy Christian community in our theological efforts. This argues strongly against individualism and its corollary, namely theological imperialism. Theology that will thrive on African soil will be that which evolves as a result of believers' interaction and dialogue among themselves about the meaning of their faith as tested out in their daily lives in all kinds of relationships. This may account for the fact that pastoral and political theologies are more popular in Africa today than any other branch of theology.

It is imperative for us in the African context to involve the Christian community as much as possible in the theological process, test our theological findings in the community, channel our theological results through the community and employ the community to police our theological explorations. Also, theology for Africa cannot be done in disregard of theologies elsewhere in Christendom. Otherwise we open ourselves to sectarianism at best and heresy at worst.

Total World Evangelization

The ultimate goal of our doing theology is aptly expressed by the Apostle Paul's words: "we take captive every thought to make it **p. 150** obedient to Christ" ([2 Cor. 10:5](#)). This echoes our Lord's commission of world-wide discipleship, teaching all believers to obey everything He has commanded—love of God and love of our neighbour. Andrew Kirk receives our support by stating that: "encouraging and enabling God's special people to carry out Christ's commission in and for the world seems to be theology's fundamental *raison d'être*." If knowing God doesn't bring us closer to Him and communicating His grace through our evangelical writings doesn't attract people to Him, then something is amiss. Paul would become all things to all men for Christ's sake that he might by all means save some. Our theologising must therefore have this invitation-to-Christ dimension. We cannot do this faithfully without confronting the power structures of our day—the rich, the privileged and the powerful. A call to justice and righteousness is an integral part of the Gospel.

Having underscored our commitments in doing theology in the African context, let us proceed to part two of the essay.

PART TWO: A MODEL OF EVANGELICAL AFRICAN THEOLOGY

Our sources in this awesome discipline include: The Bible; African worldview and religions; Arts and crafts; African history and tradition; Church History; Contemporary theologies and events. Of all the methodological approaches being advocated—extrinsic, intrinsic, comparative and systematic—each has its own value. It is a common practice for theologians to use certain themes as polar axis upon which their entire theological structure spins. Take, for example, the concept of "time". One of our own African theologians has used it as key to his theological construct. Though it could be restrictive

and limiting unless the theme is large enough it has the untold advantage of theological data synchronization. Because of this advantage we have employed it in this essay.

Thesis: “Cosmological Balance as key to developing Evangelical African Theology.”

Two terms commonly used in connection with the study of any man’s or any culture’s *weltanschauung* are cosmogony and cosmology. Compounded from κόσμος, the world, and γενεά, generation, cosmogony is strictly the science of the origin of the earth. It is applied also to the various theories of the formation of the material universe. In any epistemological consideration in which the doctrine of direct or special revelation as traditionally held p. 151 cannot be attested, what a man thinks of the world around him becomes crucial if not determinant to his faith.

“Our worldview is like the umpire at a ball game,” declares an Old Testament scholar, Bruce Waltke. “He seems unimportant and you are hardly aware of him, but in reality he decides the ball game.” Naturally, the ancient civilizations of the Sumerians, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians were built on mythical cosmogies which presupposed that out of nothing, nothing could be made. This resulted in the belief in many gods. In like manner the naturalistic, theistic speculations of the Greek philosophers evolved from their organistic worldview which was rooted in the belief that the world was eternal in form as well as in substance. This model of the world as an organism was later replaced by that of the world as a mechanism which eventually gave birth to the modern evolutionary theory. Down through the ages cosmology has served not only as an explanatory device and a guide to conduct, but also as an action system or pattern. It is a profound statement that “as a man thinks, so he is” (Prov. 23:7). Francis Schaeffer has rightly asserted: “People have presuppositions. By presuppositions we mean the basic worldview, the grid through which they see the world.”

To understand an African’s perception of God and reality, even for an African Christian for that matter, it is extremely important to know his worldview. Writing of the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria, for example, Uchendu said: “The Igbo world, in all its aspects—is made intelligible to Igbo by their cosmology which explains how everything came into being.” Another Igbo scholar, Emefie I. Metuh, has defined worldview as “the complex of a people’s beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, nature, structure of the universe and the interaction of its beings—with particular reference to man.” After identifying and illustrating four main characteristics of the traditional African world view—the multiplicity of spiritual beings; the unity of reality without dichotomy between the spiritual and the material; the hierarchical order of beings; and the essential connection and interaction between beings—Metuh concludes that “it is against this background that major problems of man are conceived, assessed, and their solutions sought.”

The world as a natural order which inexorably goes on its ordained way according to a master plan or a natural law as found in a mechanistic worldview, is foreign to the African mind. His world is a dynamic one. It is a moving equilibrium that is constantly threatened and sometimes actually disturbed by natural and social calamities. The events which upset it include natural disasters such as long continual p. 152 droughts, long periods of famine, epidemic diseases, as well as sorcery and other antisocial forces of oppression and injustice. The Africans believe that these cosmic forces and social evils which disturb their world are controllable and should be manipulated by them for their own purpose. The warding off of these cosmic and social evils becomes the central focus of religious activities among the various African people.

(Just in passing, we may note that the fastest numerically growing churches in Africa are the Pentecostal and the Independent churches where prayer-healing and exorcism—warding off evils—are practised.) Keeping a proper and undiluted ritual distance from all

forms of evil or, stated positively, maintaining a cosmological balance through divination, sacrifice and appeal to the invisible powers has been the centre-piece of African religiosity. It is no wonder then that when many an African Christian is struck with calamity he seeks succour and help from native herbalists.

A theology of cosmological balance springs from a knowledge of cosmic struggle as described above and proclaims Jesus Christ as Victor and Liberator par excellence, the God-man who has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against humanity; and, having spoiled principalities and powers, death and the grave, he has set man free! Of necessity, arrangement of theological categories in this system will be different from that common to traditional textbooks. In developing our theological system against the foregoing background, we shall propose the following tentative outline for exploration.

TENTATIVE OUTLINE

Revelation and Redemption

If Theology is the science concerning God, it is only fitting that we begin with and base our theological construct on His revelation. Though there can be revelation without redemption, it is crystal clear that God's divine intention in disclosing Himself to man is to redeem him. Genesis, chapter three, records the first divine interrogation and detailed cross-examination with man. In the midst of judgment we have the gracious protoeuangelion of verse 4 and a demonstration of God's mercy in verse 21. Likewise, Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. Redemption is the sense of Revelation.

The question is then asked: since Jesus is the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world (including our African great p.153 grandparents who never heard the Gospel as such), how did our great grandparents perceive and respond to God? To answer this, we have to examine the various forms of revelation offered to them including dreams, visions, worldview, and nature and test the validity of any claim their tradition leaves behind by the light of Scripture. For example, in the Yoruba pantheon, there is *Ela* who bears attributes similar to those of Jesus Christ. A corpus (i.e. oracles of Yoruba religion) addresses *Ela* as light, saviour and deliverer. To reinforce *Ela*'s position, a story is told of a mythical only son of a woman (*Olu-orogbo* and *Moremi* respectively) who was offered in sacrifice a while back in order to deliver his people from their enemies, the Igbo invaders. Whenever *Ela* is worshipped today, constant mention is made of *Olu-orogbo*. Has pre-incarnate Christ ever revealed Himself in any form and to any other people and at any time outside the Biblical record? Probably stories like this can be cited in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism ad infinitum. This opens up theological issues such as pluralism and universalism.

Rather than propositional statements about God and sin and atonement, the cosmological approach creates a lively interaction between the *given* revelation—the Scriptures—and the *perceived* revelation. When doctrinal statements follow rather than precede lively interaction as suggested here, faith, when generated, is firmly anchored.

Time does not permit us to treat other relevant categories as we would wish. However, for the purpose of discussion expected to follow our presentation, they are listed herewith:

1. Incarnation and Identity: How does the Incarnation of Christ fulfill man's quest for identity, particularly African Christians with a sad history of colonial exploitation?
2. Blood of Animals and Blood of God's Son: an exposition of Leviticus sacrifices and the Book of Hebrews in light of African sacrificial systems. The cross of Christ and power!

3. Mediator and Intermediaries: the knotty problem of ancestors worship or veneration and the cult of saints; Is Christ sufficient?
4. Messianic Community and Vital Participation: are all believers priests, even in African thinking?
5. Spiritual life and spiritual fruit: African religiosity defined and described.
6. Spiritual warfare and spiritual resources: the reality of spiritcharged entities and beings; the benevolent forces versus malevolent forces; exorcism etc. Have sign gifts ceased?
7. Prophets, Priests and mediums: do they exist and function today? [p. 154](#)
8. Sacraments and Rites: discussion in African psychology; points of convergence and divergence.
9. Law and Grace: issues of social ethics and morality in African Church; the family.
10. Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world: missions and politics; Church and State; where do they meet and where do they part lines?
11. Messianic Hope and Development: issues of evangelization and social responsibility in the African context.
12. Creation and Consummation: myths of lost paradise; of exist and return; eschatological imageries—real or metaphorical?
13. Continuity and Discontinuity: where do we draw the line?
14. Oppression and Liberation: what approach to solution?
15. Permanence and change: the Gospel and Ideologies.

This list is by no means exhaustive and the approach suggested is by no means normative. Probably the best result that could come out of this consultation is to create cells of theological communities all around the world among the Evangelicals for regular habitual interactions and dialogues where various models could be tested. If this essay has contributed in some way to that stimulus, our trip to Korea has been greatly rewarded.

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Toward an Evangelical Asian Theology

Rodrigo D. Tano

This article is abridged.
(Editor)

INTRODUCTION

This is by no means the first effort to sketch some lines along which Asian theology may be developed. Preman Niles,¹ has suggested a framework for doing theology in Asia using

¹ See his "Toward a Framework for 'Doing' Theology in Asia," in E. Nacpil and D. Elwood, eds., *The Human and The Holy* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1978), pp.267–90.