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EDITOR: DAVID PARKER



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change happens, curricula eventually 'fossilise'.⁴⁵ Hence an ideal curriculum by itself cannot overcome the 'countervailing power' (Kelsey) of an unresponsive faculty who play a vital role in the making of the 'traditional ethos' of a theological school. That 'ethos' is the institutional culture that gets transmitted across generations. Kelsey sees in this culture a mixture of 'power relationships, patterns of behavior, and shared attitudes and dispositions'. Hence he says, 'The faculty's potentialities for change in the educational process are defined by its actuality and not by the ideal possibilities for change sketched by a new curriculum.' The totality of that 'actuality' involves a delicate balance between the explicit and implicit as well as the 'null' curricula of a theological school. This balance inevitably rests with the faculty who must be open to change through in-service training, interfacing with church and society, learning facilitation skills and teaching the same to their students, and above all, modelling the life of Christ before students.

A holistic approach to the curriculum of training of the ministry must employ a combination of the domains of learning with the different training outcomes of knowledge, character, and ministry skills. A delicate balance is called for in the training modes adopted and in the determination of the curricular core as well as the unity of the course of study. The philosophical underpinning that supports the perception of the ministry also supports the perception of the training outcome and consequently the curricular core.

Dr Cole teaches at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), Kenya. This paper, which was presented at the 'Consultation on Revisioning Theological Education for the 21st Century' held in January 1998 at NEGST, is based on a forth-coming publication entitled, *Training of the Ministry: A Macrocurricular Approach*.

Doing Justice to Context in Theology: The Quest for a Christian Answer to the African Condition

Andrea M. Ng'weshemi

Keywords: contextualization, experience, poverty, dependence, debt, symbol, Christology

THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY

⁴⁵ 45. Harold Benjamin has so ably pointed out how curriculum soon fossilises if unresponsive to change despite changing circumstances, in his satiric classic published under the pseudonym, J. Abner Peddiwell, *The Saber-Tooth Curriculum*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc., 1939).

The question, 'how can the Christian faith, first experienced and symbolically articulated in an ancient culture now long out-of-date, speak meaningfully to human existence today'¹ presupposes the debate on the relevance of theology to any given context, in any given time and the part played by it in the experience of the world in which humans live. Defined as 'the construal of reality in the light of Christian symbols ... a discipline that interprets all reality—human existence, society, history, the world, and God—in terms of the symbols of Christian faith,'² theology is in no way simply abstract God-talk. It is rather an effort to reflect critically on as well as to express in language what it indeed means to be enmeshed by God in the divine creative and redemptive process of living. As God-talk it involves interpretation of the way in which God is related to human beings as well as the divine participation in human efforts to establish a just and livable society. Theology therefore, requires a continuous contemporaneity in order for it to be relevant and legitimate. It

talks about human life in the world, about life's deepest problems, struggles, defeats, and partial victories. It talks about what is really important in human life, about how human beings must live and behave, and about what choices they must make in order for their life to be genuinely human, fulfilling and humanizing.³

When theology fails to do this it ceases to be theology; instead it becomes doctrine or some form of ideology.

Relating theology to the context of present existence—the situation and consciousness of the world, church, (and the theologian) at any given time has been a point of emphasis and departure in the theological methods of certain theologians. In Paul Tillich's theological method of 'correlation'⁴ for instance, two basic needs are satisfied: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth to every new generation. In this case, theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and its temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received. 'Situation' as one pole of all theological work refers to the philosophical, scientific, and artistic, the economic, political and ethical forms in which they express their interpretation of human existence. That is to say, the 'situation' theology must consider is the creative interpretation of existence, an interpretation which is carried on in every period of history under all conditions. The 'situation' to which theology must respond is the totality of the human being's creative self-interpretation in a special period. Put in other words, the Word of God (or Christian story as we shall later refer to it in this paper) does not invade our world in some capricious way. Rather, it comes as the answer to the fundamental questions posed by the reality of the world and by human existence. Tillich writes:

¹ 1. Ted Peters, *God—the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 2.

² 2. Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 216.

³ 3. Simon S. Maimela, 'Towards A Theology of Humanization,' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* no. 41 (December 1982), p. 58.

⁴ 4. See Paul Tillich's full perspective discussion of the method of correlation in his *Systematic Theology* vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 59–65.

In using the method of correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to those questions.⁵

Also emphasizing common human experience as the starting point of any meaningful theologizing is David Tracy⁶ who suggests that a people's experience brings its own dynamism as it relies upon images, conventions and symbolism of language as means of communication and interpretation. If the definition of theology is 'faith seeking understanding', then such definition realizes that faith is a constitutive element in understanding and experience. Hence common human experience and language establish a base for understanding to draw its life whereas the norm by which experience is measured is found in sacred scriptures.⁷ Whereas Christian texts serve as the norm for all Christian interpretations, the theological task becomes the critical correlating of both common human experience and language with Christian texts in mutual relationship.

In John Macquarrie's thought, humanity's major problem is to find God in this world which implies looking for God in everyday situations. As such, human experiences provide relevant subject matters for theology. Theology not only has to interpret experience but also to respond to it. If theology cannot address the pain and frustration of modern people then it will have nothing to say about the world. As a matter of emphasis the relevance of theology therefore lies in its ability to address the realities faced by human beings in a given situation and time. This means that theology does not depend on itself, its own history, or isolated questions, but that it has to look for the existential situation of people whom it serves as the meeting place with God. Obedient to his own existentialontological method, John Macquarrie points out that for theology to be intelligible it has to use the language of the culture within which it is undertaken. No one can escape sharing in the mentality or intellectual climate of one's own culture, and to seek to do so is to deceive oneself 'for these influences will operate unconsciously'.⁸

Agreeing with the above view points as regards the emphases of taking a people's experience, condition, and questions asked by them in theological methods, this paper seeks to show that the current African condition and the life experience of African people together provide a context which theology needs to correlate with the Christian story. When this is done, a certain attitude or behaviour and option are called for which not only provide a theological position but also lead to more life possibilities on the part of God's people.

INTRODUCING THE AFRICAN CONTEXT AND EXPERIENCE

The historical reality, condition, and/or experience of Africa⁹ is characterized by hopelessness and misery, by anxiety and despair, by fear and depression, by anger and confusion. African reality is an overturned culture, a diverted and distorted human self understanding. The many and various forms of injustice which Africans continue to suffer point to two things: a threatened life and distortion of their identity (and ultimately their

⁵ 5. Ibid. p. 60.

⁶ 6. See David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 64–87.

⁷ 7. Ibid. p. 73.

⁸ 8. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), p. 21.

⁹ 9. Throughout this study the terms 'Africa' and 'African' will refer specifically to Africa south of the Sahara desert sometimes known as 'Black Africa.'

destiny) by caricatures of death. Engelbert Mveng has correctly summarized the African experience as the African 'anthropological poverty'¹⁰ by which he means a denial or absence of all that contributes to the 'being, essence, and dignity of the human person',¹¹ that which makes one human culturally, socially, economically, politically and spiritually. This is the effect of the many years of domination which Africa has gone through under western hegemony for most its modern history.

The historical reality of Africa and the experience of African people has given rise to the paradoxical question of what it means to be human. One can name many causes of this diversion, from slavery to colonialism and racism,¹² neocolonialism and missionary negation of African culture with almost all that it entails which enabled the African people to have their own identity and a sense of self understanding, and the suffering which result from corruption, nepotism, tribalism, and civil wars. This paper will dwell specifically on what this writer sees to be the most painful experience which Africans have been going through in all its severity and which is indeed dehumanizing. This is material or economic poverty.

Poverty itself means not to have; it means lack of income which leads persons to many other forms of vulnerability, losing their source of livelihood such as enough food, adequate housing, clean water, health care, creativity, their respect and eventually their freedom. As far as Africans are concerned, being poor means also losing control of their destiny individually and collectively. Poverty is violation of human dignity. It causes underdevelopment which leads to sickness and ultimately death. It defies and contradicts the purpose and destiny for which humankind was created. In the African context destiny is the total progression towards what humans were meant to become in this life which is to attain fulness of life, a life which is all in all. In this respect, it is undeniable that denying a people a meaningful and abundant life is tantamount to refusing to acknowledge their existence.

Now to speak of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa means to recognize the contemporary connection between exploitation and dependency which African countries are suffering at the hands of the developed, North Atlantic countries.

Poverty and most suffering which Africans are going through today are not part of the natural order or a result of individuals' failures. It has been pointed out over and over again that it is something that is caused by a system founded in injustice. The reasons for poverty lie in the relationship between the rich and the poor, the North and the South, the first world and the third world. Indeed, 'The poverty of some and the wealth of others spring from the same source,'¹³ namely an imbalanced, unfair relationship that exists and which is fuelled by economic neo-colonialist strategies of the twentieth-century with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank acting as agents of the developed, industrialized North.

¹⁰ 10. Cited in Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University, 1988), p. 15.

¹¹ 11. Engelbert Mveng, 'Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,' in Rosino Gibellini, ed., *Paths of African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 156.

¹² 12. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC.: Howard University Press, 1981) is a classic treatise on the way in which the current poverty and other forms of sufferings of African people have come into being.

¹³ 13. Sarah White and Romy Tiongco, *Doing Theology and Development: Meeting the Challenge of Poverty* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1997), p. 63.

The relationship between the North and the South and the economic neo-colonialist project which is perpetuating poverty in Africa can be explained well through what is popularly known as the 'debt crisis.' This is a system which has locked the poor Africans and those in other third world countries into the very system that has impoverished them. Today it is camouflaged in what is called globalization. By definition, globalization is not just a matter of being able to communicate with every corner of the world by telephone, computer Internet or satellite television. It is also an economic neo-colonialist strategy which aims at and calls for free exchange, encouraging the setting of multinational firms in Africa. It also means and advocates turning the world into one market. Creditors such as the International Monetary Bank, the World Bank, and private banks vest interest in maintaining the integration of the poor countries into the international free-enterprise system, a process which ensures that 'an important percentage of money which normally would have remained in Africa finds its way to American and European banks'.¹⁴ Loans therefore are tied to certain policies that ensure continued integration. It seeks to ensure that the poor countries continue to expand their exports.

Inasmuch as most if not all sub-Sahara African economies have been geared since the colonial era to produce raw materials for the developed, industrialized countries, this means more emphasis must be given to export agriculture rather than food production for local consumption; economic production in general is geared to international rather than domestic markets. Moreover, due to the economic crisis of the 1980s which forced African countries to depend on foreign economic assistance, loans are conditional upon wage and employment reductions and price increases for basic goods and services. This has caused a reduction in the purchasing power of the workers, not to mention the peasants. With reduced wages another serious social problem has evolved: corruption which became an alternative way of filling in the gaps left by insufficient wages. Conditions are also laid down about how the money loaned by the international monetary bodies to African countries should be used and how the economies of the debtor countries should be adjusted. This process is popularly known as the Structural Adjustment Program.

The structural adjustments usually include privatization, the selling off of government owned enterprises, and cutting back on what the loaning agencies characterize as 'unprofitable' programmes like housing, welfare, healthcare and education which have relatively benefited the majority poor who otherwise could not afford such services. As African countries have almost reached a point of inability to settle their external debts while at the same time they continue to borrow, the overall result of loans and the Structural Adjustment Programs is that rich countries become richer and richer, and the poor countries poorer and poorer. This is the case mainly because the Structural Adjustment Programs themselves are grounded on a principle of covetousness designed by the affluent and powerful countries without the approval of the people in Africa and their governments.¹⁵

¹⁴ 14. Jose B. Chipenda et al., *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction* (Nairobi, Kenya: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991), p. 9.

¹⁵ 15. Referring to the article 'UNICEF Challenges World Bank in Africa,' which appeared in *Daily News* (Feb. 6, 1993), p. 19, Rogate Mshana in 'Economic Neocolonialism Through Structural Adjustment Programs in Africa: A Cry for Economic Justice,' *A Just Africa: Ethics and the Economy*, ed. Virgo Mortensen, (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), p. 84 presents conclusions of a UNICEF study that suggests that 'one of the biggest problems in Africa was that the SAPs emphasized a boosting of the production of primary commodities for export such as cocoa, coffee, and uranium. Food consumption was a low priority. As a result when international prices tumbled, partly because of the abundance of new producers, the African countries found themselves in the difficult position of having little foreign currency, little food, but a heavy debt.'

At a glance, here is a picture of the burden of indebtedness. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that 1991 debt for all of Africa was US \$280 billion. The debt of Sub-Sahara Africa (i.e. countries south of the Sahara desert excluding South Africa) rose from \$154.7 billions in 1989 to \$175.8 billions in 1991. This is despite cancellation of \$6 billions in debt. The US government cancelled hundreds of millions of dollars in African debt as a result of 1989 and 1990 legislation supported by US anti-hunger groups such as Bread for the World. But sub-Saharan Africa's 1991 debt service obligation was still \$10.7 billions which is ironically equivalent to 20% of export earnings. By the year 1992, Africa's total debt had soared up to US\$ 290 billion, 10 billion more than in 1991. Presently, Tanzania's total debt is \$6.8 billion which works out at US\$ 229 for each Tanzanian while the gross domestic product (GDP) per person is merely US\$110 per year.¹⁶ One when one considers how the Tanzanian is made to pay all of his/her annual income to service a foreign debt, the question arises—how will one survive? The situation is made worse when these very people who are made to give away their whole income to settle endless debts are now made to pay for almost every service at prices that are determined by the free market and which are becoming higher and higher. A very obvious example here is education. The annual cost of education in a government owned school currently is well over \$100 per year per child. Costs for medical services are even higher. It is reported that in Ghana, the introduction of fees in hospitals has led to a drop of 50% in outpatient attendance in some rural areas. Due to ascending costs of health services in 1987/88, 45% of all sick Ghanaians did not seek any sort of medical assistance.¹⁷ A World Bank report summarizes the plight of African persons:

Africa spends four times more on debt servicing than it does on all the health services it provides its 600 million people. It is not surprising, therefore, that a single African country, Mozambique, loses more children to malnutrition and easily preventable or curable diseases than do all struggling countries of the former Soviet Union.¹⁸

Indeed, this situation is not very encouraging. For Africans, the consequence of poverty, indebtedness, dependency and continued integration into the international free enterprise system including trade patterns is just like what Job describes:

They gather their fodder in the field and they glean the vineyard of the wicked one. They go about naked, without clothing; hungry. They carry sheaves; among the olive rows of the wicked, they make oil: they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst ([Job 24:6, 10-11](#)).

The unjust world economic order continues to make African people existentially poorer and poorer, and more and more dependent. As such, they are deprived of what they have, what they are, and what they do. Their existence is continually dictated by other people and nations that regard themselves as powerful. Now this is anthropological pauperization par excellence. Anthropological pauperization rises when people are deprived of their identity, their dignity, and all other essential rights that would make them more human, and instead, subjected to suffering, dehumanization, exploitation, denial of the meaningful and abundant life. Looked at very critically, the poverty which

¹⁶ 16. *Lutheran World Information* no. 2 (1977), p. 12.

¹⁷ 17. Rolph van Der Hoeven, 'Adjustment with a Human Face: Still Relevant or overtaken by events', in *World Development*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1991):1835-1845.

¹⁸ 18. Adopted from Laurenti Magesa, 'The African "Debt" Crisis in A Christian Perspective: An Analysis and an Approach to a Resolution', in *A Just Africa: Ethics and the Economy*, 156. Magesa's source is Africa Recovery Unit, *African Debt Crisis: A Continuing Impediment to Development* (New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations, 1993).

engulfs Africans is an imposed, a created reality which is in fact not meant for the human person; as Karl Marx once pointed out:

Not to have is not a mere disconsolate reality: today the (one) who has nothing is nothing, for (one) is cut from existence. In general and still more from human existence ... not to have is the most desperate Spiritualism, a complete unreality of the human, a complete reality of the dehumanized.¹⁹

When it reaches this point, poverty which ontologically is not part of human nature becomes a threat and enemy to human life. Indeed it is a sinful condition since it negates the true essence of humanity. Now when this sinful condition is forcefully applied and made part of life of a people, such people will not avoid asking the question: what does it mean to be human?

ENGAGING THE CHRISTIAN STORY

The shortest theological description one can give to the African condition is that it is characterized by an ethos and structures that manifest and actualize the power of sin. They cause sin by making it exceedingly difficult for men and women to lead the life that is rightfully theirs as sons and daughters of God.

But it goes without saying that at the centre of the Christian story is the confidence that God responds redemptively to the whole scope of human exigencies. The presupposition is that God has the power as well as the will to redeem.

The Christian story is about the kingdom of God which in the person of Jesus, and according to his teaching, was breaking into history in a new and decisive way. Jesus' actions themselves reflected the kingdom as he called people to faith by creating a new situation: he healed the sick, forgave sins, fed the hungry, and announced his mission in terms of jubilee: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord our God'.²⁰

In announcing the kingdom and the importance of creating an order within which people would be more human, Jesus committed his life to service in God's kingdom, thereby opening up new possibilities for all. No longer should the poor and hungry and weak be resigned to their fate, nor the rich and powerful bound by their wealth and power be bound to injustice.

The Christian story has it that Jesus is the Son of God.²¹ Admittedly, this is a statement of profound hope, for through the resurrection God indicated that the locus of Christian faith and action is human history. As such, the gap between realization of the kingdom and the cross (which is so much evidence in Africa of injustice and poverty) is not a legitimate reason for hopelessness or despair. God's incarnation in Jesus offers special value to life in general and to human existence in particular: it gives value to the earth and to the entire creation.

Notably, the meaning of the history of salvation and human's role in it is nowhere more fully revealed than in the person of Jesus the Christ. Jesus preached both the presence and

¹⁹ 19. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique* (Moscow: Foreign Languages, 1956), p. 59.

²⁰ 20. [Lk. 4:18](#)–19.

²¹ 21. [Jn. 20:31](#).

the coming of a radically new world order, the kingdom of God. The growth of the kingdom, he announced, was occurring in history and would come in all its fullness as a gift from God at the end of history. The kingdom of which Jesus spoke was one of peace, justice, and love. It meant the end of all hatred, oppression in all forms—in the fullest sense of the word, and human misery.

The promise of the kingdom is the promise of salvation—communion with one another and with God. Jesus revealed that salvation is mediated through our neighbour, particularly through the poor, the marginalized, the exploited, the belittled and despised by this world, those who are dehumanized and who do not have an assurance of life in its fullness, those whose existence in this world is threatened by forces that are far beyond their control. Jesus taught that it is only by loving them that we can love God and thus be saved.

Following that, the Christian story as good news comforts. It also empowers, granting people the right of existence in the hope that the new life of Christ will take over within and through them. The hope that Africans will have lies in the essence of the gospel whose story is of God's self-emptying to identify with humanity. Through the incarnation, God puts on the title of the suffering servant, dying on behalf of humanity to defeat sin and all forms of evil which contradict the dignity of the human being whom Christianity teaches is created in God's image. The gospel, therefore, offers us hope and awareness that God understands and identifies with the suffering ones.

Since poverty is a disgrace, a distortion of the dignity and humanity of the human person, it is abnormal. Jesus himself experienced poverty and humiliation, even death. But because poverty and death are not what humanity is created for, God raised Christ, restoring to him not only life but also dignity. In the person of Jesus, God promises to be not only with God's people but particularly on the side of the disrespected and dehumanized.

A QUEST FOR A CHRIST SYMBOL

Gordon Kaufman contends that theology has always taken place in a socio-cultural context, each context itself being a modification of previous imaginative constructions. Hence theology in every period is the ongoing attempt to make sense of life's basic elements. Theology in our time, therefore, imaginatively reconstructs our ancestral images to meet the needs of contemporary life. The task of theologians is to construct conceptions 'appropriate for the orientation of contemporary human life'.²² This in turn will enable each generation to have concepts that are workable for human life in the world and which may draw human beings much closer to the divine presence. This is to say that a theological construct may be workable only if it leads to 'fruitful life, in the broadest and fullest and most comprehensive sense possible', one by which theologians will make available new possibilities, 'raising new hopes, enabling men and women to move to new levels of humanness, instead of closing off options and restricting and inhibiting growth into a fuller humanity'.²³ Now given the African context and the experience of men and women in that continent, the one pertinent question that cannot be avoided is: who is Jesus Christ for the suffering people in that part of the world?

What we learn from the Christian story leads us to seeing Jesus as both the presence and revelation of the truly fully human. In the words of Bonhoeffer,

²² 22. Gordon Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 31.

²³ 23. Ibid. pp. 71–72.

It is from the real human being, whose name is Jesus Christ, that all factual reality derives its ultimate annulment (*aufhebung*), its justification and its ultimate contradiction (*widerspruch*), its ultimate affirmation and its ultimate negation ... In Jesus Christ, the real man, the whole of reality is taken up and comprised together, in him it has its origin, its essence and its goal.²⁴

Admittedly, we humans 'learn about God from Jesus,' and also 'about our own being and its possibilities and true destiny'.²⁵ He is the full embodiment of authentic humanity, and one who is the archetypal human being whom humanity should be like in its essential quality.

Jesus who is the bearer of the new humanity strikes a kinship and existential note to which Africans resonate. In African traditional thought life is central, and faith is expressed through day-to-day encounter with the challenges of life. In this framework Jesus emerges as 'Proto-ancestor' who imparts life force to human beings in its fullness. The 'Proto-ancestor' gives life and nourishes it 'in order to restore the energy of those who believe in Him'.²⁶ Just as he is presented in the gospel stories as one who is concerned with the welfare of those who are in need, he is Saviour from misfortunes, sufferings and death. He is *Mkombozi*, Liberator from oppression, poverty and fear, and from all the forces that keep the human being from becoming what God intended one to become. Through his word and deed, he calls people to freedom in every aspect. As such, for the African, the reality of Jesus brings with it the possibility of restored wholeness in health, dignity, justice, and love. In short, through his life, death and resurrection Jesus fulfills the humanizing process of which Africans are in need. The acquisition of new humanity through faith in Jesus enables them to find their selfhood and become truly self-determining. Ultimately, it is this identity with Christ that makes economic, social, and political changes meaningful and humanizing.

Jesus purifies that human aspect which has been distorted; he takes back humanity to its right place: the number one position in God's creation. Therefore in an attempt to regain dignity, it will be necessary to remember that Jesus Christ is the way in which God freely brings about humanity's self transcendence in Godself. Jesus Christ is the realization and the manifestation of the true reality of humanity. Through the incarnation, Jesus is the best design of the highest possibility of humanity and in reference to him only can we understand what it means to be 'human' at all. The truth of Christ is the summit and conclusion of God's work in creation, the most exalted radical and unique actualization of the ultimate possibility of the human nature. Truly Jesus Christ was, and still is the only one who will save, liberate, and restore the meaningfulness and humanness of Africans, leading them to authentic humanity.

Recognizing this means several things: first, in the person and ministry of Jesus is an assurance that he is in solidarity with the suffering ones. In this connection, one can speak of Christ's contemporary presence not simply in human form, but above all in the scandalous and concealed form of humiliation in the likeness of sinful flesh ([Rom. 8:3](#)). As such, in the church where the sermon is a form of the present Christ, the claim that 'the proclaimed Christ is the real Christ' implies that Christ is present not by repeated incarnation, but rather by the humiliation of appearing in lowly form. Second, since Jesus

²⁴ 24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Trans. N.H. Smith (London: Collins, 1964), p. 299.

²⁵ 25. Monika K. Hellwig, 'Christology', in D.W. Musser and J.L. Price, eds., *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 87.

²⁶ 26. Benezet Bujo, 'The Two Sources of Life: The Eucharist and the Cult of Ancestors in Africa', *African Christian Studies* Vol. 2 No. 1 (July 1986), p. 74.

wills that humans attain life in its fullness, all efforts and struggles to diminish poverty and to prevent untimely death among millions of Africans are justified. Third, Jesus Christ calls upon all those who believe in him to rally behind and support him in his efforts to create a just world in which the well-being of all will be assured.

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The question about what it means to be human as it is posed by Africans provides the kernel of the condition which methodologically is the context which theology ought to be aware of as it seeks to make itself relevant to African people. Given the experience of poverty and other forms of injustice, Africans need to hear what the gospel says about them. Indeed they want to hear the gospel, the message of which is centred on the human person whom the various types of afflictions render less human. It is the task of theology to verify that 'the Good News is really good, that it really does bring life and hope to people, that it really does bring them peace and justice, that it really does gather people in the forgiveness of God'.²⁷

Since theology is traditionally understood to be at the service of the church,²⁸ the church brings or ought to bring something new, something specific to the continent of Africa where human beings are tirelessly seeking to restore their humanity and self-understanding. Its contribution should be seen in light of its prophetic message, namely the need for restoration of humanity. Besides the traditional functions of teaching and teaching, the church is called upon to take the lead in raising the much needed critical voice against dehumanizing and unjust social-economic structures. As the body of Christ, the church is a commissioned agent and articulator of Christ's work of liberation. As such, so long as the church truly represents the living Christ, any utterance concerning human being will be justified only if it entails an act of emancipation, an act of commitment to the liberation and restoration of the dehumanized, humiliated, depersonalized and threatened human being. The church is challenged to facilitate a possibility for African people to experience life in abundance. To do this, it is called to take part in seeking a source of effective solution and strength for the threatened masses as they struggle to overcome all that endangers their individual and collective survival. It should help them to transform their situation and hence create a better, livable and just society.

Andrea M. Ng'weshemi is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, previously a chaplain at the University of Dar es Salaam now pursuing doctoral studies in theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago with a view to returning home to take up seminary teaching.

Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World

²⁷ 27. Aylward Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), p. 16.

²⁸ 28. At least in the Barthian sense.