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# The Contemporary Theological Situation in Africa: An Overview

James Nkansah-Obrempong

**KEYWORDS:** *Inculturation, contextualization, Liberation, Reconstruction, hermeneutics, Mother-tongue theology, oral traditions, symbols, proverbs, myths*

THIS PAPER IS AN overview of the contemporary theological situation in Africa. Since the inception of Christianity on African soil, there has been a growing sense of the need to make the Christian faith African in its form and expression. The concern was to uphold the cardinal tenets of the Christian faith and yet express that core belief in a way that would reflect the life and thought of the African's religious experience. It is in this light that there was a call and need from both African politicians and Christian theologians to develop African Christian theology. This paper is a survey of this process and where we are today on that project.

## I. 'African Theology'

The term 'African theology' needs def-

inition to avoid any misunderstanding. Some regard African theology as 'theology of Africans'. This is not what we mean by African theology. We need to affirm that there is only one Christian theology since there is only one gospel. By 'African theology', we mean Christian theology in Africa. This theology is based on biblical reflection on the Christ event as recorded in the Christian scriptures, which reflects the insights and the experiences of African Christians. African theology seeks to reformulate or reinterpret the one biblical, historical, Judeo-Christian message in the idioms of the African peoples in response to the issues and concerns confronting African believers in their historical contexts.

## II. Historical Background of African Theology

Two major African ideologies influenced African theological reflection namely: African *personality* in the

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*James Nkansah-Obrempong, a Ghanaian, is Professor of Theology at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) at which he took his MTh in New Testament Ethics. He holds a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary in Systematic Theology and Culture. Before taking up his present post, he worked with World Vision and Open Doors, and as a pastor and Bible School lecturer in USA. His published articles focus on cultural and African theology. This paper was delivered at a Symposium on African Theology conducted by the WEA Theological Commission at NEGST, 22 September 2006.*

Anglophone Africa and the *Négritude*<sup>1</sup> movement of Francophone Africa.

African theology developed because African theologians and politicians expressed the need for the Christian faith to be rooted in the African Christian religious consciousness and experience. The initial attempt to deal with the dehumanization of the African person through the colonization of the African continent was for the African to get her dignity back. The gospel restored that dignity and gave the Africans back their identity.

These two concepts, '*African personality*' and '*négritude*', performed a useful function for the African to regain that identity. They also motivated African theologians to begin to reinterpret the Christian faith in terms that reflect this identity, so Africans can understand and relate to the Christian faith as their own. These cultural and socio-political movements laid the foundation for African theology of indigenization or inculturation that sees the African culture and religion as important sources for theological reflection on the Christian faith. At the same period in the southern Africa region, the black movement contributed to Black theology of liberation.

Two principal theologies, therefore, emerged in African Christianity in the post-independence and post-missionary eras from the late 1950s to the late 1980s—the theology of inculturation or contextualization and the theology of liberation. African theology's goal is

to reinterpret the Christian faith in light of the cultural, religious and socio-political contexts in which African people live. We now look at how these two theologies function in the contemporary Africa.

### III. Theologies and Culture

African Christians living south of the Sahara are advocating a theology that takes seriously the religio-cultural context of African people in theological reflection. The concern is to make theology more relevant and practical so it can address the concrete issues African Christians are facing. The African religio-cultural heritage and the political subjugation by the colonial and modern African authoritarian regimes provided the context for engaging the Christian message and using the same to understand and reinterpret the historic Christian faith. This hermeneutical practice was seen to be viable and appropriate because the Christian gospel by nature is 'linguistically and culturally translatable when it encounters new cultures'.<sup>2</sup>

Since the inception of the Christian gospel in Africa, African theologians have emphasized the need to relate the Christian message to African thought forms in order to make the Christian gospel meaningful. African Christians strongly believed that if the Christian faith was to take deep roots in Africa, theology must be related to African culture and that theological reflection on the faith must be culturally and bib-

1 An anti-colonial literary and political movement from the 1930s, expressing pride in being African and black (Ed.).

2 Andrew F. Walls, 'The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture', *Faith and Thought*, vol. 108, nos. 1-2 (1981), p. 39.

lically appropriate.

The problem of relating theology and culture has its root in the history of the Christian church and in the New Testament itself; it is not a problem peculiar to African Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Culture played an important and critical role in the early church's formulation of theological ideas and concepts. For example, the early Jewish believers reinterpreted the Old Testament traditions in light of their new experience in the Christ event, his death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus Christ was seen as the exalted Lord and Christ, terms that have the roots in the Hellenistic culture in which the Jewish Christians lived. Jesus, the Messiah becomes the 'Logos'.

Western theologies developed in the same way with the European Enlightenment as the underlying influence on theological reflection. Issues raised by the Enlightenment changed the way theological reflection was done. Theologies developed from the west took cognizance of these cultural and philosophical changes taking place in the different societies. So the theologies that were developed reflected the cultural and philosophical traditions of the period, which in most cases do not speak to the experiences, belief systems, cultural values, and needs of African Christian communities.

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3 Kwame Bediako, 'Gospel and Culture: Some Insights for our Time from the Experience of the Early Church', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 2, no. 2 (December 1999), p. 9.

## IV. Theological Methodology and Sources for Theological Reflection

The question of method becomes a central issue in the minds of African Christian theologians if the theology they are envisioning is to be worth the name. To be faithful to the historical Christian faith, African Christians have stressed the need to construct African theology on sound biblical foundations. In African theological reflection of the faith, the primacy of the Scripture in shaping such reflection is critical<sup>4</sup> African Christians affirmed this at the Pan-African Conference of the Third World Theologians held in Accra in 1977:

The Bible is the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture. The Christian heritage is also important for African theology because African

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4 See John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Kwesi Dickson, 'The Old Testament and African Theology', *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 4:31-41; K. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, eds., *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969); Byang Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa* (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 1985); Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw, and Tite Tienou, eds., *Issues in African Christian Theology* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers, 1998); especially Parts II and I. See Richard J. Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1987), pp. 44-75.

Christianity is a part of worldwide Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

Two important sources for Christian theology are delineated in this statement: namely the Bible and Christian history. Africans need to reflect on the history of Christian dogma and traditions so they can learn from them and therefore avoid repeating the errors made earlier.

In his article, 'Hebrewisms in West Africa—The Old Testament and African Life and Thought', published in 1974, Prof. Kwesi Dickson warned that, 'African theologians who are searching for an African theology can... hardly afford to base their exercise solely on African religion and culture and Western theology'.<sup>6</sup> Dickson, a biblical scholar, stressed the importance of relating the Bible to African life and thought.

In addition to the commitment to orthodoxy, to uphold the central beliefs concerning the Bible, God, the person of Christ, etc., African Christians accommodated certain aspects of African worldview in theological reflection. Using African philosophical, anthropological, and sociological concepts and ideas on African beliefs, rites, and practices as well as careful, systematic study of oral traditions—particularly African proverbs, symbols,

myths and legends—African Christians are developing a theology that 'suit[s] the tongue, style, genius, character, and culture of African peoples'.<sup>7</sup>

This hermeneutical approach and reflection has yielded new insights into and understandings of the Christian faith. If African theology will yield any lasting fruit for the community of faith, it has to make full use of biblical scholarship—sound biblical exegesis and sound cultural exegesis of the contemporary culture—in constructing a relevant theology, a theology that will not be sterile and bankrupt. There should be a constant creative dialogue between African culture and biblical culture.

However, the global nature of theology requires that African theology must consider the teachings of the wider Christian community and learn from some of the insights they have gained on their reflection on the Christian faith to enrich their own reflection on the faith; as an African proverb has warned, wisdom is not found in one person's head. It is also important to subject such theological reflection on the faith to the traditions of the Christian faith developed over the years of Christian history.

Theology in Africa finds its common

5 'Final Communiqué: Pan African Conference of Third -World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana', *African Theology en Route*, eds., Kofi Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), pp. 192-93.

6 Kwesi Dickson, 'Hebrewisms in West Africa—The Old Testament and African Life and Thought', *Legon Journal of Humanities*, vol.1 (1974), p. 32.

7 Edward Fasholé-Luke, 'The Quest for African Christian Theology,' *The Journal of Religious Thought*, vol. XXXII, no. 2, (Fall-Winter 1975), p. 77. For a discussion on the role of the Bible in theology from the perspective of South African Christians see Gerald West, 'The Bible and Theology,' *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspective*, eds., John De Gruchy and C. Villa-Vicencio (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 15-25.

ground in these four basic elements: the Bible and Christian tradition, African religious and cultural traditions, the contemporary socio-political situation, and the African Independent Churches.<sup>8</sup> This is not new to western theological thinking: The Wesleyan sources for theology include the Bible, reason, tradition and experience.

## V. Fruit of Such Theological Reflection

### 1. Culture and Context<sup>9</sup>

Methodologically, both Catholics and Protestants have made some seminal contributions to doing African Christian theology. In his book, *Reinventing*

*Christianity: African Theology Today*,<sup>10</sup> John Parratt discusses some of the approaches Catholics and Protestants theologians have used in doing African theology.

Placide Tempels, a Belgian Catholic priest, attempted to relate theology and culture, and this led him to discover a central motif in Bantu thinking, *vital force*; this provided the basis for his theological reflection on the doctrine of grace.<sup>11</sup> His classical study, *Bantu Philosophy*, was an attempt to develop systematically the fundamental elements of Bantu thought or Bantu philosophy. He found a significant connection between the Bantu *vital force* and the Christian doctrine of grace or life and attempted to adapt Bantu thought to the Christian faith and teaching of the Catholic Church.

Theological ideas and theological formulation become more fruitful and relevant if they reflect the thought forms of the recipient's culture. True

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8 John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 27. Mbiti suggests four sources of African theology: biblical theology, 'Christian theology from the major traditions of Christendom', African religions and philosophy and 'the Theology of the living Church as it expands in its Life and Mission in African societies', J. S. Mbiti, 1978a, pp. 189-190. In another writing Mbiti adds two more sources for African theology: African culture and African history, Mbiti, (1979, 68); E. W. Fasholé-Luke, 'The Quest for African Theology', in *The Journal of Religious Thought*, vol. XXXII, no. 2 (Fall-Winter, 1975), pp. 78-85.

9 Since the process of indigenization involves the interaction or dialogue between Christianity and African culture, the term inculturation has been suggested. Aylward Shorter points out that the terms 'accommodation' and 'adaptation' were popular among the Catholics before Vatican II. These concepts he points out to be inadequate, although it was an important stage in the Church's thinking. See Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1988),

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p. 11; Joseph Blomjous, 'Development in Mission Thinking and Practice 1959-1980: Inculturation and Interculturation', *AFER*, vol. 22, no. 6, (1980), pp. 393-398; Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 63-94; Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 17-50; Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), pp. 14-24; Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 116-120.

10 John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, see especially chapter 2.

11 Placide Tempels is a Belgium Franciscan missionary in the Congo. He was best known for his book, *Bantu Philosophy*.

theological reflection emerges as we construct theology by using metaphors, ideas, and concepts that form the central core of values in a culture. *Bantu Philosophy* provided a 'significant literary and missiological precedent for Mulago's attempt to bring a Christian theological perspective to bear on the interpretation of his Bantu religious heritage'.<sup>12</sup>

Heeding this methodological approach, African Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians have done some work in the area of the doctrines of God, Christology, salvation, and ecclesiology, using African cultural ideas and thought forms such as ancestor, community, hospitality, family, etc. These attempts have proved helpful and shed more light on the Christian faith. There is, however, need to ground these reflections on solid biblical exegesis. So, there is still more to do. We need to engage critically the African thinking on these doctrines with scripture to challenge the misconceptions that some of these understandings or beliefs may pose, thus discrediting the true nature of the biblical story. We have more work to do in the area of ecclesiology, anthropology, soteriology, eschatology, and other important Christian doctrines.

## 2. Theology of Liberation

Liberation theology, like that of the theology of inculturation, interprets the Christ event in light of the political and economic struggles to which the African people are subjected. The theological reflection in the southern part

of Africa has remained unchanged. The socio-political nature of liberation theology has created other theologies like feminist/womanist theologies that seek to 'engage in the reconstruction of theology and religion in the service of the transformation process, in the specificity of many contexts in which women live'.<sup>13</sup> The concern of this theology is to liberate all women, even men, by transforming religious, social, economic and cultural structures that often enslave them or discriminate against them. Liberation theologians have constructed Christological theologies, employing titles such as healer, Saviour, Lord, Victor and Liberator.

All these titles have their roots in the Christian Bible. However, these meaningful metaphors speak to the many contextual situations in which African people find themselves, and therefore the work of Christ becomes real in their experience. These titles describe different aspects of Christ's redemptive work on the cross to free humanity from oppression, sin, and its power. The main concern of African feminist theologians is to heal the brokenness between men and women. As far as there are inequalities, oppression and discrimination in our societies, liberation theology will have an enduring presence in African theological reflection.

<sup>12</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 361.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Grey, 'Feminist Theology: A critical Theology of Liberation' in Christopher Rowland (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 89.

### 3. Recent Voices in Africa Theology

In recent years, there has been a major shift from the theology of liberation to that of reconstruction and social transformation.<sup>14</sup> Mugambi, one of the leading proponents of the theology of reconstruction, proposes that 'the shift from liberation to social transformation... involves discerning alternative structures, symbols, rituals, myths, and interpretations of African social reality by Africans themselves'. This is a task that is multidisciplinary in nature and requires not only theology but also social scientists and philosophers.<sup>15</sup> Its proponents have argued that the Exodus motif that underlined most of liberation theology is no longer necessary. What Africa needs today is a theology of reconstruction. Reconstruction and renewal is a new form of theological hermeneutics being advocated by African theologians to bring full humanity to the African peoples. With this new hermeneutic, these theologians have suggested the Nehemiah motif in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem as a model for Africa's social reconstruction efforts. This is an attempt to release the African from a culture of shame to regain his/her self-esteem and dignity.

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14 M.N. Getui, E. A. Obeng (eds.), *Theology of Reconstruction* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 1999); Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2003); J. N. K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton, 2003).

15 Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, p. 40.

## VI. Achievements and Agenda for African Theology

African Theologians have made great strides in this area of constructing an African theology in the post-missionary and post-independence eras. In this part, I will outline some of the achievements and suggest some key improvements we need to look at.

### A. Achievements of African Theology

#### 1. A Theological Appraisal of African Primal Religions and Cultural Heritage

The pioneers of African theology, through their various approaches, set forth the terms and direction in which African theological reflection should go. What African Christians say about their faith, experience, and commitment provided 'the determining factors in the development of African Christian thought'.<sup>16</sup> Desmond Tutu's assessment of African theology's achievement is worth mentioning.

African theologians have set about demonstrating that African religious experience and heritage were not illusory, and that they should have formed the vehicle for conveying the Gospel verities to Africa.... It is the theological counterpart of what has happened in, say, the study of African history. The significance of Tutu's statement lies in African theology's affirmation to 'rehabilitate Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness

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16 Bediako, 'African Theology', p. 434.



ness.' African Theology in the post-missionary era is a response to missionary misinterpretation of the value of African religious traditions. Bediako asserts that African theology emerged as a theology of African Christian identity.<sup>17</sup>

African theology is successful in providing models for reinterpreting 'Africa pre-Christian religious tradition in ways which have ensured the pursuit of a creative, constructive and perhaps also a self-critical theological enterprise in Africa'.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. New Idiom for Doing Theology

The rehabilitation or the integration of African religious and cultural heritage for theology provided for the next generation of African theologians new paths, new concepts, and terms in their theological works. This resulted in monographs on Christology in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the new concerns with Christological exploration began around African categories such as Christ as Ancestor, as Healer, as Master of Initiation—all of which were derived directly from the apprehension of reality and of the Transcendent as experienced within the world-views of African primal religions'.<sup>19</sup>

Theologians like Kwame Bediako, Charles Nyamiti, Anselme Sanon, and John Pobee have used primal categories like Ancestor in their reflection on the African experience of the actuality of Jesus Christ. Diane Stinton's *Jesus of Africa* is a new addition. Besides Christology, African theologians seriously engaged with subjects such as ecclesiology, soteriology and conversion<sup>20</sup> and theological methodology.<sup>21</sup>

African theology has helped us to shift from the level of abstraction or conceptualization that has mainly dominated western theological method. Linking theology with experience has made the resultant theology practical. The current monumental work, the *Africa Bible Commentary*, is a move in the right direction. The project has shown that it is possible to do sound biblical exegesis and express those thoughts in culture without missing the basic truth scripture is

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*Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990); Anselme T. Sanon and Rene Luneau, *Enraciner l'Évangile: Initiations africaines et pédagogie de la foi* (Paris, 1982); Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru, 1984); Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992); Robert Schreier, *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (London, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> See Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1979); Cyril C. Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria* (Avebury, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *African Theology: Its Nature, Problems and Methods* (Kampala: Gaba Publications, 1971); Tite Tienou, 'The Problem of Methodology in African Christian Theology' (An Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Fuller theological Seminary, 1984).

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<sup>17</sup> See Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, especially his Introduction, pp. 1-5.

<sup>18</sup> Bediako, 'African Theology', 435.

<sup>19</sup> Bediako, 'Theology in Africa', p. 434. See John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: 1979); Kwame Bediako, 'Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions', eds., Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, *Sharing Jesus in the Two-Thirds World* (Grand Rapids: 1984), pp. 81-121; K. Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian*

teaching. It is my hope and dream that African scholars will come up and publish a book on theology that is grounded in African Christian thought that the church in Africa can use.

African theology may have relevance for the church universal and in cultures where people are struggling to relate the Christian faith to other cultures. The African Christian thought that has emerged in this process may have relevance for similar processes of engagement of the Christian faith with other cultures. In this way, African theology may hold promise for modern western theology which is now asking serious questions about how to relate the Christian message in a missionary sense to western culture.<sup>22</sup>

In its effort to relate the gospel to African thought and life in order to enhance the church's evangelistic efforts, 'African theologians have recaptured the character of theology as Christian intellectual activity on the frontier with the non-Christian world', and have made theology 'as essentially *communicative, evangelistic, and missionary*'.<sup>23</sup>

## B. The Problem of African Christian Theology

While we appreciate the important place and role the African primal religions and cultural heritages play in theology, it is disappointing that African Evangelicals have not made good use of these resources in developing the theology coming from Africa. Much of these sources are untapped for the African theological task. For fear of being branded syncretistic, evangelical theologians have shied away from using African categories in their theological reflection. If we wish to preserve the gains of African theology, then the Evangelical Church should play a leading role in this theological task. Today, Roman Catholic theologians are leading in this area and are writing on some of the major doctrines of the Christian church using African categories.

Second, African theologians often fail to engage the African worldview critically, systematically and completely, especially with its multiplicity of spiritual beings. Although the African culture and religious traditions are close to the biblical culture, there must be critical assessment of it. The founding fathers of African theology, with their aim of presenting African theology, focused on fostering continuity of the African traditional religions with the new faith. Bediako points out this failure in African theology. The claim by African Christian writers in arguing for monotheism in African Traditional Religions is a failure to engage adequately with the dimension of this multiplicity.<sup>24</sup> African theologians need

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22 See especially Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Geneva, 1986); Lesslie Newbigin, 'Can the West be converted?' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 11(1987), 2-7; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989); *Mission and the Crisis of Western Culture* (Edinburgh, 1989).

23 Bediako, 'African Theology' in *Modern Theologians*, p. 438.

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24 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 98.

to deal critically with the issue of God and his relationship to the spirits.

The other failure of African theology is that most of the discussions have remained at the speculative and talk level. This is mostly true with the African Evangelical movement. There has been no serious attempt on the part of African Evangelical theologians to explore in depth the African cultural and religious heritage on the one hand and biblical revelation on the other hand to construct a Christian theology that is unique and meets the aspirations and needs of African Christians. Many evangelicals have not taken seriously the African culture, indeed they have often ignored it. This is why many African Christians are tempted to consult the divinities when they are facing threats against their lives.

African theology has failed to produce a comprehensive and systematic theology that is biblically and culturally relevant for the church in Africa. We need to do more work on subjects such as ecclesiology, Christian community, sin, and ethics that engage African ideas and concepts with that of Scripture. This is a great need for the church in Africa.

## VII. The Future of African Theology

### 1. Grassroots Theological Reflection

The theological climate in the African Independent Churches (AICs) is one that needs serious attention. By ignoring this area, evangelical communities have neglected the theology of some of the fastest growing churches in Africa.

Since most of the leaders of these communities are not theologically trained, there is a greater risk of syncretism developing among them. However, these groups are making a frantic effort to relate theology and religious experience to the African culture. They have a distinctive form of African Christianity. African theological institutions should initiate dialogue with the leadership of these Christian communities to train them so they can teach sound biblical faith. In doing so the wider Christian church can learn from them the progress and success they have made toward inculturation of the faith in African societies.

### 2. Theological Influences from the West

The global nature of Christianity and the influence of information technology have opened African Christians to certain western theological influence. The current cults, such as the House of Yahweh with all their heretic tendencies and theological heresies, are alleged to be hatched from the west. These theologies have the potential to destroy the purity of the Christian faith in Africa. The African church must guard against such infiltration of religious and heretical influences from the west.

In addition, the theology of prosperity that has come from the west is leading the church into a philosophy of materialism, which, if not checked, could have devastating effects upon Christianity in Africa. This theology is undermining the teaching of Scripture at many critical levels and this can lead to rejection or at least undermining of certain teachings of the Christian faith

on suffering and persecution, which are central to the Christian faith.

### 3. The Dynamic Nature of Culture and Modernity

The challenge to reinterpret the Christian message in our context is one that will not go away if the Christian message is to be relevant for Africans. Our current context demands we reflect critically, theologically, and biblically on some of the serious social and economic issues confronting the African continent, including suffering, HIV/AIDS, and political and ethical issues. These challenges need thoughtful theological response. Similarly, theology in Africa must be relevant in addressing the many challenges facing the African church today such as ethnic and religious pluralism.

### 4. The Place of Mother Tongue Theology

Many Africans cannot read and understand the English language. Therefore, the challenge to do theology in the mother tongue so that they can be taught theology in a way that they can understand is critical. African Christians need to reflect on doing popular theology not only at the academic levels in Bible and theological institutions but in local Christian communities. Grass roots theological reflection will give this venture enduring effects on the faith and practice of African Christians.

### 5. Charting Christian Theology for the Worldwide Church

With the shift of Christianity from the global north to the southern continents, sound theological reflection on the Christian faith is all the more important. If African Christianity is going to shape the world's faith for the future as has been the case with other cultures, then theology must be given important attention in our theological institutions. In addition, there should be serious theological reflection on the theology of the AICs. African Christianity might hold the key to saving the world church from ideologies that would militate against it.

The African Church faces the challenge to document and publish these theological reflections on the Christian faith so that other Christian communities can benefit from their insights and contributions to world Christianity.

### Conclusion

The critical place African Christianity occupies in relation to world Christianity demands for its voice to be heard. No longer can Christians in the West ignore African Christianity and its theological reflection. The theological problems African Christians are dealing with and the insights they are gaining from such reflection might be the key for the west to deal with the cultural issues being raised there.