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HUMAN FALLENNESS AND AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES

Mark ENEMALI, CSSp

INTRODUCTION

Many Christian theologians focusing on the African context, especially Africa south of the Sahara, have attempted a construction of African theology or theologies and many have written about the developments in Christianity in Africa, but the question of human fallenness appears to have been neglected.¹ To my knowledge, no monograph on this issue

¹ There is a paucity of literature on the subject of sin as we can see: Adeolu Adegbola, "The Theological Basis of Ethics," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (edited by Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth; New York: Orbis Books, 1969), 116-136; Harry Sawyerr, "Sin and Forgiveness in Africa," *Frontier* 7 (1964): 60-63; "Sin and Salvation: Soteriology Viewed from the African Situation," in *Relevant Theology for Southern Africa: Report on a Consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Natal, September 12-21, 1972* (edited by Hans Jurgen Becken; Durban: Lutheran Publishing House); Simon S. Maimela, "The Atonement in the Context of Liberation Theology," *The Journal of Theology in Southern Africa* 39 (1982): 45-54; Simon S. Maimela, "Traditional African Anthropology and Christian Theology," *The Journal of Theology in Southern Africa* 76 (1991): 4-14; John Pobee, *Towards African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 99-118; John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Chicago: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1969), 204-215; John Samuel Mbiti "God, Sin and Salvation in African Religion," *AME Zion Quarterly* 100 (1989): 2-8. Gerhardus Cornelius Oosthuizen, *Post Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study* (London: C. Hurst & Co. TTCL, 1968), 188-205; Xolani Sherlock-Lee Sakuba, "The Relationship

currently exists.² A popular assumption in the African worldview that seems to have found its way into the theology or theologies is the inherent goodness of humanity. This quality makes it possible for one to put the needs of others or the community above his/her own. This is reflected, for instance, in the understanding of the human being in terms of *ubuntu*.³ One with the spirit of *ubuntu* exemplifies the African conception of life in which one understands himself/herself as connected to the community of life. In fact, humanness in *ubuntu* has been compared to the image of God.⁴ Humans are essentially different from animals by this quality. *Ubuntu* is not far from what Placide Tempels calls vital force and Gabriel Setiloane calls *seriti*.⁵ The vital force is behind the actions of humanity and it originates from God. Setiloane argues that *seriti* is a manifestation of the vital force as it empowers humans to relate well with one another.⁶ Mbiti's understanding of communalism and Nyerere's idea of *ujamaa* (a Swahili word that means "extended family," "brotherhood" or "socialism") also seem to rely on this background.⁷ The

Between Sin and Evil in African Christian Theology," *A Magister of Theologiae Minithesis*, University of the Western Cape, November 2004.

² There are books on different manifestations of evil such as witchcraft, sorceries, demons, etc., but I haven't found one on sin per se.

³ Harvey Sindima, "Community of Life," *The Ecumenical Review* 41:4 (1989): 537-551; see also *Africa's Agenda: The Legacy of Liberalism and Colonialism in the Crisis of African Values* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995).

⁴ Augustine Chingwala Musopole, *Being Human in Africa: Towards an African Christian Anthropology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 177.

⁵ Placide Tempels, *Bantu philosophy* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1959); Gabriel Molehe Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986).

⁶ Setiloane, *African Theology*, 13.

⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 205; Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1962).

interconnection that exists in the community gives rise to the ethical imperative that frowns at the treatment of others as means to another end. A question arises as to how this view of the inherent goodness of the human person can be understood in the light of the pervasive corruption in the African continent.

The above question calls for a renewed treatment of the issue of sin or the fallenness of humanity within African Christian Theologies. The extent of humanity's need of grace remains unrealizable as long as inadequate attention is given to its propensity to sin. Alongside upholding the dignity of the human person as the image of God, the idea of human fallenness or tendency to sin is well represented in the Hebrew Bible and its reception by the early Christians as "the fall" or the effect of original sin. This makes it possible to speak of human responsibility with respect to the origin of corruption in the world and the need for the grace of Christ. In my opinion, the beautiful picture of the inherent goodness of the human person that is at the background of the communal living in traditional Africa as presented in the work of many African theologians, is overly optimistic. It might cause the human condition of sin to be neglected as a factor in the investigation of the origin of corruption in the modern African society. Consequently, the role played by the present generation of Africans with respect to the cause of its problems goes unnoticed, leading to less introspection and more finger pointing.

I will begin with the African worldview in terms of community life and individual freedom, which is the ideal context that is commonly thought in the work of theologians to characterize traditional Africa. This is followed by a description of the reality of sin and evil in African Religion.

The possibility of affirming the inherent goodness of the human person in the midst of the perpetration of evil in the society is questionable. I will briefly look at the biblical story of “the fall” as a helpful way to understand the goodness of creation and the human condition of corruption and suffering. Finally, I will present a brief assessment of the recent trends in African Christian theologies. It appears that while the question of sin is recognized in the African worldview, a fundamental aspect of its origin, which is the human propensity to sin, is not sufficiently developed by theologians. This might be an area in need of consideration especially as the theme of this year’s African Journal of Contextual Theology is *Christian Faith and African Cultural Renaissance*.

COMMUNITY LIFE AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

In the African worldview, the human person is integral and is essentially relational. The relationship is expressed in the various levels of existence: physical, spiritual, cosmological, and social.⁸ John Mbiti describes this worldview as constituting a web of relation made up of a hierarchy of beings – God first, followed by Spirits and Ancestors, and then human beings.⁹ The idea of the extended family where everyone is seen as related to the other is based on this. Relationship, here, comprises both the living and the living dead who are either past (ancestors) or remote (anamnestic). In the context of traditional Africa, it is claimed that all forms of inequality were abhorred. Land, as a means of production, was held in common and there were no

⁸ Fernando Domingues, *Christ Our Healer: A Theological Dialogue with Aylward Shorter* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), 62.

⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 205.

restrictions as to where to live, cultivate or hunt. The society was characterized by communal social responsibility. This sense of responsibility finds its expression in Julius Nyerere's Socialism '*Ujamaa*'. According to Nyerere, in traditional African society, everybody was a worker and there was no idling about. Security and hospitality were provided to the members by the society. Work was the very justification of the great socialist or communal achievement of which Africans are justly proud.¹⁰

The disposition to live and work together is solidarity. It is believed that this happened at all levels in traditional Africa. As Panteleon Iroegbu avers, "the foundation of solidarity was on the natural and common ties of origin, blood, culture, language, conviviality and worldview that characterize each community".¹¹ That is why Mbiti maintains that "Social order and peace are recognized by African people as essential and sacred".¹² We find a network of relations where everybody is related to everybody else through kinship ties. This bond needs to be maintained by the co-operation of the members of the community in solidarity, otherwise the relationship disintegrates. An act of an individual against another individual in the community affects the entire community. As a result, there are "laws, customs, set forms of behavior, regulations, rules, observances and taboos, constituting the moral code and ethics of a given community or society."¹³ The sanctity and power of the customs and regulations is grounded on the fact that they are seen to be instituted by God or national leaders. Going against this

¹⁰ Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 6.

¹¹ Panteleon Iroegbu, *Enwisdomisation and African Philosophy* (Owerri: International University Press 1994), 87.

¹² Mbiti, *African Religion & Philosophy*, 206.

¹³ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 205.

implies an injury to the social order and peace and consequently demands a punishment from God or the community of both the living and the dead.

In this arrangement the community is the standard of morality. To do harm or break a taboo meant upsetting the ontological balance or equilibrium of the community. Good acts are those approved by the community and are in consonance with the order and peaceful co-existence of the community, while evil acts are the ones prohibited by the community. Within this situation of a closely tied society, Mbiti discovers a paradox. This paradox applies to the fact that each community member remains naked before the other members of the community. There is no sin that is secret and the ethics is not transcendental but basically societal or communal. Thus, every misfortune in the community is blamed on somebody in the community and this, in some cases, gives rise to scapegoats in the society. The idea of communal life in traditional Africa reveals an underlying belief expressed in the saying, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am".¹⁴ Thus, life is life-in-community or life-with-others. Only in relation does one exist and in the face of conflict with the community one is expected to submit to the demands of the community.

The community is seen as a mere extension of the family. The reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories. And it is in being rooted in the community that people come to see themselves as humans. In other words, the individual is able to make sense of his/her self-identity only with reference to the group. This has an implication on the way freedom is viewed.

¹⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 108-109.

Freedom is understood not in the sense of individual self-rule or against the community. It is freedom in the community and this is unlike the Euro-modernists' view that the limitation of individual freedom is oppressive. African traditional society views the individual as free, integrated member of his/her community. In this society individualism is considered a taboo, and each member takes up the interest of the community at heart. The effort is to build a strong society and the more united one is to the community, the stronger and more secure she/he feels. More emphasis is therefore placed on one's duties in the society than on his/her rights. Ifeanyi Menkiti observes that in the African traditional societies, priority was given to the duties, which individuals owed to the group, and their rights, whatever they may be, were considered secondary to the performance of their duties.¹⁵

The fact that there is a lot of emphasis placed on the duties of the individual does not mean that the community is blind to the rights of the individual. The community accords respect for the rights and dignity of the human person and this implies recognition of one's freedom. Democratic freedom and equality of rights is the basis and rationality of social communion of the group. This freedom finds expression in one's rights to various liberties such as freedom to express oneself in family or communal gathering, freedom to participate in community's activities and actions, freedom of worship, freedom to belong to any of the communal associations, freedom to cultivate the land, to do hunting without restriction, and so on. Every citizen is an integral part of the community and therefore has the rights to take an equal part in government. The "common spirit" or what Nyerere

¹⁵ Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, *African Philosophy: An Introduction* (USA: University Press, 1984), 171-172.

calls African brotherhood, molds human relationships and creates an understandable single-mindedness in actions and relations.¹⁶ The humane interpersonal relationship, which exists, becomes the underlying principle for life in the community. The concern becomes the common good of people in the society. Activities are directed towards the good of the human person and so communal life is stripped of exploitations and denials. Freedom of the individual, which is inherent in the system because of the consensus of individuals, becomes protected, assured and preserved. Communal life is surely positive and not negative; it does not harbor any coercive tendency and does not lead to conflict. It rather leads to communal development and communal progress. A crucial question is, if this communal living was a reality how did sin or evil come in?

SIN AND THE ORIGIN OF EVIL IN AFRICAN RELIGION

Sin in African thought is the breaking of relationships within the community.¹⁷ Mbiti sees sin as the breakdown of social order and peace in the community and is punishable.¹⁸ The metaphysical sense is not talked about as much as the pragmatic aspect. Sin is considered here as generally connected with wrongdoing. It is usually connected to the human doer and to a wrong action.¹⁹ It consists essentially in going against life or destroying life. The idea that before the advent of Christianity, Africans had no sense of sin must be

¹⁶ Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 6.

¹⁷ Maimela, "The Atonement in the Context of Liberation Theology," 45-54.

¹⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200.

¹⁹ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1997), 161.

rejected.²⁰ Supporters of this wrong idea have argued in line with the mistaken notion that “primal societies such as the traditional African societies have a ‘shame culture’ in contradistinction to ‘guilt culture’ (e.g., Judaism and Christianity) because the *summum bonum* of the former is the enjoyment of time and public esteem and not a quiet conscience.”²¹ Transition from this realm of morality determined by respect for public opinion to the realm of morality determined by the sense of guilt or fear of God, it is argued, can take place only as a result of political and economic insecurity that results from human helplessness and religious anxiety.

Pobee rejects this view and insists on the idea of the existence of the sense of sin in traditional Africa. Arguing from the Akan culture he shows the high position given to the conscience in African Religion and maintains that the cultures in Africa should not be classified as shame culture. There is a constant reference to the Supreme Being as concerned with both public and private morality. Thus, one always called on God to adjudicate between his or her affairs and others. There is also the belief that every individual gets the life-soul from God and would return after death to render account to God. And finally, we have the role of the ancestors who are custodians of morality. They reward good life and punish the evil one.²² In the elaboration of the above four points he argues for the existence of a moral sense in Africa prior to Christianity.

²⁰ John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 102.

²¹ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 102-103.

²² Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 103.

One problem that comes to mind with the African understanding of sin is that the emphasis on order in the community and sin being a disruption of that order makes us to focus on the social aspect of sin alone. Again, since sin is viewed as wrongdoing, there is often a focus on the breaking of moral norms. Little or no attention is given to the aspect of the inner constitution of the human person. Since the human being is essentially good according to the traditional view and can cause evil only under the influence of external forces, we seem to have no room for the fallen nature of the human being. For everything that happens, mystical reasons are sought. "Frustrations, psychic disturbances, emotional tensions and other states of the inner person, are readily externalized and incarnated or made concrete in another human being, or in circumstances which lay the blame on the external agent."²³ This is perhaps why we cannot get over slavery, colonialism, bad governance, etc. as the causes of our misfortunes in Africa.

The idea of the inherent goodness of the human person in traditional African worldview is not unconnected with its myths of origins. Myth, as Paul Ricoeur describes it, is "a traditional narration which relates events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of men of today and in a general manner, establishing all the forms and action by which man understands himself in his world."²⁴ The myths in African Religion act in this way. They "attempt either to make sense or to impose sense of reality in general or some aspect of

²³ Alex Ojacor, "The Phenomenon of Evil in African Thought", *African Christian Studies* 18, 2 (2002): 93-119, esp. 101.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 6.

reality.”²⁵ The myths in African worldview do not have much to say about the human primordial experience of error as we find in the Hebrew Bible.

Most of the myths of the origin of the world present the image of a paradise at the beginning of creation. Evil was introduced by spiritual beings other than God. These myths speak of nature spirits on the one hand or human spirits on the other. Awolalu²⁶ finds within Africa some myths that talk about the origin of the separation between heaven and earth and the idea of sin as disobedience to God. The latter might constitute an attempt to relate the African myths to the story of “the fall” in Genesis 2–3, and might be guilty of importing a category from the Jewish Bible or the Christian thought into African mythology. As Ojacor observes, in Africa “one is not a ‘sinner’ by birth but by deed. As long as one is clean before one’s community and conscience, there is no sin.”²⁷

Many African societies associate the origin of evil with spiritual beings. The evil spirits cause unrest in the society as they inflict people with sicknesses and make them miserable and this is done easily. Evil spirits can bewitch someone and bring about mental problems.²⁸ The Zulu culture believes that mental problems are caused by the wandering spirits of the dead whose burial rituals have not been properly performed, and who indiscriminately take possession of people outside

²⁵ Paulinus Odozor, “Man and Meaning” in *The Colloquium: A Collection of Lectures Delivered at NAPS Symposia 1984/85 Session* (Ikot Ekpene: The Bigard Branch of NAPS 1985, Vol 1, No 1), 46-60, esp. 56.

²⁶ J. Omosade Awolalu & P. Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press and Book Industries, 1979), 67ff, 214ff.

²⁷ Ojacor, “The Phenomenon of Evil in African Thought”, 104.

²⁸ Ann Hales, “West African Beliefs about Mental Illness,” *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 32:2 (1996): 23-33.

their patrilineal descent.²⁹ It is also believed that there exist forces of nature that are neither good nor bad in themselves. These forces can be harnessed by powerful people who use them to cause evil. Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft belong to this area.³⁰ The interesting aspect is that of witchcraft where we see its phenomenon as a deliberate assault on love. Shirley Thorpe sees witchcraft as extreme hatred.³¹ This is common in African thought according to Ashworth.³² Parish makes a similar observation from her study of the Akan society.³³ For Ashworth and Parish, jealousy is at the background of witchcraft. So, at the heart of the phenomenon of witchcraft is the question of human greed and failure to love. According to Arazu “A witch cannot perform charity on a permanent basis.”³⁴ Their very nature renders this impossible. In fact, witchcraft by definition, is “extreme selfishness or wickedness”. It is the direct opposite of spirituality. “The witch has narrowed his or her consciousness and through the use of psychic powers induced by external substances (the witch substance) he or she performs actions that are based purely on selfish qualifications.... A witch is naturally

²⁹ Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice* (London: Academic Press, 1977), 146-150.

³⁰ Ojacob, “The Phenomenon of Evil in African Thought”, 97.

³¹ Shirley A. Thorpe, *African Traditional Religions* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1996).

³² Adam Ashworth, “Of Secrecy and the Commonplace: Witchcraft and Power in Soweto,” *Social Research* 63, 4 (1996): 183-208, esp. 191.

³³ Jane Parish, “The Dynamics of Witchcraft and Indigenous Shrines among the Akan,” *Africa* 69: 3, (1999): 426-446, esp. 438.

³⁴ Raymond Arazu, *Man Know Thyself* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2003), 86.

selfish.”³⁵ Hubert Bucher speaks of the neglect of the accepted norms of the society as being at the background.³⁶

While individual human guilt is acknowledged in African moral thought, there seems to be too much emphasis on the influence of external forces. This seems to render the human person helpless and reduces her/his responsibility for the evil in the society. Without giving adequate attention to human freedom and will, it is impossible to see the role we play in the perpetration of the woes of the contemporary society. The biblical story of “the fall” supports this point. Sin entered the world through the misuse of human freedom. This is one important way in which the biblical writers dealt with the origin of corruption in the universe. Let us quickly look at this.

THE FALL IN BIBLICAL TRADITION

The Hebrew Bible presents a range of explanations concerning sin. An important view is that of a disruption introduced by human disobedience into the perfect world that God created. This explanation blames human disobedience as the root of much of what we call suffering, injustice and oppression in the world. A close reading of Genesis 2–3 reveals the attempt to explain the origin of evil in this good world created by the good and beneficent God.³⁷ The human being is responsible for his problem of suffering and

³⁵ Arazu, *Man Know Thyself*, 86.

³⁶ Hubert Bucher, *Spirits and Power: An Analysis of Shona Cosmology* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 110.

³⁷ James Chukwuma Okoye, *Genesis 1–11: A Narrative-Theological Commentary* (Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 46.

corruption in the world.³⁸ This is the primary purpose of this text.³⁹ The Christian doctrine of original sin and “the fall” is based on these texts. Original sin is the condition of sinfulness inherited from our first parents (Adam and Eve) as a result of their disobedience. The sin consisted in eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that the Lord God commanded them not to eat. After their transgression of the commandment they fell from grace and this condition can only be cured by Christ. Modern biblical interpretations have challenged this reading of the story of Adam and Eve as “the fall.”⁴⁰

This is worth further consideration since the plain sense of Genesis 2-3 does not clearly speak of original sin. In terms of the interpretation of this text, one wonders why nothing is said about the transgression of Adam ushering in sin until the letters of Paul. It is equally puzzling that the entire Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus seem to have ignored this issue. Again, Judaism has no room for original sin. What is clearly maintained is that Adam’s sin brought death, not the necessity of sin. According to 4 Ezra 3:7, “you laid upon him one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and for his descendants.” The larger narrative of Genesis 1–

³⁸ Notice that the temptation by the serpent did not take away the choice of the human being to obey the Lord’s command.

³⁹ See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Pt. 1, From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 71.

⁴⁰ For recent reviews and discussions on this issue, see James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1–20; R. W. L. Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988): 1–27; and R. Di Vito, “The Demarcation of Divine and Human Realms,” in *Creation in Biblical Traditions*, ed. R. Clifford and J. Collins, CBQMS 24 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 39–56.

11 acknowledges the inclination of the human desires to sin (cf. Genesis 6:5; and 8:21), but no connection is made between this inclination and the sin of Adam and Eve. So how do we understand the Christian teaching about the fall and the necessity of the grace of Christ for justification? This comes to surface retrospectively “through a Christological prism.”⁴¹

Although the plain reading of the passage does not speak of original sin, the doctrine is well founded on the text as will be shown below. For a proper comprehension of this issue it is pertinent to look at the creation stories in Genesis 1–3 within which the story of the fall is located. While we, in the modern age, preoccupied with the scientific outlook, focus on how creation came about, the ancients told their stories of creation in order to provide “a cosmic foundation for the meaning and purpose of human life.”⁴² Creation is understood properly only by relating it to its end. The fall, which comes with the stories of creation shows the role of humanity in obstructing creation from reaching its goal. There are two creation accounts in the book of Genesis. The first (1:1–2:4a) is usually understood to be the priestly account (P) and the second (2:4b–3:24) is the J (from the German rendering of the tetragrammaton, YHWH i.e., JHWH) account. The P writer sees the purpose of creation as being revealed on Mount Sinai, which is the establishment of God’s abode in the midst of his people. This idea comes to the fore as we find some parallels between the first creation account and the construction of the

⁴¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #388; see also Tzvi Novick, *An Introduction to the Scriptures of Israel: History and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 103.

⁴² Gary Anderson, *Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament: Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 62.

tabernacle in the book of Exodus.⁴³ Notice the six days of creation and six days of Moses' presence on Mount Sinai before God drew him near on the seventh day (Exod 24:15b–18). In Exodus 24:16 the glory of the Lord descends and the cloud covers Mount Sinai for six days. On the seventh God spoke to Moses out of the cloud and instructed him concerning the construction of the sanctuary (Exodus 25–31), which the people construct in Exodus 35–40. Notice that the instruction was given in a set of seven addresses, which concludes with the command concerning the Sabbath rest on the seventh day (Exodus 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12). Seven times we have the refrain “as the Lord had commanded Moses” accompanying the fashioning of the priestly vestments (Exodus 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31), and the erection of the tabernacle (Exodus 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). This highlights Moses' strict adherence to the blueprint that was revealed to him. Moses' completion of the work (Exodus 40:33) recalls the conclusion of God's work of creation (Gen 2:1–2).⁴⁴ Again, God's “rest” on the seventh day parallels the descent of the glory of God on the tabernacle after seven works of construction (Exodus 40:34). A meeting point between earth and heaven is now expected to be seen here. “Just as the Sabbath stands both within and outside time,” Anderson maintains, “so the hallowed ground of the sanctuary is situated on earth yet points beyond earth's finite

⁴³ See Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 142–45; and Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 63.

⁴⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 56–69; and M. Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple, and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of the Sitz im Leben in Gen 1:1–2:3,” in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 501–12.

contours."⁴⁵ Creation is thus moving towards its goal of communion with the divine according to P.

It is interesting to note that while God did all the work of creation in the first story, in the construction of the tabernacle, which is creation in miniature, God involves the participation of the human person. This human participation was highly valued by the rabbis as they saw Moses' action as causing the divine presence (the *shekina*) to come and dwell in a work of human hands.⁴⁶ This rabbinic position is summarized by Peter Schäfer thus, "The creation of the world is not, if one accepts this view, solely the work of God but also the work of humankind: only when the man Moses erects the tabernacle is God's created order brought to completion."⁴⁷ He maintains that the completion of the tabernacle was necessary because from the beginning God created the world in order to be in relationship with humans. "Without such a relationship between God and humans," he argues, "the creation of the world would be senseless and superfluous."

The connection seen between the construction of the tabernacle and the P account of creation echoes a popular view from the ancient Near East that saw the temple as a "microcosm of what the world was in macrocosm."⁴⁸ As the P theologian has it, the cult is set up by Moses exactly as he was commanded culminating in the lighting of the sacrificial pyre in Leviticus 8–9. The daily sacrifices can now begin (Exod 29:38–42; Leviticus 9); we are approaching the goal of creation, which realizes God's promise to dwell with his people (Exodus 29:45), and the people prostrate in adoration (Lev 9:23–24). The completion of these events was meant to

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 63.

⁴⁶ Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 63.

⁴⁷ Peter Schäfer, "Tempel und Schöpfung," *Kairos* 16 (1974): 132–33.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 65.

bring in peace and tranquility as shown by ancient Near Eastern parallels concerning the time of temple construction.⁴⁹ Everything is well until Moses' strict execution of the command under God's close watch ends and human autonomy in the hands of the priests, Aaron and his sons begins the task of caring for the cult (Leviticus 10). Immediately, we have the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu offering a strange fire that leads to the death of the two priests. And the sin did not end there but it spread through the entire priestly household, leading to Moses' harsh rebuke (Lev 10:16–20). The immediacy of the human error by the priests here, in a sense, is the original sin according to P. In other words, as soon as there is an experience of election, Israel sins. This is seen in other founding moments of the nation of Israel.⁵⁰ The final form of the book of Exodus, however, has the story of the golden calf (Exodus 32–34) inserted between the command to build the tabernacle and its execution. This story, which perhaps was unknown to P's original legend of the tabernacle, might, in its current location, serve to highlight the fact that before ever the command to build the tabernacle was executed there was an error as the people committed idolatry in the absence of Moses. This insertion by the editors, according to Anderson, reduces the severity of the priestly error in Leviticus 10 and emphasizes the immediacy and universality of the sin of the golden calf.⁵¹ In other words, before the priests committed their error all of Israel had already sinned.

⁴⁹ See Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle," JAOS 105 (1985): 21–30; and Avigdor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings*, JSOTSup 115 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

⁵⁰ See the establishment of the northern kingdom under Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26–40; 12:25–33; 13:1–2); Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 68–69.

⁵¹ Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 70.

The J author also accompanies his creation story with the fall. His story of Eden is closely related to the Epic of Gilgamesh (attested from the seventh century BCE). This epic as well as some other similar myths from the ancient Near East have the hierarchical distinctions that separate animals, humans and the gods. The gap between the humans and the gods is so thin and the humans continually strive to attain immortality or bridge the gap between them and the divine without success. The gods do not issue any command to prevent the humans from trying to do this. Our biblical story has a similar hierarchical dynamic and the humans attempting to bridge the gap between them and God, but in its rendering of the story in light of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, a command is inserted, which Adam and Eve disobeyed and, in the process, incurred death.⁵² It has been argued that the story of Eden has parallels with the larger national story of Israel.⁵³ As Joseph Blenkinsopp observes, the establishment of the human beings in Eden recalls the "rest" in conquest stories, the building of the tabernacle and the enjoyment of the sabbath.⁵⁴ The continuity of life in this environment depends on the obedience of God's commandment and death is brought by disobedience. This appears to be similar to the Deuteronomic theology that says obey and you will live, disobey and you will die.

The placement of the J story, Anderson notes, says something "about the propensity of human nature toward disobedience."⁵⁵ In the first creation story, God puts everything in order and then creates the human person who

⁵² Novick, *An Introduction to the Scriptures of Israel*, 104-109.

⁵³ Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 70.

⁵⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 66.

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 71.

would rule over all. At the end God rested. The J account that follows is tragic. The story begins with everything being put in place by God once more, but as soon as the human being is left on his own, disaster strikes. It is not clear if Adam and Eve ever had a good time together in the garden of Eden before the approach of the serpent. Adam and Eve transgressed the very first commandment God gave to them. Expulsion from the garden follows just like the nation Israel disobeyed God and was exiled. So, the final editor has consciously placed the J story where it is in order to tell the story of Israel that was to unfold.⁵⁶ “Eden is Torah in miniature.”⁵⁷ Even though it is not naturally easy to obey according to the story of Eden, disobedience is still a choice.

Nicholas Fogliacco speaks of “the conscious and willful misuse of freedom, as the root of suffering in the world.”⁵⁸ Fogliacco describes sin as involving a mystery that moves “from its innocent start, through its complex psychological development, to its real nature, and all the way to its disastrous effects.”⁵⁹ This is clearly expressed in the story of Genesis 3. Placing the temptation chronologically before the first fall implies that temptation is not a consequence of sin but “is inherent in human existence as such – in theological jargon, it is not infralapsarian but supralapsarian, like work”. From this he concludes that human condition as such is tempted. There is a constant tension between the good to be done and the evil to be avoided. Hence human existence is a tempted existence.

⁵⁶ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 66.

⁵⁷ Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 71.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Fogliacco, *The God of All Consolation* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 18.

⁵⁹ Fogliacco, *God of All Consolation*, 19.

Sin from the point of view of this story of the fall of our biblical ancestors has three different levels. At the first level is "disobedience by which they set themselves, consciously and deliberately, in opposition to the will of their Creator." The second level is found in the words of the tempter, which points to the craving to usurp God's throne. "To sin means trying to overthrow God." The third level concerns "the root of all evil which is trickery and deception." For Fogliacco, "sin finds its way into human psychology through error, actually through the most fatal error that could possibly exist, for it concerns, neither material creatures, nor the human being, but God himself. Sin disfigures the face of God."⁶⁰ This is a great advancement made by the Hebrew mind through revelation.

In the New Testament Paul distinguishes between "*hamartia*, Sin, and *hamartemata*, sins, offences, transgressions." While *hamartemata* concerns individual sins *hamartia* refers to Sin as a cosmic power. According to Joseph Fitzmyer, "*Hamartia* is the personified malevolent force, Sin (with the capital S), hostile to God and alienating human beings from him; it strode upon the stage of human history at the time of Adam's transgression and has dominated <<all human beings.>>"⁶¹ John the Baptist praised Jesus as the one sent by God to destroy the power of evil in the world.⁶² In both Paul and John we see the apocalyptic view of

⁶⁰ Fogliacco, *God of All Consolation*, 19-20.

⁶¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (The Anchor Bible, XXXIII; New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1993), 411.

⁶² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (The Anchor Bible, XXIX; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 60.

“the two ages or ‘acons,’ the first of which is subject to the power of sin and evil introduced by the fall.”⁶³

The resurrection of Christ has ramifications for other human beings. For Paul to argue this, he uses the idea of the universality of the effect of Adam’s sin (1 Cor 15:20–23). While Paul argues here for the cosmic significance of the resurrection, in Romans 5:12 he uses the same argument for the universal nature of human sin. All are in need of the benefits of Christ’s resurrection. The topic of sin or the fallenness of the human being is important and should be given adequate attention because without it we lose sight of the role of Christ in our salvation.

RECENT APPROACHES TO CORRUPTION AND SUFFERING IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES

One of the most fundamental aspects of human experience is sin. Elochukwu Uzukwu describes the situation in Africa as ‘the face with many scars.’⁶⁴ The most glaring thing in Africa is misery noticed from its series of wars, sickness, poverty, bad governance, witchcraft and so on. Many of the citizens of Africa flock to Europe and America in search of better life. The World Bank and the IMF are not helping the matter either as are witnesses to the rise in capitalism and the policies that are more in favor of the developed countries. Hence Africa has a wounded face. As a way of responding to these crises theologians in Africa begin from this context. They hope to suggest viable “models for the reconstruction of our societies”.⁶⁵ Most of the work in

⁶³ Fogliacco, *God of All Consolation*, 21.

⁶⁴ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 1.

⁶⁵ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 2.

theology done in Africa can be characterized as contextual. They mainly fall within the category of inculturation theology or liberation theology.

Liberation theology in Africa sets itself at assessing this concrete situation in order to see the underlying factors. "It tries to trace the historical origin of our burden from the time of slavery through colonialism to independence." It is not lost in the blame of the past. On the contrary "it calls for a dynamic, as opposed to an archaeological reading of the social history of African societies, an approach which emphasizes the fundamental element of change and development in African history and traditions."⁶⁶ It aims at making the church committed to social transformation. One interesting fruit of this enterprise is the successful overthrow of apartheid in South Africa, a sign of hope for the future.

The task of social reconstruction demands a return to our own African sources. We return to those values, social, political, economic, and religious, which have always helped African communities to cope with the crises that arise in the wake of their "encounter with the realities of the modern world." As Uzukwu argues, it is through the reassessment of our history that we shall be able to move forward through reconstruction. The only way forward is through a "retracing of our steps back to the fundamental elements of our heritage." This is the avenue through which we can get integral healing. While not indulging in the total condemnation of missionary work and the negative effects of colonialism (in fact, he points to some positive effects like reading and writing), he asserts categorically that "the retrieval and modernization of our African cultural matrix is

⁶⁶ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 3.

the necessary route toward healing the political, economic, social and religious misery of Africa.”⁶⁷ In this way he suggests “a rigorous sociohistorical and comparative study.” So, we have to focus on the “dimensions of African societies and cultures – past and present” in order to get our raw materials for theological reflection.

The other stream of theology in Africa is the one of inculturation. This also uses African culture, ancient and modern as its context. According to Uzukwu it is “first and foremost a reaffirmation of African culture and identity, denied by Western colonialism and Christian missionary evangelism.” Second, it is connected with the incarnation of the word of Christ in our midst. Third, “the Jesus living among us in his community or church listens to new questions arising from the said community’s reception of his message.” And fourth there is the aspect of the church responding to the message of the living Christ in her midst through liturgy, spirituality, discipline, ethics, and theology.⁶⁸

It is clear that we have been disoriented culturally and only a cultural reorientation is the way forward. It is true that “we are both the victims and agents of the negation of our fundamental cultural values, which are the resources we bring into our encounter with other groups of people and which may still constitute viable resources for the transformation of the continent.”⁶⁹ And no doubt the solution suggested by Uzukwu and many of our theologians, liberation or inculturation, are great. However, there is an aspect that is almost taken for granted. This is the interior of the human person. Focusing

⁶⁷ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 5.

⁶⁸ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 5.

⁶⁹ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 6.

on society and culture alone seems to be one-sided and thus, places the problem of Africa on external causes only.

The focus in traditional Africa on communal morality does not deny personal responsibility or interiorization of ethical norms. Good and evil arise from the interior of the human being.⁷⁰ This is a case of centralizing the human heart as the most important when it comes to individual decision making. It is not very much separated from the Christian conscience. The heart is also the foundation for an understanding of African ethics, according to Bujo.⁷¹ A good conscience, Bujo maintains, is one that is open – open to others, ready to listen to other views so as to inform itself. In that way, it is able to act in view of the demands of common good and fraternal love for others.⁷²

Even though we do not talk of the individual without the community, the individual is still unique and irreplaceable within the community. There is a relationship of reciprocity. The individual acts in accordance with the good of the community and the community in turn does everything to protect the interest of the individual and sees that he/she does not stray. Self-realization is sought by the individual within the context of the community. Bujo observes that when freedom is really understood, what is important “is not what a person does concretely, but rather the faculty of being able to decide about oneself and to make oneself”.⁷³

⁷⁰ Benezet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 98.

⁷¹ Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation*, 101.

⁷² Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation*, 46.

⁷³ Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation*, 19-20.

It is in this aspect of self-making in freedom that we find some problem. It is clear that there is no certainty that the human being will always make the correct choice. Human greed and selfishness exact a lot of influence on one's choices. And so, we can never be sure of the next action of the individual. The kind of perfect situation said to be present in traditional Africa as described above seems to be idealistic and different from present concrete experience. It appears to presume the goodness of the human person and does not account for the issue of human fallenness. To rely on the assumption of the inherent goodness of humanity and therefore base morality on the process of open communal discourse as Bujo seems to argue in the concept of palaver, is problematic. After rejecting Natural Law's claim to absolute universality, Bujo insists on the process of palaver as the standard for judging morality.⁷⁴ Experience teaches us that we cannot underplay what the human person can do if unchecked. In the process of self-making in freedom, one might decide to turn against God and others and in the process be alienated from God and the community. It is important to have objective categories towards which the community aspires and at the same time recognize the fact that the human person is capable of causing evil.

CONCLUSION

So far, I have ventured into an area that seems to be outside the frequent consideration of Theologians. This might serve as an impetus for some further theological reflections in this line. I have tried to show that the communal living said to exist in traditional Africa had at its background the presumption of the inherent goodness of the human being.

⁷⁴ Benezet Bujo, *Foundations of An African Ethic* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 45-71.

This causes the origin of evil to be placed only in external forces. It is important that the work of theology be aimed at changing lives in the community, otherwise it is not worth doing. The starting point of our theologizing should be the recognition of our fallenness as humans and capability of error, making our need of God's grace inevitable. Our crises should not be blamed on outside forces only but on all of us.

Coupled with the idea of self-identification is the challenge we also bring to our culture. As Shorter observes, "the Gospel invites people to reappraise their cultures in the light of radically new values – values that turn human thinking upside-down." He maintains that "If human structures can be vitiated by sin, then human cultures can be similarly vitiated. Cultures can be sinful and destructive. They can be 'cultures of death', rather than of life."⁷⁵ African Christian theologians need to give more emphasis to the question of the tendency to sin and the need for the grace of Christ. This doesn't appear to be a favorable area for many perhaps because of the fact that in African Traditional Religion there is no talk about original sin. The point I am simply making is that too much emphasis on history – slavery, colonialism - and bad leadership tends to undermine the role the present generation plays in the perpetration of the misery in Africa. We need this awareness in order to put into check our greed and selfishness that always spur us into doing so many unwanted things. In paying a close attention to this fact we shall be able to realize the difference that the message of Christ brings to our lives as individuals and as a community.

⁷⁵ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Eugene: Orbis Books, 1999), 83-84.