

THE PLACE OF THEOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE AND THE PUBLIC SQUARE: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Theology is the study of how to speak truly of God and of all things in relation to God. But theologians can't approach the object of their study the way biologists study living creatures or geologists the earth. God cannot be empirically examined. God is the creator of all things, not to be identified with any part of the universe or even with the universe as a whole. Speaking of God thus poses unique challenges. If God had not condescended to communicate to creatures something of his light, we would be in the dark. Theologians aren't fiction writers, either: We're not making this up, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche notwithstanding. Theologians are simply children who love their father and want to know him better; who trust their father's wisdom (Matt. 18:3), and, for that very reason, keep asking "Why?" It seems urgent for African Christians to 'own' their theological reflection, rather than borrow it from others. This means taking seriously their African heritage. This requires the theological quest in the broader context of political, educational, literary, and religious factors in Africa. It is not easy to determine exactly what African Theology portends. Some theologians today contend that the task of African theologian is to provide a clear and comprehensive description of the African Christian faith. Other theologians emphasize the importance of translating faith into terms that are intelligible to the African cultures. For others, African Christian theology must be defined as thinking about important issues from the perspective of the faith of African Christians. And still others insist that theology must reflect on the praxis of Christian faith within an oppressed community. This Paper explores the role Theology can play in the African context. It argues that Theology matters and has some fundamental roles to play in the academy, the Church, and society as a whole. It concludes by affirming that theology in Africa is needed today, more than ever, especially in Church pews and circles of piety: for a wider theological vision and critical principles to keep: a) Unbridled Piety, b) Naïve Fundamentalism, and c) Misguided religious favor within proper boundaries.

Keywords: Theology, African Perspective, Public Square

Introduction

Theology is an objective study with over 2000 years of intellectual history. Unfortunately, in modern times, it ranks very low on the totem pole of academic status. Theology goes beyond just knowing the faith, it seeks to deepen an individual's understanding and love of God, while helping them appreciate the beauty of his revelation in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Faith seeks understanding, and it is faith seeking understanding that gives rise to theology. In defining Theology, Vanhoozer is right on target, when he observes that: "theology is neither a nine-to-five job nor a career. To know and speak truly of God is a vocation that requires more than academic or professional qualifications. The image one should have in mind is not the professor with a tweed jacket, but rather the disciples who dropped everything to follow Jesus. Becoming a theologian means following God's Word where it leads with all one's mind, heart, soul, and strength"¹. Thomas Aquinas' definition of theology is worth pondering upon. He says, "theology is taught by God, teaches of God, and leads to God." William Ames, a Puritan, uses language much like Aquinas's: "Theology is the doctrine of living to God." Theology is more than an academic exercise, more even than knowing God; it's ultimately about cultivating godliness, in oneself and one's community. Theology's proper ends are both contemplative and practical. Vanhoozer further cautions that, if one sees God as a means to worldly fame, power, or popularity, then theology is not their calling. There are already many, who speak of God for the wrong reasons, which means they are not speaking truly of the one true God. Becoming a theologian involves not only coming to know God (theology is simultaneously art, science, and craft), but also becoming a certain kind of person, one whose created intelligence has been illumined by the Holy Spirit.²

John Henry Newman wrote of three dimensions, or three offices, of leadership in the Church: the intellectual, the devotional, and the political. The first office is exercised by theologians, both clerical and lay, the second is expressed in popular piety and the lives of the saints, while the third is the office of governing the Church. All three are indispensable, and sometimes, although not too often, all three are exercised by the same person.³

Hans Urs von Balthasar came up with a similar typology in his reflections on the Pauline, Johannine, and Petrine dimensions of ecclesial leadership. The theologian

¹ Vanhoozer, Kevin, J. "Letter to an Aspiring Theologian", First Things, August 2018.

² Vanhoozer, Kevin, J. "Letter to Aspiring Theologian", First Things, August 2018.

³ Newman, John Henry. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946.

penetrates deeply into the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of the faith, sometimes probing and experimenting. Sometimes, as we say today, pushing the envelope. The saints exemplify the lived power of the faith in the holiness of service to God and neighbor. And the bishops draw on both in holding the community together in advancing with apostolic zeal the common mission of Christ through his Church. Of course, these are “ideal types,” and the various dimensions of leadership frequently overlap.⁴

The Church has known many outstanding bishops who were also theologians and also saints. One thinks, for instance, of Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Anselm of Canterbury, and, in our time, John Paul the Great. Certainly, Benedict XVI is a theologian of great distinction and may one day be acknowledged as a saint. Early-twentieth-century Catholic theology was dominated by the “modernist” school, marked by higher criticism, questioning of the Church, and assimilation with modern culture. Several popes fought this trend by silencing and deposing theologians. In 1962, Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council, bringing about significant change. In his book, “The Analogical Imagination”, David Tracy, argues that theology must be public and interact with three distinct audiences: the academy, the Church, and society as a whole.⁵

Theology and the Church

Rowan Williams argues that there are three approaches to theology: the “celebratory,” the “communicative,” and the “critical.”⁶ The “celebratory” is the “attempt to draw out and display connections of thought and image so as to exhibit the fullest possible range of significance in the language used. It is typically the language of hymnody and preaching,” but it can also be found in the work of Dante and Langland, Byzantine iconography, and some of “the more intelligent modern choruses.”⁷ Williams also notes that celebratory theology is the dominant mode of reflection in the Eastern Orthodox Church and, in some cases, in the work of western theologians, like that of Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁸ “Communicative” theology is, by contrast, what Williams describes as “theology experimenting with the rhetoric of its uncommitted environment.”⁹ What Williams is referring to here might also be described as apologetic theology, as long as one hews fairly close to the classical definition given to that enterprise. It is the effort to “persuade or comment, to witness

⁴ The references in the text are to *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, translated by André Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986 [1974]).

⁵ Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the culture of pluralism*. Herder and Herder, 1998.

⁶ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology, Challenges in Contemporary Theology*, eds., Gareth Jones and Lewis Ayres (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000): xiii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii

⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv

⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

to the gospel's capacity for being at home in more than one cultural environment, and to display enough confidence to believe that this gospel can be rediscovered at the end of a long and exotic detour through strange idioms and structures of thought.”¹⁰

Williams seems to imply that this task only becomes necessary or important when celebratory theology “becomes so densely worked that the language is in danger of being sealed in on itself,” but it is unclear why that would necessarily be the case. Described as a separate theological endeavor, communicative theology could easily be understood as a parallel and complementary effort. Widening the audience that the church has for its message and broadening the categories at its disposal, communicative theology vindicates the church's claim to universality and embraces a wider world. Examples that Williams offers include the use made of Stoic and Platonic categories by the Apologists, Clement, and Origen or feminist theory, as used by Sarah Coakley.¹¹

The third endeavor that Williams describes is critical theology. Here again, he offers a somewhat linear description of the relationship between critical theology and the preceding theological endeavor. Arguing that communicative theology takes the theologian into a struggle with the question as to what is “continuous with what has been believed” and with what “the 'fundamental categories' really mean,” the task becomes “critical” – “alert to its own inner tensions and irresolution.”¹² Once the theologian embarks on this task, Williams notes it can go in a variety of shapes. But it runs in two fundamentally different directions: toward either “agnosticism” and “even nihilism” or “towards a rediscovery of the celebratory.”¹³

As before, it is not clear that the strains in a communicative theology are the only occasion for critical theology. One might reasonably argue that the critical task is essential to the articulation of the Christian message as culture changes and time passes. The critical task in that sense is not tied to either the failure of Christian categories or questions about the necessity or coherence of those categories.

Ultimately, the way in which we navigate the theological task can be more or less life-giving. A celebratory theology that becomes moribund betrays the lively and lived connection with God that the church depends upon. Communicative theology that values the cultural assumptions of its surroundings over the native language of the faith's essential assumptions betrays its task. And, plainly, a critical theology that trends toward agnosticism and nihilism will undermine the church's relationship with the Resurrected Christ.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., xiv-xv

¹³ Ibid., xv.

As Williams notes, lively theology is never confined to one of the theological tasks to the exclusion of the others.¹⁴ Theology, he notes, is the product of “an essential restlessness in the enterprise of Christian utterance that reflects the eschatological impulse at its heart”; and it resists “any attempt to picture the world as immanently ordered or finished.”¹⁵ But the restlessness that Williams describes is not native to theology per se and his description of its origin as “eschatological” – though accurate — masks a deeper reason for that restlessness. It is rooted in the experience of the Resurrected Christ, shaped by baptism into the body of Christ, and fed by the liturgy and the prayer life of the church.

Today, the failure to acknowledge the necessity of all three tasks and the tendency to emphasize one task to the exclusion of the other two presents the greatest theological challenge that the church faces. Those who do nothing but advocate for a lifeless reassertion of the church's doctrine court one set of problems. Those who do nothing but advocate a critical theology unmoored in the church's celebratory court another set. But because the conversation about theology is always a conversation about God's hope for the church and the world, this is not an abstract challenge. It is a lived, spiritual, and missional challenge as well. Attending conscientiously to all three tasks in an integrated fashion is the only solution.

Does theology really matter?

This question has been answered by Frederick W. Schmidt in his latest article on the *Patheos Magazine*. His answer is in the affirmative: “Yes, theology still matters”! I will borrow substantially from the contours of his argument because they are not only intellectually stimulating but they also convincingly address the points at issue. So why does Theology matter?¹⁶

One: As Abraham Maslow's hierarchy suggests, human beings need not only to survive, but to have reasons for surviving, something larger, more meaningful. Theology is inherently about meaning making and while it speaks to the importance of human life, the subject of our existence is, itself, tied to the larger significance of our lives as creatures made in the image of God.

Two: It is a false dichotomy to argue that we cannot or should not give our attention to anything but the exigencies of the moment. To be sure, we can and should attend to issues that threaten the survival and safety of others, but it is not enough to survive, and survival is often tied to issues of meaning making. It is also rare that we lack the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹⁶ Schmidt, Frederick. “Does Theology Matter”, *Patheos Magazine*, 8 June, 2022.

time or the ability to attend to both concerns. So, suggesting that we must choose between the two is misleading.

Three: Each generation contributes to the world, not just for its own sake, but for the sake of generations to come. Confronting issues that might seem abstract or without relevance is inevitably a part of that process. It is not necessarily possible to see into our own futures, let alone the future of other generations. So, it is difficult to predict what will be “relevant” or “useful” at some, as yet unknown point in the future.

Four: The journey into God is a journey into the infinite. Theology is ultimately about defining that journey. It is about how we understand God, about God's redemptive purposes, and about our obligations before God. As such, the theological task has its own value – for us and for those who follow us. To neglect that task is to fail in our responsibility to them.

Five: We take as much or as little knowledge of God into a crisis as we have already nurtured. Having worked for years with people grappling with loss and grief, it is painful to watch people grapple with distorted conceptions of God, prayer, and the ways in which God's presence is manifested in the world. A piecemeal answer to those questions in one moment does not guarantee that people will be well prepared to face future crises. Being well prepared to face a crisis requires a larger undertaking, including the formation of our souls and our minds.

Finally, this needs to be said: We may think that we live in extraordinary times that require a new and different sense of urgency. But, in fact, that is not true. Our times are more dangerous than some, less dangerous than others. And our times, like every other period in human history, are lived out in the presence of God. There are, then, theological issues that demand our attention, regardless of the challenges that we face, because they impinge upon timeless and transcendent considerations. Talking not just about the theological task, but the larger challenge of teaching and learning,

Four Basic Types of Theology in Africa

Inculturation Theology

African inculturation theology, is simply referred to as African theology. This theology is an attempt to give African expression to the Christian faith within a theological framework. It involves a conscious engagement of European Christian thinking and African religious thought in serious dialogue for the purpose of integrating Christianity into the life and culture of African people. Furthermore, inculturation theology is a form of contextualization. The context into which the Gospel is placed in this case is usually the traditional African culture. The preaching

and praying and singing of African Christians throughout the history of the African church are forms of the inculturation of the Gospel. Often these forms of inculturation are in the local African language. That is why, Anglican priest John Samuel Mbiti rightly states that “aided by the biblical revelation and faith in Jesus Christ,” Africans built their approach to Christianity on a foundation that already existed in traditional African religions. However, African cultures that have adopted Christianity view religious practice and salvation quite differently from European cultures. Mbiti holds that a respectful understanding of the differences can help to ensure the viability of the Christian church in Africa.

The inculturation of the Gospel was done to make the Gospel relevant to the African situation. In 1983, Osadolor Imasogie wrote, “Christianity, for many Africans, remains a foreign religion. . . . It is only when incarnation takes place that Christianity ceases to be a foreign religion.”¹⁷ Even Byang Kato said, “Contextualize without compromise.”¹⁸ But the results of this inculturation exercise have been mixed. At times the result has been pure syncretism or a return to African traditional religion. Gabriel Setiloane said that “we have learnt nothing new about religion from the missionaries. . . . But we Africans are bringing something to Christianity: a view of Divinity much higher, deeper, and all-pervasive.”¹⁹ Bolaji Idowu concluded his book on African Traditional Religion by praising a “faithful remnant whose loyalty to the religion of their forbears will continue steadfast.”²⁰ Unfortunately, the African culture is changing rapidly. The African culture is becoming more urbanized and westernized. Many of our young people are far removed from the traditional African religion. It seems that inculturation theology is neglecting the pressing social issues in our society. The main question is: how to speak about God in a continent where people are oppressed, exploited, dehumanized and are daily saddened.?

Liberation theology

Liberation theology is becoming very popular in most parts of Africa. There are three subcurrents in this theology. One is based on the indigenous socioeconomic system, the second takes after the Latin American model, and the third involves a combination of elements from both approaches. They seek genuine human promotion in the context of the poverty and political powerlessness of Africa, and take the form of Christian reflection within the context. The liberationists believe that the gospel has a liberating message for Africans in their state of poverty, oppression, and exploitation. Though young, these theologies unquestionably excel

¹⁷ IMASOGIE, O., *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1983), pp. 23-24.

¹⁸ KATO, B., *Biblical Christianity in Africa* (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1985), p. 38.

¹⁹ SETILOANE, G., “Where Are We in African Theology?” in *African Theology en Route*, e. K. Appiah Kubi and S. Torress (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), pp. 59-65 (63)

²⁰ IDOWU, B., *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), p.208

in terms of output.

Instead of focusing on the traditional African culture, liberation theology is passionately concerned with rectifying the glaring injustices in our society. Liberation theology began in this continent in South Africa, taking the form of Black Theology. Alan Boesak and Desmond Tutu are two early representatives of South African Black Theology. In the subsequent years, liberation theology moved beyond racial issues. Socioeconomic liberation has become a major concern of liberation theology. Allan Boesak even accuses James Cone of reducing liberation theology to the racial issue. Instead, Black Theology should focus on total liberation. “It focuses on the dependency of the oppressed and their liberation from dependency in all its dimensions—psychological, cultural, political, economic, theological.”²¹ All told, we can surmise that liberation theology is a contextualization of the Gospel into the context of injustice and poverty within Africa. It is a cry for justice in our unjust world. We must recognize the presence of massive corruption and injustice in many Christian countries and states on this continent. We desperately need justice in Africa. But this should not be done to the neglect of the liberation of the individual from the guilt and effects of sin.

Reconstruction Theology

Reconstruction theology has been the latest theological project coming out of Africa, beginning in 1990 it has gradually established itself and from 2003 a number of publications have come out on the subject. Since the early 1990s theologians have been looking for new ways to interpret the gospel in Africa, in light of the changing circumstances in the continent. Prominent among the themes that have been suggested is the “Reconstruction Paradigm”. As Dr. Jessy N. K. Mugambi of the University of Nairobi says, this interpretation seeks to elaborate from the scriptures the aspects that portray God and his people re-creating a new world order. Reconstruction Theology then offers the Christian basis for recreating anew the African social economic reality from a scriptural perspective.

Reconstruction theologians however approach pertinent issues, such as food crisis, child abuse, the AIDS pandemic and poverty in a unique and inspiring way. On the food crisis, for example they use the Biblical basis of passages where God feeds his people in the Old and New Testaments as a proof that God wants people to have enough to feed on. While the Israelites were in the Desert, God gave them enough to eat until there was some left over. The same experience is repeated with Jesus and His disciples, where out of only five loaves and two fish, there was a total of 12 baskets of left over after the disciples had had to their satisfaction. Mugambi suggested that

²¹ BOESAK, A, *Farewell to Innocence* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977), p. 144.

African Christianity should shift her theological gear from the paradigm of liberation to that of reconstruction. He suggested that: “Reconstruction is the new priority for African nations in the 1990s. The churches and their theologians will need to respond to this new priority in relevant fashion, to facilitate this process of reconstruction. The process will require considerable efforts of reconciliation and confidence-building. It will also require reorientation and retraining.”²²

Reconstruction theologians recognize the need to include findings and expert from other academic disciplines in solving the numerous African problems. Indeed, it is this willingness to dialogue and work with other African experts, that these theologians usher in hope for a theology that can truly work for human development. Important questions relating to how the barriers of language and content of the various disciplines will be broken need to be explored.

Prosperity Theology.

Prosperity Theology is defined as the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings. The context of this theology is the contemporary—and often urban—Africa with its social and economic problems like poverty, unemployment, Medical Bills, school fees and barrenness. Prosperity theology assumes that every Christian has a right to be prosperous. Prosperity theology assumes that God will make every Christian prosperous if the believer does the right things. Prosperity theology assumes that a faithful Christian will be rich. It assumes that poverty is an indication of lack of faith. But this teaching is not entirely scriptural. Despite the general truths of the Sinaitic covenant in Deuteronomy 28, righteous people sometimes suffer. The book of Job makes this clear. Nonetheless, it needs to be observed that Prosperity theology is a syncretistic form of Christianity. It is a deviation from authentic Christianity. Usually, it is a non-formal theology. But since it is so prominent in Africa, it should be included as a distinct type of African Christian theology.

Challenges Confronting African Theologians Today

Firstly, it is to be said that the Christian faith has remained largely alien to African believers in spite of the increasing number of Christians in Africa. A relevant African-theology is needed to establish continuity between African traditional life and the new faith. Having been colonized for several decades, many African people have lost their sense of identity and human dignity. The task of African theology is to

²² MUGAMBI, J N K. *The future of the church and the church of the future in Africa*, in Chipenda, J B, Karamaga, A, MUGAMBI, J N K & Omari, C K (eds), *The church of Africa: Towards a theology of reconstruction*. Nairobi: AACC, 1991.

help fulfill their African sense of humanity. This has not been accomplished.

Secondly, the African continent has a history that is largely tragic, including socio-political, economic, and religious instability. Bad governance and manipulation of ethnic and religious differences have resulted in misery for the people²³. Many Christians have fallen for lies and have been misled, leaving the church confused, discouraged, and betrayed. False dogma, end time spiritual deception, and strange techniques in supernatural engagement are holding the church hostage. For example, the church in the recent past has suffered a storm of deceptions including the prosperity gospel, corruption, and ethnic hatred.²⁴

In Jesus' words, the love for God and neighbor underlies the teaching of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:13-14). Because of this, any failure by the church to love is a blow to the church's commitment to society. In this respect, the weakness of the church has been her lack of love as a benchmark of biblical spirituality. Overhand again, this lack of love has manifested itself in the lack of hospitality, selflessness, and compassionate lifestyle. The challenge of the church in Africa is attached to maintaining and practicing the love concept as a biblical spirituality and ethics. The idea of love as the central theme in Christianity seems to be defaced with current issues that weaken Christian experience with the world.²⁵

Thirdly, Conservation, transformation, and renewal of both the spiritual and physical life of the people is key to the reform agenda²⁶. Critical evaluation of Africa as a continent "portrays it as sick, starved, bleeding and crippled...economically Africa is living under deb." Reports indicate that Africa has suffered active conflict and human rights abuse. In short, Africa is a "dark continent." There are diverse problems that need to be tackled by leaders called for the purpose of reconstructing the society. The portrayal of this is evidenced in therefrom that should be made by the church in education, health, social, moral, and community life of the African people. An authentic African theology of Christian education will clearly show how the Christian faith can be effectively taught in Africa, using terms familiar to Africans, acknowledging and affirming that which is good in the sight of God in African tradition, while condemning and advocating a change from that which reprehensible in African culture and tradition, in favor of biblical lifestyles.

Fourthly, the African church is finding itself in the middle of a multi-religious society. Though Christianity is still the majority religion in Africa, the African church

²³ ONAIYEKAN, J. "More challenges for the church in Africa," at Africa Catholic Peacebuilding Network, consulted May 21, 2013, <http://cpn.nd.edu/conflicts-and-the-role-of-the-church>.

²⁴ WO'DONOVAN, W., *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 2000), 237.

²⁵ Cf. Kamai, Peter H. Perspectives in Johannine Theology – The Love Command in John 13: 34-35: From Orthodoxy to Orthopraxis for the Church in Nigeria, July, 2022.

²⁶ MUGAMBI, J.N. Christian theology and social reconstruction. Nairobi: Acton, 2003, p.53.

will need to find answers regarding its position towards other religions. The church will have to address issues of tolerance towards people of other religions. The church will also need to guard against religious extremes, and position itself against such extremes. Religion has the power to make people much better than they would otherwise be, but it would be naïve to disregard the contrary proposition.

More often than not the Africa Traditional Religions are overlooked in the discussion on multi-religious societies. The African church cannot ignore their presence and the effect that they have on the African church. On the other hand, there is a concern that in spite of this phenomenal growth, the Church in Africa faces the challenges of justice, peace, unity, and reconciliation as seen in the numerous conflicts that bedevil the continent.

Fifthly, inculturation is an urgent priority in the life of particular Churches, for the firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa. It is for Evangelization, a path towards full Evangelization and one of the greatest challenges for the Church on the continent on the eve of the third millennium. Consequently, the family is said to be the smallest Christian Community. The Church places a lot of emphasis on the role of the family in evangelization. However, stable families are dependent on rich cultural values and identity which are handed over from generation to generation. The modern African society faces great challenges in this area from the intrusive nature of modern means of communication (internet, social media, cell phones, satellite TV...) which transmit social values that are alien to both African tradition and Christian faith.

Sixthly, it is clear in the Bible that “our God is a God of Peace (cf. 1Cor.14:33) and Christ is our Peace which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal.5:22). He is the one source of every genuine peace” “Sent by God and God himself, Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of peace, because he reveals and establishes in human history the fullness of divine life (Col. 2:9). This peace is a constant call of God for the Church and for everyone: "Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow"(Is. 1:17). "This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

In sum, one has to admit that theology in Africa is needed today, more than ever, especially in Church pews and circles of piety for the following reasons, firstly, a wider theological vision. Many interpretations of the tenets of the Christian faith on offer are at best shallow and at worst mundane. Secondly, people need critical principles to keep: a) unbridled piety, b) naïve fundamentalism, and c) misguided religious favor within proper boundaries.

Concluding Reflection

Few Theologians have chronicled the successes and failures of the theological approaches adopted by particular churches with the view to African development and social transformation. The self-understanding of the Church in Africa as a family of God and its salvific mission encompasses social transformation in the light of the African social reality. The image of the Church as family of God embodies solidarity, the common good, subsidiarity, participation, and option for the poor and the earth.²⁷

It has been observed that Inculturation is a burning issue in the African Church. Inculturation involves the interplay of faith and culture. African intellectuals and especially theologians have criticized some aspects of the faith that Africans received from European Missionaries. Lack of adequate inculturation in previous missionary efforts has often resulted in the need to focus on inculturation.

Many have said that the future of the Church is in Africa. This statement is empty unless African Catholicism becomes truly African and truly Christian. When we talk about incarnating the faith in our culture, some people only think about dancing, and singing, and drumming. That is liturgical inculturation. Inculturation has to deal with the entire Christian experience, it has to deal with the Christian message as a whole. Consequently, the values of the gospel should find expression in every aspect or dimension of our culture. There are also African values that are worthy of emulation in this respect namely, respect for elders, probity and accountability, a sense of community etc.

African theologians have the onerous responsibility to observe, interpret, understand, and respond to the social decline of Africa in the light of the Christian faith. This demands an articulation of a vision and method for development and social transformation. Their views must be imbued with human and ecological values capable of inspiring Africa on the path to integral and sustainable development.²⁸

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