

# Africa's Inculturation Theology: Observations of an Outsider

*Paul Gifford\**

**A**bstract: *The existence of 'African theology' is no longer a subject of debate. This article reviews the content and perspectives of African theologians, particularly those from East Africa. It examines the positions of these theologians on issues of culture, modernity and the public sphere. On the whole, it recognises a certain romanticisation of the African past and an unconvincing dismissal of some positive contributions of modernity to the African civilisation.*

**I**ntroduction: East Africa [hereafter EA] (Kenya particularly) produces as much theology as any other country on the continent, probably much more than most, mainly thanks to two publishing companies, Paulines Publications and Acton Publishers. Since this literature is not widely distributed or known outside Africa, a response from an outsider may be of interest.

EA theology is produced mainly by members of mainline churches, in their own theological institutions and in the public universities. It is produced overwhelmingly as papers for meetings of the Ecumenical Symposium of East African Theologians (ESEAT), the Kenya branch of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT Kenya), and the local branch of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians. The papers are then collated and published. Some writers belong even to all three of these groups so the same writers tend to recur. The provenance determines the format of most EA theological writing, namely the short paper. The corpus of EA theology includes very few monographs; even the few books that are produced tend to be collections of articles rather than extended treatments of one issue. We will have reason to return to this.

For what follows, I have covered a good deal of this literature. Although obviously there are differences between the authors cited, there are also overriding similarities that enable the material to be considered as a unity. In those few cases where a position seems unique to one individual or a small group, I have tried to indicate this.

**C**haracter of EA Theology: How then can this theology be characterised? It is not a political theology. Even in the early 1990s when the churches (better, some individual churchmen) were quite prominent in political interventions, this was hardly a matter of political theology: the churches were using the relative immunity accorded them to say what many were thinking but could not express. The Law Society of Kenya, for example, and foreign embassies, were also calling for multi-party democracy, freedom of speech, free and fair elections, and the abolition of the police

\* **Paul Gifford** is a professor of religion at the University of London. He specialises in African Christianity.

state – though this is not to belittle the church contribution.<sup>1</sup> No, Kenyan theology has turned far less around politics than around culture. ‘Inculturation’ began in the early 1990s, promoted mainly by missionaries (for the Catholics, as a contribution for the 1994 African Synod of Bishops which had inculturation as one of its main themes).<sup>2</sup> Since then, missionaries have tended to back out of this field, leaving it to Africans for many of whom (particularly Catholic theologians) it has become a distinct theological project. Its basic agenda is well caught by these two statements of Mugambi: ‘Africans... do not have to choose between being Christian and being African. They can be both Christian and African at the same time’. Again: ‘It is erroneous to think that Western culture is morally superior to African culture, and that western customs are consistent with the Christian faith while African customs are not’.<sup>3</sup> As it has developed, therefore, it is less concerned with liturgy, art, music and organisation (the missionaries’ ‘inculturation’) and more focused on culture itself. For this reason, in what follows I will tend to avoid the term inculturation, and speak more of a ‘theology of culture’. This enables me to include some theologians who would repudiate the missionaries’ original programme of inculturation. Mugambi, for example, has dismissed inculturation, seeing it as a Catholic ploy to divert attention from the need to promote a theology of liberation.<sup>4</sup> Yet, for our purposes, it is legitimate to consider him here, because for Mugambi culture is pivotal; culture must always be the touchstone, criterion, fulcrum. It seems to be a conclusive argument against something if it can be labelled ‘alien to the African cultural and religious heritage’.<sup>5</sup> ‘African Christianity in particular and African culture in general, will be reconstituted from characteristically African frames of reference’.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, culture theology is reactive. It starts from the premise that Africans have been despised and exploited from the time of the slave trade and then colonialism. Through greed, the West plundered the continent, but cultural annihilation was even worse, for Western contempt damaged the African soul.<sup>7</sup> Kanyandago expresses

<sup>1</sup> For this contribution over time, see David Throup, ‘“Render unto Caesar the Things that are Caesar’s”: the Politics of Church-State Conflict in Kenya’, in Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (eds), *Religion and Politics in East Africa*, London: James Currey, 1995, 143-76; Herve Maupeu, ‘The Churches and the Polls’, in Marcel Rutten, Alamin Mazrui and Francois Grignon, *Out for the Count: the 1997 Elections and Prospects for Democracy in Kenya*, Kampala: Fountain Publications, 2001, 50-71; Herve Maupeu, ‘Religion and the Elections’, in Herve Maupeu, Musambayi Katumanga and Winnie Mitullah, *The Moi Succession: Elections 2002*, Nairobi: IFRA, 2005, 33-68.

<sup>2</sup> Notably, A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988; J.M. Waliggo, A. Roest Crolius, T. Nkeramihigo, J. Mutiso-Mbinda, *Inculturation: its Meaning and Urgency*, Nairobi: St Paul Publications, 1986; Patrick Ryan et al, *Inculturation in the South African Context*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2000; Cecil McGarry and Patrick Ryan (eds), *Inculturating the Church in Africa: Theological and Practical Perspectives*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> J.N.K. Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*, Nairobi: Longman, 1989, 22 & 197 respectively.

<sup>4</sup> J.N.K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi: Acton 2003, 208; *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*, Nairobi: EAEP, 1995, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Mugambi, ‘Religion and Social Reconstruction in Post-Colonial Africa’, in J.N.K. Mugambi and Frank Kuschner-Pelkmann, *Church-State Relations: a Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton, 2004, 13. See *From Liberation*, 103.

<sup>6</sup> *Christian Theology*, 145, see also 37f, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Laurenti Magesa, ‘African Renaissance: the Jubilee and Africa’s Position in the International Context’, in Peter Kanyandago (ed), *Marginalised Africa: an International Perspective*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2002, 18.

it: 'The African has been hurt and humiliated in what constitutes his/her world and system of values, especially his/her symbolic structure... This has led to psychological and social alienation expressed in all forms of self-denial by Africans as they express and live hatred for what is African because this is perceived as primitive and backward. This is the worst form of poverty because it attacks the African in what makes him/her African; this is anthropological poverty'.<sup>8</sup> The agenda is well caught in this quotation from Tarimo: 'For centuries, African cultures have been systematically regarded as primitive and inferior by Western civilisation. It was assumed that Africans had no culture, religion, thinking capacity, or civilization. Others went as far as saying Africans had no soul. This attitude was basically motivated by ignorance, prejudice and the desire to dominate others for economic gain. Under the influence of this experience, an inferiority complex has been internalised and made a part of African identity. On the international scene, Africa has become synonymous with diseases, political chaos and socio-cultural backwardness. In order to change this image, we have to develop a critical understanding of African cultures beyond racist prejudices, colonial contempt, and fatalism'.<sup>9</sup>

Of particular concern to Christian theologians is the fact that it was not only secular forces which inflicted such harm on Africa. Equally to blame were Christian missionaries, for the missionary movement was an integral part of the colonial enterprise. 'The modern Christian missionary enterprise became the legitimating agent for European colonial expansion'.<sup>10</sup> 'Evangelisation and imperialism have historically been so interrelated that it seems impossible to separate them'.<sup>11</sup> 'Missionary expansion and imperial conquest were complementary projects and were understood as such both by the imperial executors and the colonial victims. It is not possible to dodge around this historical fact'.<sup>12</sup> The missionaries were inevitably there somewhere: 'Sometimes missionaries provide the vanguard of cultural invaders, and at other times they are the rear guard'.<sup>13</sup> 'The missionaries, by design or accident, became partners in the social transformation of colonial Africa'.<sup>14</sup> They were partners in the plunder; indeed, 'It is in the African countries where Christianity has been most successful, that pauperisation has been greatest'.<sup>15</sup> Their theology was crucial: 'Imperial missionary ecclesiology rationalised colonial rule and justified the imperial subjugation of

<sup>8</sup> Kanyandago, 'Rich but rendered Poor: a Christian Response to the Paradox of Poverty in Africa', in Kanyandago (ed), *The Cries of the Poor in Africa: Questions and Responses for African Christianity*, Kisumu: Marianum Publishing, 2002, 50.

<sup>9</sup> Aquiline Tarimo, *Applied Ethics and Africa's Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi: Acton, 2005, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, 12. It is true that in places Mugambi can give a more nuanced view of Christian missions, mentioning a positive side as well (see *Christian Theology*, 84-88), but the overwhelming view is searingly negative: see *ibid* 31, 83, 114, 122, 127, 156f, 158, 180, 181, 205, 210, 211. The same ambiguity is found in *From Liberation*: missionaries can do good (72, 73, 101, 164), yet the darker view co-exists (77, 98, 197, 198, 208, 225). In the earlier *African Heritage* the view is perhaps less dark (see 78, 137, though 161). I admit the different emphases, as also perhaps the development over time, but do not think I have not misrepresented Mugambi here.

<sup>11</sup> Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, 122.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>13</sup> J.N.K. Mugambi, 'Evangelistic and Charismatic Initiatives in Post-Colonial Africa', in Mika Vahakangas and Andrew A. Kyomo (eds), *Charismatic Renewal in Africa: a Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton, 2003, 136.

<sup>14</sup> Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, 83.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 180.

African nations'.<sup>16</sup> Magesa essentially agrees: 'Colonialism and Christianisation were the two events that hold pride of place in the profound... mis-shaping of the African continent'.<sup>17</sup> And besides legitimating the plunder, missionaries played a key role in destroying the African soul. 'Most missionaries were convinced that Africans had no religion, no culture, no history, no literature, no art, no music. All these things that distinguish human beings from other primates were denied of Africans'.<sup>18</sup>

Africans now must reverse their situation by rediscovering their culture and standing tall as Africans. African Christians, too, must discover a form of Christianity that enables them to be Africans, setting aside all the accidentals that came with Western missionaries. Just as Africans must make their contribution to the world systems from which they have been so marginalized, so too African Christians must contribute to global Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

This theology is frequently expressed through what has been called the comparative method: African realities are related to scriptural or traditional data, or to Christian values and ideals. So many articles take as starting point the cultural practices of an ethnic group (often the author's own), suggesting that these reveal something valuable that should be incorporated into Christianity. In fact, sometimes the article consists mainly of the cultural exposition, with only a few observations near the end along the lines of 'The church must therefore...'. Given this format, and perhaps because of its predominantly Catholic practitioners, this theology is not particularly linked to any biblical motifs, or elaborated in terms of any narrowly biblical exposition. One of the few innovative biblical uses is Mugambi's depiction of Jesus in terms of sensitivity to others' culture (as opposed to, say, as 'Freedom Fighter', or 'Ethical Exemplar' or 'Man for Others'). He writes: 'The uniqueness and freshness of Jesus' teaching concerns his emphasis of the need to rise above ethnic, racial, class and hierarchical barriers. Jesus showed no discrimination towards people he came into contact with...by urging his followers to acknowledge the dignity and cultural integrity of other people he established a new community and gave it a new identity...The uniqueness of Christian faith is derived from its universal appeal, which, ideally, goes so far as to ensure that no culture has ascendancy over any other, but rather that the equal validity of all is affirmed'.<sup>20</sup> This, however, is

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>17</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Christian Ethics in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton, 2002, 111.

<sup>18</sup> Mugambi, *African Heritage*, 169. The animus of much of this is reminiscent of the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, e.g., his *A Grain of Wheat*, London: Heinemann, 1967.

<sup>19</sup> Magesa, *Christian Ethics*, 154; Mugambi, *African Heritage*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> Mugambi, *From Liberation*, 90. Mugambi claims to have moved on from liberation, to a theology of reconstruction, in which the exemplar is no longer Moses, but Nehemiah (sometimes, to a lesser degree, Josiah; see *From Liberation*, 165f). The basic idea is simple enough: Reconstruction 'is a challenge to do theology in a new way, with new thought forms, new presuppositions and new axioms. Liberation is a process in which the oppressed direct their actions against the oppressors while the oppressors resist. In contrast, social reconstruction is a process in which all sectors of the population are invited to participate in the inauguration of a new social order' (*Christian Theology*, 166; see also 28-31). This new paradigm has received much attention, both in the churches (Mugambi has been closely associated with the ecumenical movement, particularly with the AACC; it was the theme of the AACC 8th General Assembly in Yaounde in 2003) and in scholarly circles: there have been several theses written on this new African theology, and Mugambi has been invited round the world to speak on it (see i-v of *Christian Theology* for a glimpse of just where he has been invited to lecture). Also, Acton Publishers (set up by Mugambi) has been influential in publishing this theology and its resultant debate. The detailed working out of this paradigm is yet to be done, and for that reason I here label Mugambi as a culture theologian.

more a passing observation than something elaborated in any detail, and I have not met this elsewhere. There are few attempts to present culture theology as biblical in any hard sense.

**Culture as the pivot:** What observations might an outsider offer? First, making culture the beginning and end, the point on which the theology revolves, seems to leave much unexamined. For example, what exactly is African culture? In cases of disagreement, who would decide? Does it solve the problem by reserving the decision to ‘only those with a genuine African outlook’?<sup>21</sup> Who would decide that? And where do we look for this African culture? In Kenya’s huge informal settlements, what would most naturally be regarded as culture (even language) seems fast disappearing.<sup>22</sup> Some presentations of African culture seem rather idealised.<sup>23</sup> Theuri provides a good example:

African development was holistic and inclusive, it was always guided by fundamental values of generosity, solidarity and hospitality to all... Everyone was ‘equal’ to each other; resources were well and equally distributed among all. The sick, the orphaned, the widows, the Africans lived in the model that is only reflective of the Early Church... African communities practised more or less what the early church practised (Acts 4, 1ff). Bearing this argument in mind, one can say with certainty that Africa was developed in all aspects of life... Everyone did what was best for the community regardless of their personal gains... the African traditional system thus seems in many ways to be the ideal one.<sup>24</sup>

Often the contrast is made explicitly: Western culture is bad, African culture is good. Juvenalis Baitu, Professor of Moral Theology and Director, Centre for the Social Teaching of the Church at CUEA, laments that Africa’s media now ‘mostly reflect the interests, problems, values and ideals of Euro-American societies with its (their?) sexual mores, organised crime, violence, drug addiction, alcoholism, romance, immoral attitudes, practices and behavioural patterns’. These western influences ‘have distorted *the right understanding* of moral demands in the areas of human sexuality, the family, social, political, economic, cultural and religious life as conceived by traditional African societies’.<sup>25</sup> Any deficiencies in Africa must arise from Western influence: ‘Most of the manifestations of this violence cannot be traced in African traditional societies. With all proper proportions guarded, one can say that the following are not “African” problems: modern forms of torture; imperialism and

---

<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel Mutabazi, ‘Process and Method in the Theology of Inculturation’, in Patrick Ryan (ed), *Theology of Inculturation in Africa Today: Methods, Praxis and Mission*, Nairobi: CUEA, 2004, 74.

<sup>22</sup> Christine Bodewes, *Parish Transformation in Urban Slums: Voices of Kibera, Kenya*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2005, 107-27.

<sup>23</sup> Mugambi, *African Heritage*, 117; Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2004, 160-62.

<sup>24</sup> Theuri, ‘Religion and Culture’, in Mary N. Getui and Matthew M. Theuri (eds), *Quests for Abundant Life in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton, 2002, 193-94. And Kanyandago: ‘Africans have had the time to evolve institutions best suited to their conditions...the African endogenous economic systems aim at satisfying basic needs and at sharing human and material resources for this purpose’ (Kanyandago, ‘Rich’, 36)

<sup>25</sup> Juvenalis Baitu, ‘The Moral Crisis in Contemporary Africa’, *AFER*, 45,3(2003), 248-62, citations from pp 256, 260; italics added. His case is somewhat undermined by the very next article in that book by a senior lecturer at Moi University, which presents a far less idealised picture, especially in matters of gender. Eunice Kamaara, ‘Moral Problems in Africa; a Challenge to the Church of Christ’, 263-88, esp 272.

colonialism; slave trade, exploitative economic systems; exploitation of workers; abuse of addictive substances; racism and apartheid; urbanisation and its tandems including slums, crime, anonymity. One can include prostitution, beggary, discriminative, irrelevant and expensive education, and inappropriate political systems which produce corruption and oppression'.<sup>26</sup> Such writing seems to imply that the peoples of Africa are the only humans untouched by original sin.

Sometimes the unresolved tension is palpable. Chepkwony gives a glowing picture of his own people's culture and then writes: 'Having said that, I find it difficult to explain the participation of the Kipsigis in the brutal and senseless killings witnessed in Kenya in 1992 and 1998 in some parts of the Rift Valley Province. This is a difficult issue, which might suggest that moral values and indeed respect for human life have been eroded'.<sup>27</sup> Sometimes there seems some special pleading. African leaders today oppress compatriots because they have lost genuine African values; thus Mugambi has the contemporary African elite 'alienated from the African norms of governance through schooling'.<sup>28</sup> Behind much of this, there seems a fairly static or essentialised notion of culture. The basics 'tend to be so resilient that they will re-emerge after many centuries of oppression', so it seems at least the basics are regarded as fixed.<sup>29</sup> Mugambi doesn't want modern stories used in the place of traditional ones, which again seems to privilege some past reality.<sup>30</sup> In theory, many admit the reality of change,<sup>31</sup> and many admit that some aspects of African culture (like widow inheritance in a time of AIDS) are dysfunctional;<sup>32</sup> yet they give few criteria for distinguishing valid aspects of African culture from dysfunctional ones – normally it is 'African culture' itself which is privileged.<sup>33</sup> Nor has Tarimo avoided these difficulties by talking of 'reformulated', 're-appropriated' or 'reformed' cultural traditions.<sup>34</sup> Again, what constitutes a reformulated culture, and who decides? Only Kalilombe avoids such difficulties by making change itself rather than African culture his starting point: 'Through evangelization, new options (in line with the Christian faith) become available to society and challenge it to make new choices'.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Peter Kanyandago, 'Violence in Africa: a Search for Causes and Remedies', in Mary N. Getui and Peter Kanyandago (eds), *From Violence to Peace: a Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton, 2003, 10. For further elaboration of Kanyandago's position, see his 'Rethinking African Ecclesiology Challenges from People's Rights and Participation', in McGarry and Ryan (eds), *Inculturating*, 95-119, and 'Violence in Africa: Pastoral Response from a Historical Perspective', in Douglas W. Waruta and Hannah W. Kinoti (eds), *Pastoral Care in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton, 2005, 41-71.

<sup>27</sup> Adam K. A. Chepkwony, 'An African Approach to the Acquisition of Wealth and Dealing with Poverty', in Peter Kanyandago (ed), *The Cries of the Poor in Africa: Questions and Responses for African Christianity*, Kisubi: Marianum Publishing, 2002, 9-32, citation p 18.

<sup>28</sup> Mugambi, 'Religion', 13. Similarly Emanuel Barbara, 'Justice and Peace in African Theology', in Ryan (ed), *Faces*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Mugambi, *African Heritage*, 116; similarly 'When an opportunity arises later, the old social structures, value systems and world-views will tend to resurface' 120.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Mugambi, *From Liberation*, 17, 26, 73, 77-79, 180; *African Heritage*, 94, 124f.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Magesa, *Anatomy*, 197, 256.

<sup>33</sup> Tarimo deals at length with both tribalism and the extended family (*Applied Ethics*, 65-76 and 162-86 respectively); in both he finds things to praise and to fault; on what score is never made clear. Ngona reminds us that Vatican II (AG 19) speaks of 'healthy customs of the locality'. But who decides what a healthy custom is? Dieudonne Ngona, 'Theology of Inculturation in Africa Today', in Ryan (ed), *Theology*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Tarimo, *Applied Ethics*, 27, 179.

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Kalilombe, 'Praxis and Methods of Inculturation in Africa', in Ryan (ed), *Theology*, 47.



**Late Industrial Society:** Second, since the focus is on the West as despoiler and exploiter and the need to repudiate things ‘Western’, little attention is paid to the rise of the modern world, the factors involved in this, and the dynamics of industrial and late-industrial society.<sup>36</sup> Mugambi sometimes refers to the Renaissance and the Reformation, and understands them as ‘the effort of European peoples to rediscover and assert their identity’, thus serving as models for African rediscovery and assertion.<sup>37</sup> However, he does not refer to the Enlightenment or the Industrial Revolution which might have different lessons in the totally new socio-economic order they initiated.<sup>38</sup> The sheer novelty of the modern world is left unaddressed in this preoccupation with African culture. One discussion includes a cartoon showing an African at a crossroads, with one signpost pointing to ‘The West’, the other to ‘Africa’; his head is spinning, unsure which road to take.<sup>39</sup> Yet this dichotomy (either African or Western, with a true African always opting for the former) surely obscures the crucial element of novelty. Accountable government, for example, is not Western in any real sense. In Britain, Henry VIII was almost totally unaccountable, as was Louis XIV in France. Had Britain’s Charles I deigned to plead at his trial in 1649, he would have argued that ‘The King can do no wrong’, for the monarch is accountable only to God. To most of his compatriots of the 17<sup>th</sup> century this truth was self-evident; to the peoples of Britain today the claim is absurd. The demand for accountable leadership is totally new, and prevailed only after the rise of an educated, entrepreneurial middle class who would not tolerate arbitrary government.

Similarly, the separation of church and state in the West, or the removal of religion from public life, which many African theologians compare rather unfavourably to the holistic African understanding, is not ‘Western’. Western traditions are decidedly to the contrary. Such thinking is hardly 250 years old, and was enshrined first in the US constitution. However, once tried, it has proved so beneficial for the functioning of modern pluralist societies, that most countries have adopted it, even countries like Sweden where because of religious homogeneity there was no pressing need. These things are not part of any Western heritage. Quite the contrary; they are totally new, but novelties seemingly required by the dynamics of modern society. Mugambi admits

<sup>36</sup> For the purposes of this article, I understand the ‘modern world’ in a very general sense, and define modernisation (with Landes) as ‘that combination of changes – in the mode of production and government, in the social and institutional order, in the corpus of knowledge, and in attitudes and values – that makes it possible for a society to hold its own in the [twenty-first] century; that is, to compete on even terms in the generation of material and cultural wealth, to sustain its independence, and to promote and accommodate to further change’ (David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge: CUP, 1969, 6; Landes wrote ‘twentieth century’). I do not consider ‘postmodernity’ as a category which advances this debate – though see Emmanuel M. Katongole, ‘Twenty-First Century: on Surviving Postmodernism’ in Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke and Justin Ukpong (eds), *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton, 2001, 253-73; item, ‘Postmodern Illusions and Performances’, in his *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2005, 73-94.

<sup>37</sup> E.g. *African Heritage*, 38, 114, 128; *From Liberation*, 5, 41, 43, 107, 115, 124, 163; *Christian Theology*, 13, 38, 122, 180, 205.

<sup>38</sup> Magesa makes a passing reference to the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution *Anatomy*, 266.

<sup>39</sup> In Fritz Stenger and Maria Teresa Ratti (eds), *The Poor Discover their own Resources*, Nairobi Paulines, 2002, 76.

Africans do not have to re-invent the wheel,<sup>40</sup> but if separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers of government is seen as Western and therefore suspect, Africa might find it harder to compete with nations operating on that principle. Magesa rightly dismisses the view 'Without the West... Africa is doomed',<sup>41</sup> but without an independent judiciary which can hold its elite accountable, Africa may very well be doomed, and if that is presented as something 'Western' rather than as something seemingly required by a pluralist society, debates about an independent judiciary become unnecessarily unproductive.

If the goal is to participate equally on the world stage (and that surely lies behind laments about marginalisation), a preoccupation with 'the way we have always operated' may be less than helpful. Coping in today's world seems to require educational skills of the first order – especially in science, engineering, information technology. None of these disciplines is 'traditionally Western'; all are quite new. It has been said that 90% of all the scientists who have ever lived are still alive; if that statement is nearly meaningless in its untestability, it at least conveys this awareness of the novelty of science. The fact that now 1.2 million engineers and scientists graduate from Chinese and Indian universities annually – as many as in America, the EU and Japan combined – and three times the number ten years ago, is intimately connected with their recent rapid development. Yet Kanyandago wants none of it. 'The African education system aims at making people fit in their material and social environment, and does not discriminate in favour of men, as our so-called modern school education system has tended to do. The African education system educates hardly at any cost, and all members of the community have a role to play in the system. The "modern" system of education imparts knowledge with few skills, is expensive, often irrelevant and too long, and ends up by excluding those who do not have money'.<sup>42</sup> Similarly: 'The whole process of revalorising itself will require from Africa changing drastically the education systems which usually impart knowledge and facts that are not very relevant to its cultural and historical contexts'.<sup>43</sup> I have found this repudiation of modern education only in Kanyandago, and it would be interesting to know whether others too would advocate what on the face of it would relegate Africa to perpetual marginalisation.<sup>44</sup>

**Local Political Reality:** Thirdly, theologians prioritising culture pay correspondingly little attention to the socio-political context, to the political reality of Kenya. Yet this political reality is well-known. The Akiwumi, Ndungu, and Bosire Reports and the Githongo dossier shed great light on the Kenyan context, on politically-instigated violence, land-grabbing, the Goldenberg and the Anglo-Leasing scams,

<sup>40</sup> Mugambi, *From Liberation*, 42.

<sup>41</sup> Magesa, *Christian Ethics*, 112.

<sup>42</sup> Kanyandago, 'Rich', 37.

<sup>43</sup> Kanyandago, 'Violence', 25.

<sup>44</sup> By contrast, a physics lecturer at the University of Nairobi argues that only science and technology can drive economic competitiveness; Angeyo Kalambuka, 'Vision 2030's Success lies in Science, IT Strategies', *Standard*, 25 Oct 2006, 7.



respectively.<sup>45</sup> In virtually ignoring the reality uncovered by these reports, theologians distinguish themselves sharply from Kenya's intellectuals generally, who expatiate on them interminably (see the comment pages of the *Nation* and the *Standard* daily). The phone-ins on FM stations show that ordinary people are just as exercised over these issues. Surely the poverty, ill-health and precarious security of so many Kenyans is not unrelated to the well-documented plundering of the country's resources by an irresponsible political elite.

Theologians of culture tend to deal only with external causes of Africa's situation. Consider Mugambi's *Christian Theology*. Africa has suffered, after colonialism, from institutionalised racism, and ideological manipulation during the Cold War, and economic strangulation.<sup>46</sup> The OECD countries and Bretton Woods institutions have deliberately exploited Africa; globalisation is another ploy to dominate Africa,<sup>47</sup> and the whole democratisation movement is yet another attempt to keep Africa subservient.<sup>48</sup> In fact, everyone and everything Western seems bent on this, even NGOs.<sup>49</sup> Western Churches, too, since they now get most of their funds from their exploitative governments, are an integral part of this onslaught.<sup>50</sup> All these Western institutions are responsible for the subjugation of Africa; in fact, there are no references to what might be considered African contributions, apart from one allusion to African 'shortcomings', which is immediately followed by the qualification: 'even though those shortcomings were the result of policies imposed on Africa by multi-lateral and bilateral institutions'.<sup>51</sup> It is worthy of note that Katongole finds even this too lenient on the West: he faults Mugambi for his 'uncritical optimism' towards the new world order.<sup>52</sup>

Theologians of culture denounce institutions like the World Bank for crippling Africa (although there is sometimes little evident familiarity with the history, aims, policies – especially changing policies – of these institutions).<sup>53</sup> Globalisation is also denounced. Thus Magesa: 'Globalisation pushes Africa, with financial and political pressure, to become an uncritical consumer of values that may appear attractive

<sup>45</sup> The Akiwumi Report was never published, but the issue is covered in Human Rights Watch, *Playing with Fire: Weapons Proliferation, Political Violence and Human Rights in Kenya*, New York: HRW, 2002; Government of Kenya, *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Illegal/Irregular Allocation of Public Land (Ndugu Report)*, Nairobi: Government Printers, 2004 (for land-grabbing in Karura, Ngong and Kiptagich Forests, see Kenya National Commission on Human Rights and Kenya Land Alliance, *Unjust Enrichment: the Making of Land-Grabbing Millionaires*, Nairobi: KNCHR & KLA, 2006); the Githongo Dossier was never published, but freely available from the internet (a further statement from Githongo is found in *Standard*, 19 Sept 2006, 12; the PAC committee report on the same issue is found in *Nation*, 31 Mar 2006, 10-23).

<sup>46</sup> Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, 27, 28, 29, 37, 54, 163.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 127, 145.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 9, 163-4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 193; also 'Religion', 28, see all 24-28; *From Liberation*, 164.

<sup>50</sup> *Christian Theology*, 160, 181, 193, 195, 197-9; also 'Evangelistic', 141. See also Mugambi, 'Religion', 28. In his earlier writing he seemed prepared to admit that the missionary abuses of the past were diminishing (*African Heritage*, 89, 145-47).

<sup>51</sup> *Christian Theology*, 216; there is one other passage where the Western responsibility has the qualifier 'largely' (*ibid*, 79). Mugambi distinguishes between liberation and reconstruction theology in that the former tries to find blame, whereas the latter does not (*Ibid*, 48, 74, 176). However, his own theology lays the blame for Africa's situation insistently on the West.

<sup>52</sup> Emmanuel M. Katongole, *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2005, 169.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Magesa, *Christian Ethics*, 98f.

and irresistible on the surface, but are hardly useful in terms of its identity and its authentic and holistic development'.<sup>54</sup> In May 2006, The Centre for Ethics of CUEA held a three-day conference on 'Africa, Globalisation and Justice' which drew participants from universities across East Africa. The papers, interventions and questions in sessions that I attended were all firmly in accord with the themes I have identified here as theology of culture. The hurt, humiliation and resentment were never far beneath the surface. Many papers rehearsed the litany of ills perpetrated by the West – on three occasions when a question was raised from the floor enquiring whether some African leaders might also bear some responsibilities for Africa's plight, the answer was that these leaders were themselves imposed by the West. Globalisation was almost invariably seen as the latest of the evils inflicted on Africa from outside and to be rejected. The wholesale rejection of globalisation by the participants was in marked contrast to the opening address delivered by Kenya's Minister of Trade and Industry, who argued that globalisation was a fact of life, and Africans had to mobilise to make certain they benefited from it. (He cited the case of Rwanda's having four Ministers of Trade in as many years as the sort of thing calculated to ensure that Africa did not benefit). Again, the theologians, philosophers and ethicists seem to adopt a stance almost unique to them.

Of the work I have studied, only Tarimo provides something of an exception to this relentless externalism or blaming the West. His starting point seems to be that African culture (rather than external factors) is the main cause of Africa's plight. Yet even here his position is not perfectly clear; at times he seems to admit this only for the purposes of his book; at others he blames external factors like colonialism, the international financial institutions, multinationals.<sup>55</sup> Again, probably the format is responsible; the book is essentially a slight reworking of earlier essays, obviously written at different times from different perspectives.

**Culture as a Hindrance:** Fourthly, this theology of culture seems to conflate two distinct issues. One issue, a theological one, is the presence of God in African cultures before missionaries came. Thus Mutabazi: 'Inculturation requires the acceptance of the fact that God has been at work in the history of all peoples and that their history is sacred. Culture is the sacred space of people. Hence any agent of inculturation has to discern the presence of God within these traditions and cultures'.<sup>56</sup> Kanyandago expresses this even more forcefully: 'God manifests him/herself in each human being, society and culture... The negation of the unique mission of Africa, as one can appreciate, has very serious theological implications. Tampering with Africa means tampering with humanity and therefore tampering with God'.<sup>57</sup> That is a theological position and needs to be assessed on its theological merits. Yet there is another and distinct issue of a different level altogether, namely whether

<sup>54</sup> *Anatomy*, 267. Also Mugambi, 'Evangelistic', 126; Elena Rastello, 'On the Side of Women and Children: Great Resources in a World of Marginalisation', in Stenger et al, *Poor*, 54.

<sup>55</sup> Tarimo, *Applied Ethics*. On pp 8, 15 he seems to adopt an internalist position, and that seems the logic of 87-105. On p 137 he writes of 'internal causes, which are at the heart of the African economic crisis', which, given that comma, seems to express an internalist view. On p 15 he seems to be both internalist and externalist, and pp 108-27 seem externalist.

<sup>56</sup> Mutabazi, 'Process', 63; 'Every authentic culture is, in fact, in its own way a bearer of the universal values established by God', *ibid*, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Kanyandago, 'Rich', 47-49.

something 'traditionally African' is calculated to bring Africa into the socio-economic and political systems obtaining in the modern world. Kanyandago writes: 'There is no way a people can develop without using and building on its culture... Borrowing can be done on condition that it does not tamper with the unique identity of the one who is developing. In the case of Africa, it is not difficult to see the difficulties that have come mainly from trying to impose solutions which are strange to the culture and history of its people, especially in the economic, political and religious fields'.<sup>58</sup> Obviously, much depends on the meaning of 'using and building on its culture'. In one sense this is obvious; by the late 1990s World Bank President James Wolfensohn was insisting that none could promote development without knowledge of and sensitivity to culture. However, there are other defensive, protective and exclusivist senses ('We don't do that'; 'That's not our traditional practice'; 'That idea comes from elsewhere') in which it is far from obvious. This question needs more discussion. (Again we meet the limitations of the 40-minute paper or the 15-page article). Mugambi states almost as a principle: 'Technological and scientific success is directly related to cultural rediscovery'.<sup>59</sup> That is not self-evident. For example, Mugambi explains the traditional African view of time, in which the significance of an event is not measured in terms of duration, but according to 'its contribution to the improvement or violation of the balance of relationships in the African community'. All well and good, but it has been convincingly argued that no country can join the modern world without interiorising the notion of time (in the sense of calculation of duration passed – which incidentally is another very recent human achievement).<sup>60</sup> So the question arises: do Africans want to preserve that traditional attitude, even if it disqualifies them from other benefits? They may, and with good reason, but I have never seen the case argued.

Similarly with counting. Githuku explains the punishments David incurred for counting his people in the census recorded in 2 Samuel and I Chronicles. He explains (in a classic illustration of Africa's 'comparative method' of understanding a biblical text through parallels with African culture) how in traditional African culture exact numeration, especially of people and animals, is taboo because it is believed that the people or animals counted will die. That surely raises the question whether a disposition against counting is a help or hindrance in a world increasingly driven by science, engineering, information technology, all of which are based on quantification, measurement and precision. Four lines from the end Githuku casually notes that 'the African taboo prohibiting counting is not meant to hold the African against mathematical computation'.<sup>61</sup> Of course he need not address the issue there (the article is specifically on biblical interpretation and of only six pages), but I have never seen it addressed at all.

---

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>59</sup> Mugambi, *African Heritage*, 114.

<sup>60</sup> Mugambi, *African Heritage*, 79f; David Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

<sup>61</sup> Sammy Githuku, 'Taboos on Counting', in Mary N. Getui, Knut Holter, Victor Zinkuratiire (eds), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton, 2001, 113-18. He finds the taboo among the Masai, the Luo, the Kisii, the Akamba, the Kikuyu and the Kipsigis.

Magesa admits the distinction between culture and development: 'Africa's struggle for identity and authenticity is mainly a cultural question, whereas that of development is essentially a technological one'.<sup>62</sup> This, however, may not be the case. The notion of culture as a significant factor in development is drawing ever more attention. Rene Maheu, a former Director General of UNESCO, has declared: 'Development (occurs) when science becomes culture'.<sup>63</sup>

In EA theology I have nowhere seen it debated that culture may prevent development. Landes has argued: 'If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference' and he means both for good and for ill.<sup>64</sup> It is interesting that it is left to Africa's evangelicals (for whom no culture is sacrosanct – all are eminently 'reformable') to introduce Landes to Africa. Tokunboh Adeyemo, General Secretary of the Association of African Evangelicals for over 20 years, runs seminars across Africa on Landes, and has even brought him to Kenya to speak. I have never seen Landes cited by mainline culture theologians.

**Spiritual Worldview:** Fifth, perhaps strangely, culture theology makes almost no reference to the traditional world-view of spiritual forces and spiritual causality. Only Kalilombe, speaking at a CUEA workshop on inculturation, deals with this at any length.<sup>65</sup> He insists that this is precisely the area inculturation must address. It is because this world-view is ignored that ordinary people have little interest in the writings of the theologians. He deserves to be quoted at length:

For the people the choice of past elements to which they seem to be *particularly attached* are in the area of the *more basic ideas, attitudes and customs that are linked up with their world-view*. They are attached to these because they form the basic spirituality on which the very essential coping mechanism for life itself and its success depend. Such are for instance, the important areas of belief in medicines, magic practices and rituals which give assurance for dealing with the life problems of misfortune, sickness, natural disasters, and witchcraft – problems of failure or success in life, problems of death and survival. Such beliefs, which have continued even in the context of culture change, concern the individual's and communities' links with invisible powers as a condition for dealing successfully with the basic problems and challenges of life. That specific manifestation of culture has continued, whether one has been "converted" to Christianity or has chosen not to be so converted. That is why there is still much commitment to beliefs, practices

<sup>62</sup> Magesa, *Anatomy*, 265.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Alioune Sall (ed), with foreword by Thabo Mbeki, *Africa 2025: What Possible Futures for Sub-Saharan Africa?* Abidjan: UNDP/African Futures, Pretoria: UNISA, 2003, 114; for many of these issues, see Christopher Clapham, 'Governmentality and Economic Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, 17(1996), 809-24; Daniel Etonga-Manguelle, 'Does Africa Need a Cultural Adjustment Program?' in Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (eds), *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, New York: Basic Books, 2000, 65-77. For a segment of West African Christianity that does address this issue, see Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, London: Hurst, 2004, 125-32.

<sup>64</sup> David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor*, London: Litte, Brown and Co, 1998, 216.

<sup>65</sup> Kalilombe, 'Praxis', 38-48. Far more common are brief allusions like: 'A successful inculturation theology is bound to lie on the full recognition and application of African worldviews', in Adam K. arap Chepkwony, 'African Religion: the Root Paradigm for Inculturation Theology', in Nahashon W. Ndung'u and Philomena N. Mwaura (eds), *Challenges and Prospects of the Church in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2005, 53. See also Dieudonne Ngona, 'Inculturation as a Face of African Theology Today', in Ryan (ed), *Faces*, 168; Mugambi, *African Heritage*, 82; Magesa, *Anatomy*, 56, 81f, 193, 243, 262f.

and customs surrounding life crises: sicknesses, misfortunes, health, interpretation of causes of diseases, dreams, omens, celebrations of funerals etc. This is where much of the people's attention and preoccupation is expressed.

*In the contact with Christian faith, the challenge is really on these issues.* People have been struggling with the Christian faith in as far as it proposes alternative basic beliefs in that area and critiques both the traditional ideas and convictions and the resultant practices and customs. Are the invisible powers to be understood alongside faith in Jesus Christ? Are people's fears, intentions and projects of solution to be guided by the new beliefs concerning the God revealed by Christ, the place and role of Jesus in his Paschal Mystery and the way of life proposed and shaped by such new beliefs? If the option was made in this sense, then the meaning of practices and customs of the people would be changed. Even the use of material and symbolic forms of the culture would take new shapes and that would point the way to a meaningful inculturation of the Christian faith.

People would then review the concrete beliefs that sustain and give meaning and direction to what they do. The new commitment would enlighten them in their selection about what to drop out or to retain in their past practices. It would also affect their choices among the concrete alternatives that are being offered in their contact with the Western Christian elements of culture and religion, and would guide them as to how to take them over and make use of them. This would be the right way of "Christianizing" their culture, but also the more natural way of "Africanizing" Christianity.<sup>66</sup>

It is remarkable how little attention is paid to this religious imagination in discussions of African culture, especially since the explosion of Pentecostal churches (often at the expense of the mainline) is probably not unconnected to the Pentecostal celebration of precisely that imagination.

**H**ypermoralism: Sixth, I have noted that this privileging of culture, as the centrepiece of an entire project, seems largely restricted to theologians and (if we add the CUEA 'Globalisation' conference) philosophers and ethicists. Yet, paradoxically, some of these essays seem hardly theology in any hard sense. It is often people with degrees in theology or teaching in a department of religious studies, commenting on what is more properly sociology, economics, especially economic history, international relations. Sometimes (again, no doubt because of the limitations imposed by the conference-paper format) there seems little engagement with the debates in these areas. Jean-Francois Bayart, for example, has made a significant contribution to understanding Africa's relations with the wider world, and makes it specifically in terms of culture (*la longue duree*). Yet I have never seen him referred to.<sup>67</sup> Above all, there is little empirical research. Many celebrate the African tradition of sharing, and advocate reconstructing a society based on such sharing.<sup>68</sup> But Nkrumahism, Nyerere's Ujamaa, Kaunda's humanism, Obote's (even Mugabe's)

---

<sup>66</sup> Kalilombe, *Praxis*, 45-46, emphasis added.

<sup>67</sup> Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: the Politics of the Belly*, London: Longman, 1993.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., 'Without necessarily suggesting that we return to our traditional ways of life, I suggest that communal ownership of property seems to be the only way out for the empowerment of the poor in Africa', Chepkwony, 'African Approach', 31. Also, 'Africa must also revisit their traditional economic systems which favour solidarity and sharing, and circulation of goods, instead of taking the free market economy model to be the solution to all our problems', Kanyandago, 'Violence', 25.

socialism all professed to be attempts at this. None of these theologians attempts to analyse these experiences for lessons for today. Chepkwony advocates the *barambee* spirit.<sup>69</sup> But what happened that led the practice to be so widely abandoned as dysfunctional? At the CUEA Globalisation conference it was noteworthy that a number of participants proposed the African Union as offering a way forward. But nobody had analysed the performance of its predecessor with a view to explaining exactly why the OAU contributed so little, or had studied the NEPAD process for what it might contribute. Njoroge wa Ngugi suggests that the theology of Mau Mau might provide guidance, but this remains a suggestion; nothing more is said.<sup>70</sup> Theuri writes: 'Capitalism was meant to under-develop Africa and under no circumstances can Africa experience any form of development under this system'.<sup>71</sup> But what other system, especially since 1989, is there? He provides little guidance. Similarly Katongole continually inveighs against the nation-state. He calls for a 'different vision of the world and a different way of being in the world'.<sup>72</sup> What this new imagination would lead to in practice and how this new world free of nation-states might be created, he has not explained – at least not yet. Besides the limitations of the standard conference-paper format, it is almost as though people trained in theology feel no need to descend to the empirical, the feasible, the practicable.

David Martin has coined the word 'hypermoralism' for an over-reliance on a general moral viewpoint, elevated so far above all the concrete choices to be made in proximate situations that it can lead to moral irresponsibility by obfuscating relevant distinctions of relative good and evil.<sup>73</sup> It is at this lower level of practical wisdom that culture theologians seem reluctant to engage.<sup>74</sup>

**C**onclusion: EA theology is still in its early stages and, as in any intellectual project, further debate will undoubtedly clarify contributions and advance the line of thought; it is as a contribution to that debate that I offer these observations here. Yet some like the Cameroonian Fabien Eboussi Boulaga would argue that a debate turning on the notion of culture can never deliver. When the Pope came to Cameroon urging inculturation, Boulaga insisted that he never used the word: it implied that culture was a static thing, which it is not; it was invoked for all the wrong reasons, like explaining (for as long as politicians could get away with it) why multi-party democracy is foreign to Africa; and the appeal to African cultures reached its *reductio ad absurdum* in the *authentecite* of Mobutu's Zaire. It is human beings who produce cultures, and human beings of freedom and integrity should

<sup>69</sup> Chepkwony, 'African Approach', 24.

<sup>70</sup> Njoroge wa Ngugi, 'Liberation in Africa Today', in Ryan (ed), *Faces*, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Theuri, 'Religion and Culture', 193 and 195.

<sup>72</sup> Katongole, *Future*, 236.

<sup>73</sup> Martin, *Does Christianity Cause War?* Oxford: OUP, 2002, 100f, 107. Magesa seems to be making the same point in his allusion to the Catholic Church's dualism, *Anatomy*, 270.

<sup>74</sup> For examples of hypermoralism, see John Mary Waliggo, 'The External Debt in the Continued Marginalisation of Africa: What Action by Christian Theologians?' in Kanyandago (ed), *Marginalised*, 51-62 (but compare with Georges Enderle, 'Facing Globalisation and Marginalisation: can Business Ethics make a Difference?', 110 & 115 in the same volume); Paulino Twesigye Mondo, 'The Dimension of Justice and Peace in African Beliefs', in Ryan (ed), *Faces*, 17f; Barbara, 'Justice', 31f; Peter Kanyandago, 'Is God African? Theological Reflections on the AIDS Scourge', in Ndung'u et al (eds), *Challenges*, 157.



be the focus of the church's concern, not culture.<sup>75</sup> People relating and reacting to one another are more real than anything we can designate as 'culture'. Cultures are never static, for people pick and choose from their cultural pool as they respond to new circumstances. They have to change as circumstances change. Emphasis must be placed on this incessant mutability and temporality; change, not permanence, must be the focus. Culture should be viewed less as an object and more as an event, or series of events. The word 'culture' should be understood as a verb, not a noun.<sup>76</sup> This expectation and celebration of change is well expressed in Cardinal Newman's famous dictum: 'In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often'.<sup>77</sup> Loisy refers to the 'law of life, which is movement and a continual effort of adaptation to conditions always new and perpetually changing'. For anything living, it is suicide to privilege the past at the expense of the future; identity 'is not determined by permanent immobility of external forms, but by continuity of existence and consciousness of life through the perpetual transformations which are life's condition and manifestation'.<sup>78</sup> Kalilombe claims that this is the attitude ordinary people have taken: 'In the total culture change in which they are engaged, [many expressions of traditional culture] are areas which they would very gladly do away with. They would make other choices, like the more "Europeanised" forms, because for them this represents their wish for "development" and change. In those areas they are opting for modernity. The way we are promoting "traditional" forms is such as to valorize regressive values; return to a past that demonstrated our incapacity to move forward with the times'.<sup>79</sup> In much the same way, Dedji claims that Mugambi's preoccupation with African culture ('re-mythologisation') is 'just another version of Blackness (Negritude) theory' and 'has scarcely any real hold on the African masses'.<sup>80</sup>

Culture theology reveals the enormous hurt experienced by Africans, the conviction that Christianity was an integral part of Africa's humiliation, and the insistence that missionary Christianity has to be rejected. Culture theology is a way of dealing with these issues. (As an aside, we may also say that the complete unwillingness to engage with African colleagues reveals much about the collective colonial guilt and self-flagellation of the West and its missionary societies).<sup>81</sup>

However, the preoccupation with Africa's hurt and humiliation is not unproblematic. I mentioned above that Africa's evangelicals were using David Landes as the basis of seminars of reconstruction for Africa. Landes somewhere writes of the

---

<sup>75</sup> *Messagere*, 4 Oct 1995, 7.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures; Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity*, Oxford: OUP, 1992, 34-36.

<sup>77</sup> J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, New York: Doubleday, 1960 [1845], 63.

<sup>78</sup> Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976 [1903], 166 & 171.

<sup>79</sup> Kalilombe, 'Praxis', 44. 'Cultural change... results from choices that people themselves make when confronted with new options. They are the ones who should decide what to retain from the past and what to adopt from among the new options, taking into account what they want the configuration of their new way of life to be like' (ibid, 48).

<sup>80</sup> Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Nairobi: Acton, 2003, 86f.

<sup>81</sup> Martin, *Does?* 101, 107.

MOPE ('Most Oppressed People Ever') syndrome, and argues that it is counterproductive. He writes of the dependency arguments underlying liberation theology, that 'by fostering a morbid propensity to find fault with everyone but oneself, they promote economic impotence. *Even if they were true, it would be better to stow [dis-pense with] them.*'<sup>82</sup>

One of the aims of these theologians is to make the contribution to world Christianity that they feel is long overdue. Yet the incessant preoccupation with African realities may preclude this. Might an ESEAT workshop with the theme, say, 'A Theology of Ireland' shed some light? Could Kenya learn from Ireland?<sup>83</sup> After all, Ireland was colonised by the English for 800 years (many more than the 60-odd for Kenya). At the end of the 1980s Ireland still had a level of output 40% below that of the rest of the EU; in 14 years Ireland caught up, with an increase in living standards in those years three times greater than other EU countries. If Ireland is considered too Western, what about a workshop on 'A Theology of South Korea'? South Korea too was brutally colonised till quite recently, economically roughly on a par with Kenya in the 1960s, and has transformed itself into an economic tiger. Is there anything to be learned from Korea? Can Africa learn from elsewhere?

## Bibliography

- Baitu, Juvenalis. "The Moral Crisis in Contemporary Africa", *AFER*, 45, 3 (2003).
- Bodewes, Christine. *Parish Transformation in Urban Slums: Voices of Kibera, Kenya* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2005).
- Carrithers, Michael. *Why Humans Have Cultures; Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (Oxford: OUP, 1992).
- Chepkwony, Adam K. A. "An African Approach to the Acquisition of Wealth and Dealing with Poverty", in Peter Kanyandago (ed), *The Cries of the Poor in Africa: Questions and Responses for African Christianity* (Kisubi: Marianum Publishing, 2002).
- Dejji, Valentin. *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology* (Nairobi: Acton, 2003).
- Githuku, Sammy. "Taboos on Counting", in Mary N. Getui, Knut Holter, Victor Zinkuratiire (eds), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton, 2001).
- Kanyandago, Peter. "Rich but Rendered Poor: a Christian Response to the Paradox of Poverty in Africa", in Kanyandago (ed), *The Cries of the Poor in Africa: Questions and Responses for African Christianity* (Kisubi: Marianum Publishing, 2002).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Violence in Africa: a Search for Causes and Remedies," in Mary N. Getui and Peter Kanyandago (eds), *From Violence to Peace: a Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton, 2003).
- Katongole, Emmanuel M. "Twenty-First Century: on Surviving Postmodernism", in Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke and Justin Ukpong (eds), *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton, 2001).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2005).
- Landes, David. *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).
- Loisy, Alfred. *The Gospel and the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976 [1903]).

<sup>82</sup> Landes, *Wealth*, 328, italics in original.

<sup>83</sup> As urged in Iraki Xn, 'Vision 2030: Lessons from Ireland', *Standard*, 5 Nov 2006, 12.

- Magesa, Laurenti. "African Renaissance: the Jubilee and Africa's Position in the International Context", in Peter Kanyandago (ed), *Marginalised Africa: an International Perspective* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2002).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Christian Ethics in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton, 2002).
- Maupeu, Herve. "Religion and the Elections", in Herve Maupeu, Musambayi Katumanga and Winnie Mitullah, *The Moi Succession: Elections 2002* (Nairobi: IFRA, 2005); pp. 33-68.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Churches and the Polls", in Marcel Rutten, Alamin Mazrui and Francois Grignon, *Out for the Count: the 1997 Elections and Prospects for Democracy in Kenya* (Kampala: Fountain Publications, 2001); pp. 50-71.
- McGarry, Cecil and Patrick Ryan (eds). *Inculturating the Church in Africa: Theological and Practical Perspectives* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2001).
- Mugambi, J.N.K. *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (Nairobi: Longman, 1989).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Evangelistic and Charismatic Initiatives in Post-Colonial Africa", in Mika Vahakangas and Andrew A. Kyomo (eds), *Charismatic Renewal in Africa: a Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton, 2003).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Religion and Social Reconstruction in Post-Colonial Africa", in J.N.K. Mugambi and Frank Kuschner-Pelkmann (eds), *Church-State Relations: a Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton, 2004).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi: Acton 2003).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (Nairobi: EAEP, 1995).
- Mutabazi, Emmanuel. "Process and Method in the Theology of Inculturation", in Patrick Ryan (ed), *Theology of Inculturation in Africa Today: Methods, Praxis and Mission* (Nairobi: CUEA, 2004).
- Newman, J.H. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Doubleday, 1960 [1845]).
- Ryan, Patrick et al. *Inculturation in the South African Context* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2000).
- Shorter, Aylward. *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988).
- Tarimo, Aquiline. *Applied Ethics and Africa's Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi: Acton, 2005).
- Theuri, Matthew M. "Religion and Culture", in Mary N. Getui and Matthew M. Theuri (eds), *Quests for Abundant Life in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton, 2002).
- Throup, David. "Render unto Caesar the Things that are Caesar's": the Politics of Church-State Conflict in Kenya," in Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (eds), *Religion and Politics in East Africa* (London: James Currey, 1995); pp. 143-76.
- Waliggo, J.M., A. Roest Crolius, T. Nkeramihigo, J. Mutiso-Mbinda. *Inculturation: its Meaning and Urgency* (Nairobi: St Paul Publications, 1986).
- Waruta, Douglas W and Hannah W. Kinoti (eds), *Pastoral Care in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton, 2005).