

ABSTRACT

The Material in Salvific Discourse: A Study of Two Christian Perspectives

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African theology and Christianity are deeply concerned with promoting human material well being, especially in the present deteriorating African contexts. Because of this concern African theology and Christianity have uncritically appropriated the African traditional religious worldview which promotes an immanent and anthropocentric view of the material realm. This immanent and anthropocentric vision, it is claimed, cannot adequately lead to improved material well being but only to greed and corruption because the material realm is viewed as the highest good or an end in itself. This view of the material realm is especially evident in the popular Neo-Pentecostal Christianity or the 'New' Christianity spreading throughout the continent, growing on the promise of improved material well being of its adherents. This project claims that rather than dismissing this New Christianity as inordinately materialistic, as some African theologians do, we should rather suggest a more helpful understanding of the material realm that may aid not only the adherents of the New Christianity but also the African and global church.

In doing this the project locates this New Christianity within the context of African theology and Christianity, suggesting that this New Christianity is not new, as some claim, but rather intensifies the immanent and anthropocentric view of the material realm characteristic of African traditional religious cosmology. It then attempts to overcome this immanent and anthropocentric vision of the material realm by appropriating the Augustinian theocentric vision espoused by Radical Orthodoxy, especially as represented by its proponents such as John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Philip Blond. This theocentric vision does not see the material realm as an end in itself but rather as finding its end in God so that it is not loved for its own sake but for God's sake. Here the material realm is seen as a means to the end of enjoying God. This vision relativises the material realm and thus makes it possible for material well being to be enhanced because what is sought is not material well being for its own sake but as a means of creaturely participation in transcendent and eternal divine life.

The Material in Salvific Discourse: A Study of Two Christian Perspectives

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I dedicate this work to the memory of my late father but I want to offer it to my mother, Ma Juliana Mouh Ngong, as a different kind of gift from what she might be expecting from me. Probably God offers different kinds of gift from what we may be expecting too! Last and most importantly, I want to express my deep gratitude to my wife, Prudencia Eshangke Tonghou, the woman who continues to bear my follies.

DEDICATION

In Memory of My Late Father
Pa Peter Ngong Gweshomo,

The man who first taught me to love the world in a measured manner.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Project

Like African Christianity, African Christian theology¹ has been perennially concerned with human material well being in its soteriological discourse.² This concern, even more evident in recent theological reflections from Africa,³ has been intensified by the increasing human suffering on the continent. However, two limitations characterize these recent theological reflections. The first is that these theological reflections do not

¹“African Christianity” and “African Christian theology” as used in this project refers mainly to the Christianity of, and Christian theology done in, sub-Saharan Africa. Also, the two are not separated in this project.

²The above observation is based on the fact that like modern African Christianity, modern African theology was born in the context of colonial- and neo-colonialism. This is a context which many Africans saw as having undermined African humanity. The rise of the Independent Churches could be seen as an attempt to reevaluate African humanity. This is also the case with the rise of the theology of inculturation and liberation. See Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 1-35. Of course, not all expressions of African Christianity have emphasized the material in their salvific discourse. Missionary Christianity is the prime culprit here. See for example, Ngidu Mushete, “The History of Theology in Africa: From Polemics to Critical Irenics,” in *African Theology En Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 23-4; Kodwo E. Ankrah, “Church and Politics in Africa,” in *African Theology En Route*, 156-7.

³Some recent theological projects from the African continent that attempt to address issues of material well being includes: D. A. Oyeshola, “The Church and Development in Africa: A Critical Assessment of the Praxis of the Roman Catholic Church in Development in Black Africa” (Ph.D. diss., University of Bradford, 1989); Joseph D. Zalot, *The Roman Catholic Church and Economic Development in sub-Saharan Africa: Voices Yet Unheard in a Listening World* (New York: University Press of America, 2002); Benson Kalikawe Bagonza, “Transforming the Human: African Theology of Sustainable Development in Tanzania” (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2003); Emmanuel Katongole, ed., *African Theology Today* (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2002); Emmanuel Katongole, *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2004). Also see, Tokunbo Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya and Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Word Alive Publishers and Zondervan, 2006), a work of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), which does not only contain commentary on the Bible but also includes brief articles that deal with issues such as “Christians and Politics,” “Democracy,” “Healing,” “Secularism and Materialism,” “Suffering,” “Wealth and Poverty,” among others.

adequately discuss how Christians should understand the material realm.⁴ The second is that they fail to engage, or in some cases simply dismiss, what has become the most vocal expression of the Christian faith on the continent – the “New” Christianity in Africa (hereafter abbreviated as NCA [the New Christianity in Africa] or NC [the New Christianity]).⁵ Because of its emphasis on material well being in its soteriology, Allan Anderson, one of the leading Pentecostal scholars and Professor of Global Pentecostalism at the University of Birmingham, England, attributes the emergence of this NC to “unresolved questions” facing the African Church, questions about the place of success and prosperity, healing and material provision, and the “holistic dimension of salvation.”⁶ Thus, it seems prudent that African theologians should not simply ignore the NC in their reflection on Christian contribution to human material well being, or dismiss it as fostering the modern illusory promises of prosperity;⁷ they should instead carefully engage this

⁴The term material realm is used here to refer to things such as material wealth or possessions, created reality such as the physical world, including those sites that RO notes secularity has invested much in, such as aesthetics, politics, sex, the body, personhood, visibility, and space. See John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, “Introduction – Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Graham Ward, Catherine Pickstock (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

⁵Characterized largely by neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, this new Christianity, as J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 26, points out, is a growing form of Christianity in Africa that encompasses “Pentecostal renewal phenomena associated with trans-denominational fellowships, prayer groups, ministries, and independent churches, which came into prominence from about the last three decades of the twentieth century.” In their soteriology, they emphasize personal and societal transformation, healing, empowerment and prosperity through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit. I shall treat this phenomenon in more detail in chapter three.

⁶Allan H. Anderson, “The Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches: The Shape of Future Christianity in Africa?” *Pneuma: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 183-4. Also see his *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162.

⁷Among theologians who simply dismiss this NC are the Ugandan Roman Catholic theologian, Emmanuel Katongole, *A Future for Africa*, 244-8, and the Cameroonian Jesuit priest, Ludovic Lado, “African Catholicism in the Face of Pentecostalism,” in *African Christianities*, Concilium, ed. Éloi Messi Metogo, no. 4 (London: SCM Press, 2006), 22-30.

increasingly dominant force in contemporary African Christianity and help shape its understanding of the material realm.⁸ Such engagement would, in fact, not only help adherents of NC better understand the material and appropriately use it but would also be of help to most African Christians.

This project hopes to contribute towards shaping the understanding of the material realm in the soteriological discourse of NC in particular and African theology in general by locating NC within the context of African Christian theology as a whole. It will argue that NC's stress on material well being as salvific intensifies an important soteriological trend but that, like African theology in general, it fails to situate the material realm within a broader theological vision, thus giving the impression that the material realm is an end itself rather than that which points to God, the source and end of creation.⁹ This shortcoming can be remedied, it will be suggested, by engaging the understanding of the material realm espoused by some proponents of Radical Orthodoxy (henceforth referred to as RO) namely, John Milbank, Graham Ward and Philip Blond.¹⁰ They interpret the material realm according to the theological doctrines of incarnation and participation in the divine economy of salvation, so that the material realm may be loved within the context of love of God. Here, the material is loved not for its own sake but for God's sake as one

⁸This is what Asamoah-Gyadu, a Ghanaian Methodist minister and one of the leading theologians on African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, tries to do in his book *African Charismatics*, 244, which was his dissertation submitted to the University of Birmingham in 2000.

⁹Though a caricature, Shorter and Njiru tell a "true story" about a frustrated young man who became a pastor in this Christianity because he saw that those who are pastors of these churches never went to bed hungry like he did. His motive for becoming a pastor seems to have been to have the means of feeding himself. This is the impression which this Christianity may give about what it means to become a Christian because of its stress on material well being in its salvific discourse. See Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 39-40.

¹⁰It will become clear how I intend to engage each of these scholars in the section that develops the dissertation.

enjoys the material by participating in the Good, the True and the Beautiful, who is God. This view refrains from absolutising the material realm, thus reminding African Christians that they have a higher calling than simply chasing after material well being. The higher calling is to be united with the triune God towards whom we, as pilgrims in this world, move.

Purpose, Significance, and Methodology

This dissertation is an exercise in foundation laying, a prolegomena. With the widespread concern in African Christianity and theology to promote human material well being, only a viable understanding of the material realm can help us imagine how this can be fostered. The cosmology that has influenced much of African theology and NC in particular is the African cosmology¹¹ in which human material well being is seen as the hallmark of divine favor. This, together with the fact that Africa and Africans have undergone unspeakable mistreatment in modern history, has made it very difficult for African Christian theology to relativize the material realm, fearing that it may lead to a stress on otherworldliness. That is why inculturation, liberation and reconstruction theologies have unequivocally stressed human material well being. This has been picked up by NC and the stress on the salvific significance of material well being has been done at the expense of providing an adequate understanding of the material realm. This African

¹¹That there is an African cosmology or worldview is a disputed claim because it appears to give the impression that all Africans think alike since they share a common cosmology. African theologians have continued to use this expression in spite of protests from African philosophers. For a rejection of this collective way of thinking, also known as ethnophilosophy or collective or culture philosophy, see Didier N. Kaphagawani, "What is African Philosophy?" in *The African Philosophy Reader*, ed. P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 89-98. I use the expression not because I want to continue giving the impression that all Africans think alike but because, as we shall see later, this cosmology still appears to be very influential in contemporary African context. Questioning this cosmology is part of the task of this project.

cosmology has led to the inordinate quest for material well being by both Christians and non-Christians, so that Christians have essentially the same understanding of the material realm as some non-Christians.¹² Thus, it can be concluded that the creation-centered view of African traditional religious culture has laid a foundation for an understanding of the material realm that has so far not been helpful in fostering the overall well being of Africans. That is why a new understanding of the material realm is called for, an understanding that blends the creation-centered view in African cosmology with Augustinian theocentrism.¹³ It is this perspective that the representatives of RO discussed here, for all their faults,¹⁴ attempt to provide. It will be argued that this understanding of the material realm can provide a better basis for the economic development of Africa

¹²See Shorter and Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa*, 52. Shorter and Njiru make the interesting point that some segments of NC are competing with the Devil in the drive to enrich their followers because it is believed in Africa that the Devil enriches those who sell their souls to him. By promising to make their followers rich, some segments of NC are in effect in competition with the Devil for the same goal.

¹³That the theocentrism espoused here is Augustinian should be noted. This theocentrism sees the material realm as anchored in the life of God and moving towards God in whom there is complete deification. This eschatological theocentrism should be differentiated from the twentieth century ethics from a theocentric perspective promoted by the University of Chicago professor, James Gustafson. While Gustafson's theocentrism largely attempts to locate ethical decision making within a cosmic rather than an anthropocentric context, we shall see in chapters five and six that Augustinian theocentrism does not decenter human beings but insists that they, together with the rest of creation, have their highest good within the life of God. For Gustafson's theocentric ethics see, James M. Gustafson, *Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), especially the first volume and first chapter of the second volume.

¹⁴The critiques that have been leveled against RO, among others, includes its inability to distinguish between the Christian faith and reflection on that faith (as with John Milbank), its intolerance of other views and, interestingly, its undermining of materiality, especially as seen in Graham Ward's Christology of the displaced body of Christ. For the first critique see James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 177-9; for the second critique see Christopher J. Insole, "Against Radical Orthodoxy: The Dangers of Overcoming Political Liberalism," *Modern Theology* 20 no. 2 (April 2004): 213-41; for the third critique see Lucy Gardner, "Listening at the Threshold: Christology and the 'Suspension of the Material,'" in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, ed., Lawrence Paul Hemming (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), 126-46.

because it does not simply seek economic development qua economic development, but rather the participation in the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

This dissertation is significant not only because it attempts to satisfy the need for a viable understanding of the material realm in African Christianity in particular and world Christianity in general (considering the worldwide growth of NC), but also because it attempts, through RO, to reclaim the Augustinian tradition for Africa. This project is also significant because as a prolegomena to future understanding of the material realm, it provides a foundation on which African theologians can engage issues of human material well being. Such a project has not been attempted before. Also, by linking RO with African theology in general and NC in particular this dissertation is linking forms of theological reflections that have not been linked before.¹⁵

I will critically appropriate the method of RO in this project. RO positions itself against what it sees as the nihilism of secular modernity, which has been defining and constructing the world for several centuries now. According to RO, modern theology has bought into the discourse of secular modernity by confining itself in the privatized space constructed for it by this discourse and has, in effect, suffered from a false humility.¹⁶ This does not only limit theology's capacity to address critically the modern nihilistic world but also its ability to fruitfully appropriate the Christian tradition, especially its classical manifestations. It is in this light that RO proposes to sacramentalize the world (and not just

¹⁵I am aware of only one attempt to link RO to African theology and it is found in an article by Anthony Balcomb who teaches systematic theology at the University of Natal, South Africa. However, his article does not link African theology in general or NC with RO but rather suggests that Milbank's emphasis on the transcendent should be appropriated in South African Black theology. See Anthony O. Balcomb, "Is God in South Africa or Are We Still Clearing Our Throats?" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 111 (November 2001): 57-65.

¹⁶See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1; Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 1.

the spiritual segment of it) by linking it to the divine, insisting that the world has meaning only as it participates in God. In this endeavor, RO draws from pre-modern theology, especially as manifested in the creeds and patristic period; it also draws from those in modern times who attempt to retrieve a vision of the world consonant with its participation in God. Milbank has called this method “postmodern critical Augustinianism” partly because, like Augustine, it prioritizes the reality of the triune God and thus substitutes postmodern nihilistic ontology of violence with an ontology of harmonious peace.¹⁷ Its postmodern character can be seen in its acknowledgement of “the end of a single system of truth based on universal reason,” and its realization that “truth is inseparable from particular narratives.” This enables postmodern Christian theology to put forward its equally unique and unfounded truth but beginning with Christian practice.¹⁸

This project critically appropriates the method of RO in that it appreciates RO’s use of patristic sources, especially in the case of Augustine. Also, it uses the genealogical method as it tries to unearth tendencies in African theology that could have led to the flourishing of NC. It appropriates RO’s location of its project in the postmodern context because the African context, like other contexts, seems to be one in which there are competing visions of truth. But it also takes seriously the fact that contemporary African Christian theology is done in a postcolonial context, a fact that does not appear to be of any interest to the RO project.

¹⁷See his “‘Postmodern Critical Augustinianism’: A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions,” *Modern Theology* 7 (April 1991): 225-37.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 225-7.

The Context

Modern African Christianity and theology have been most especially influenced by the colonial and neo-colonial context in which they developed. This colonial context is one in which traditional African culture was generally disparaged by both the colonial administrations and the missionary enterprise. In this context, theology sought to reclaim this disparaged tradition and to show that theology and Christianity could be authentically African, that is, to be Christian, Africans did not have to become westernized. This is the stuff with which the various theologies of inculturation are made.¹⁹

African theology also developed in a context in which African countries were fighting to gain independence from colonial administrations and dreaming of an independent Africa that would take charge of its destiny, emancipating the African people from colonial domination, thus improving their material well being.²⁰ This context is important because it made African theology to identify more with African people than only with the African church. In as much as African theologians would call for the independence of the African churches,²¹ they would also call for the promotion of the dignity and well being of all Africans. This may explain why in spite of various attempts at

¹⁹This theology originated with works such as, Placide Temples, *La Philosophie Bantoue* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1948) and *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent*. See Emmanuel Martey, *Inculturation and Liberation*, 14-16. Just as is the case with the idea of an African worldview, the notion of anything being “authentically African” is presently under serious assault as it has been pointed out that there are many ways to be African and that Africans can hardly ever completely discard their colonial heritage to retrieve a pristine African way of life. See for example, Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Edward P. Antonio, “Introduction: Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse,” in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, ed. Edward P. Antonio (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 1-28.

²⁰See Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 46-56.

²¹See Gabriel M. Setiloane, “Where Are We in African Theology?” in *African Theology En Route*, 59-60.

constructing an African ecclesiology, African theologians seem to be more concerned about the well being of Africans as a whole and not only about the well being of the church in particular. This means that because African theology also developed in the context of the struggle for the dignity of Africans, it tends to talk more about Africans rather than only about African Christians.²²

The vision of life with dignity and well being that motivated the independence struggle did not seem to have materialized in post-independence Africa. What became apparent was that the independence struggle overthrew white colonizers only to replace them with black autocrats. The undignified life of the average African continued unabated; only this time it was perpetrated by black Africans themselves. African elites who were mostly trained in mission schools and who led in independence struggle became leaders of their various countries and only succeeded in running the countries aground. What became apparent was that the apartheid situation that obtained in South Africa where white minority ruled over the majority black population²³ was similar to what obtained in other sub-Saharan countries, with the only difference being that in sub-Saharan African countries it was the black minority elites, backed by their western supervisors, who lorded it over

²²At the 2006 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion held in Washington, D.C., Ernst M. Conradie, who teaches systematic theology at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, made a presentation on the theme “God’s African Households.” The title of his presentation was “The Whole Household of God (*oikos*): Some African Perspectives,” in which he came to the conclusion that African theologians “seem to place less emphasis on the distinctiveness of the church community in the larger human community.” The development of African theology within the context of African nationalism may help explain why this is so.

²³This led to the development of Black theology in South Africa, which, like African nationalist theology which talks about the dignity of Africans in general, addressed the situation of black oppression in South Africa. This could again explain why the ecclesiology of black theology is less distinctive. For more on the development of Black theology, see Martey, *African Theology*, 18-27; Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 101-13; Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

their own people. This has led the Ghanaian economist George Ayittey to talk of the betrayal of Africa by the African ruling elites. According to Ayittey, the African ruling elites have so destroyed the various nation-states of sub-Saharan Africa by their sheer incompetence, corruption and kleptocracy, that it would take a total reinvention of African leadership and a focus on rural development to turn things around.²⁴ He points out that the current African nation-states are like broken vehicles unfit to carry Africans to a future of well being. That is why the countries that are usually at the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index are usually countries from sub-Saharan Africa. According to him, the nation-state “has to be junked or completely overhauled.”²⁵ Unlike some commentators who put the onus of Africa’s woes on western imperialism, Ayittey, without dismissing the effects of western imperialism on Africa, places the onus for Africa’s woes on African ruling elites. This is also the position of the present writer.

It is this context of apartheid and its overthrow, the betrayal of the dream of a prosperous post-independence Africa, and the grinding penury this has brought on most African people (exacerbated by the present AIDS pandemic), that recent African Christians and theologians are engaging in their salvific discourse. In this context, then, African theology has tended to be reactive rather than proactive. It sees colonialism, neo-colonialism and apartheid as having fostered a situation that undermined the material well being of Africans. Missionary or Western Christianity is sometimes seen as allies of these

²⁴This is the content of his three volumes: George Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992); Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* (St. Martin’s Press, 1998); Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa’s future* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

²⁵Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos*, 33-4; Ayittey, *Africa Unchained*, 3. The United Nations Human Development Index assesses the overall material well being of people in a country based on life expectancy, educational attainment, and adjusted income per capita based on purchasing power parity (PPP).

ideologies by urging Africans to look for happiness in the hereafter rather than in the here and now. So any theological system that is not anthropocentric or creation-centered is regarded with suspicion in this context. It is in this context that NC is growing.²⁶ But one of the goals of this dissertation is to show that stressing the eternal does not necessary ignores the importance of the penultimate. In fact, it is only when the material realm is relativized with reference to the ultimate that its importance can be properly maintained.

Recent Literature on the Material

This review of recent literature relating to the material realm argues that African theology has largely ignored or dismissed NC and that even where it is taken seriously, the issue of how the material realm should be understood is still inadequately addressed. This Christianity has been flourishing in Africa for at least the last twenty years but mainstream African theology has proceeded as if it is a minor event in the life of the African church. That is why some recent works by African theologians ignore this form of Christianity and its understanding of the material realm.²⁷ Reading *African Theology Today* and *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, one would be forgiven for thinking that NC is not relevant in contemporary Africa. Both of these books address issues pertinent to the material well being of Africans but they fail to engage this Christian phenomenon which is presently sweeping across the continent,

²⁶The growth of NCA can however not be seen only as a response to the dire socioeconomic and political conditions in Africa, as Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (London: Hurst and Company, 2004), 1-19, suggests, but could also be said to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

²⁷See Emmanuel Katongole, ed., *African Theology Today and A Future for Africa*; Edward P. Antonio, ed. *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*. No representative of NC is among those who contributed to these texts. Emmanuel Katongole intermittently addresses it in his second volume, but then he dismisses it.

riding on the promise of material improvement. These two works are particularly important because they are edited works that claim to address issues pertinent to African theological discourse. Their failure to address this form of Christianity explicitly suggests that they do not consider it critical in the African theological landscape. Elsewhere, Emmanuel Katongole simply dismisses it as a church of charlatans,²⁸ that fosters the illusion of material progress in Africa. Katongole's reaction is typical of some in the mainline churches both in Africa and elsewhere who feel threatened by the growth of this Christianity. For the Cameroonian Jesuit priest, Ludovic Lado, NC is fostered by predatory ministers who feast on the sweat of their congregations while their congregations pine in penury.²⁹ Thus, rather than engaging these churches theologically in order to determine why people leave mainline churches to join them, they are simply dismissed or accused of "sheep stealing."³⁰ So far, very few mainline African theologians have been interested in the phenomenon. A majority of those who engage it has been anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, whose analyses of the phenomenon have not been dominated by a theological motif but rather by what its prevalence on the continent says about African societies.³¹

²⁸Katongole, *A Future for Africa*, 199-201, 239-49.

²⁹Lado, "African Catholicism in the Face of Pentecostalism," 25.

³⁰See Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru, eds. *New Religious Movements in Africa*, 56-8.

³¹See for example, Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe of Ghana* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999); Mathews Ojo, *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movement in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006); Albert de Surgy, *Le Phénomène Pentecôtiste en Afrique Noire: le cas béninois* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001). A Majority of journal articles that deal with this Christianity is published in journals such as *Journal of Religion in Africa*, *Review of African Political Economy* and *African Affairs*. In fact, *Review of African Political Economy* 52 (1991) was largely devoted to it.

However, two recent works have attempted to engage the theology of this Christianity, paying particular attention to its conception of the material realm in its understanding of salvation. One of these is *African Charismatics* by Asamoah-Gyadu, and the other is *Pentecostalism* by Kingsley Larbi.³² Asamoah-Gyadu's work probes the material dimension in this Christianity's soteriology under headings such as "salvation as transformation and empowerment," "salvation as healing and deliverance," "salvation as prosperity," and "African Charismatic spirituality," showing in each case that this Christianity's understanding of the material realm has contextual and biblical warrants.³³ For him the soteriology of NC is especially pertinent in the African (Ghanaian) context because it articulates "a message that addresses people's situations and circumstances in a relevant manner."³⁴ This message is one that preaches salvation as healing and deliverance, empowerment and transformation, and as prosperity in a context of deprivation. However, he faults NC for, among other things, selective biblical interpretation and inordinate stress on the prosperity message. But at least two shortcomings characterize Asamoah-Gyadu's work. First, it does not see that NC's emphasis on material well being intensifies the same emphasis in African theology in general. Second, its attempt to counter the new Christianity's stress on material well being with a theology of the cross or a theology of suffering is counterproductive in the African rural context. Most Africans are already very acquainted with grief, so a

³²See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*; E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra, Ghana: Center for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001). Both of these theologians are Ghanaians who base their studies on Ghana. While the first work is dedicated entirely to tNC, the second one deals with Ghanaian Pentecostalism in General.

³³Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 132-248.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 231.

theology of the cross will be more appropriate to the elites who are exacerbating the penury of most of these suffering people than to the suffering people themselves. Even more, balancing a stress on the salvific significance of material well being with a theology of suffering does not settle the matter of how the material realm should be understood or appropriated.

Larbi, on the other hand, rightly locates this Christianity's understanding of the material realm in the context of African traditional cosmology, although he does not show how African theology as a whole appropriates this African traditional worldview. For him, this Christianity is mediating salvation "at the fringes of the church," in a context where the need for such material salvation cannot be gainsaid.³⁵ Like Asamoah-Gyadu, Larbi decries the materialism ("commercialism") which this Christianity may engender but he also does not show how the material realm should be understood.³⁶ He seems to see this Christianity's appropriation of the traditional African cosmology as worthy of emulation by the mainline churches.

There is, however, a third work that approaches this Christianity not essentially from the perspective of its material understanding of salvation but rather from the Roman Catholic perspective. This is the work by the English Missionary, Aylward Shorter, and the Kenyan, Joseph Njiru, entitled *New Religious Movements in Africa*.³⁷ The work acknowledges that because many Catholics are joining the movement, it is important to know what makes it attractive to them. This work largely compares and contrasts the

³⁵Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 301-7, 367-416.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 3-15, 425-50.

³⁷Shorter and Njiru, eds., *New Religious Movements in Africa*.

soteriology of NC with that of the Roman Catholic Church, pointing out what Catholics may or may not learn from this movement. One of the differences is that while Roman Catholicism sees the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity as crucial to the process of salvation, NC places more store on faith and imagines salvation as an immediate reality already possessed by the believer. Although Shorter and Njiru do not draw out the implication of this difference, it can be justifiably inferred that the deemphasizing of hope in the soteriological discourse of NC indicates their lack of an important theological vision, thus limiting their view to the present. This may explain why present material well being is crucial to their understanding of salvation. Also, their failure to stress charity may indicate why they see accumulation of wealth by the born again believer as a sign of God's blessing, rather than something that may actually result from ungodly habits. Shorter and Njiru see the failure to stress faith, hope, and charity as a weakness that must not be emulated by Roman Catholicism.³⁸ However, they see NC's stress on *Christus victor* soteriology as fulfilling "an important catechetical need" that Roman Catholicism would do well to emulate in the African context. This is because many African Christians are preoccupied with the negative work of the Devil. Since they see the Devil as responsible for personal and societal mishaps, it is important for the Catholic Church to stress that Jesus Christ has overcome the power of the Devil.³⁹ But stressing that Jesus Christ overcomes the power of the Devil simply validates the African cosmology that this dissertation intends to question.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 49-50.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 50-3.

Even more, although Shorter and Njiru are aware that part of the reason for the growth of NC is its promises of economic and social uplift for its followers, like Asamoah-Gyadu and Larbi, they fail to address how the material realm should be understood. They rather suggest that in order for the Roman Catholic Church to address properly the situation of material lack that is fueling this NC, Catholics have to take the call of Pope John Paul II for a “new evangelization” seriously. This new evangelization is one that eschews “the domineering and manipulative methods of economism and globalization” or commercialism but “implies social transformation through the application of Gospel values, the promotion of solidarity and the exercise of social responsibility. . . . [it implies] the evangelization of neo-liberal economism itself, without allowing Christianity to continue to be contaminated by it.”⁴⁰ Apart from indicating that this new evangelization must be deeply spiritual because it must be coupled with prayer, Shorter and Njiru do not tell us how this deeply material/spiritual evangelization should be understood in the divine economy of salvation. In this case, their approach to the material realm is not very different from that of NC. The new evangelization seems to proceed as if Christians are generally aware of how the material realm should be understood in God’s economy of salvation. It may thus unwittingly promote the same immanent vision espoused by NC by not saying how the material realm should be understood in Christian salvific discourse.

Generally, therefore, those who engage NC either dismiss it as shallow or praise it as worthy of emulation while faulting its emphasis on the material realm. The only positive proposals they give have to do with encouraging its adherents to also appropriate

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 81-2.

suffering as a legitimate Christian lifestyle. But just how the material realm should be understood is hardly suggested. That is the crucial contribution which this dissertation hopes to make – suggest how the material realm should be understood in Christian salvific discourse, especially in the African context.

Development of the Dissertation: From Creation-centeredness to Theocentrism

In this introductory chapter I have attempted to set the framework for the body of the dissertation by first describing the project and setting it within the present African context. I have shown how mainstream African theology hardly adequately addresses this form of Christianity and how even those who engage it still do not settle the important matter of how the material realm should be understood.

Chapter Two will discuss the understanding of the material realm in African theology where it will be shown that just as is the case with African Traditional Religion, African theology's understanding of salvation lays stress on present material well being. Thus, NC's stress on the salvific significance of the material realm is not new because such a stress can be found in African inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction theologies. What many students of NCA fail to realize is that these theologies are forerunners of NC. I will support this argument, first, with a study of the inculturation soteriology of the most influential African theologian, the Kenyan John Mbiti. It will be argued that in his 1963 dissertation Mbiti⁴¹ tries to locate the material realm within the kind of broader theological

⁴¹This dissertation was published as his *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter Between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 123. Here he expresses the desire to see the understanding of salvation by African Christians "elevated far above the utilitarian view of deliverance from physical ills and uncertainties of this life or the security of going to Heaven for its own sake, to the heights of the positive view and experience of fellowship with God." For how Mbiti abandons this desire, see his *Concepts of God in Africa* (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970; Mbiti, "Some Reflections on African

context advocated here, but in his later works he retreated from this attempt, seeing salvation largely within the anthropocentric African traditional religious context. This is the same tendency exhibited by African liberation theologians such as the Cameroonian Jean-Marc Ela,⁴² the South African Manas Buthelezi,⁴³ and the Ghanaian Mercy Amba Oduyoye.⁴⁴ (My choosing of these liberation theologians as representatives of the kind of liberation theology done in Africa is deliberate: they are a fair sample of “African liberation theology,” South African Black theology, and African feminist theology, respectively.) I will conclude this chapter by arguing that even the recent theology of reconstruction proposed by Charles Villa-Vicencio from South Africa and Jesse Nugambi from Kenya, among others, does not divert from this basically anthropocentric way of doing theology. It is therefore not surprising that the new Christianity’s soteriological understanding of the material realm developed in this context.

Chapter Three will be an in depth study of the soteriology of NC in Africa, showing how its conception of the material is an intensification of that discussed in Chapter Two.

This stress on the material realm is not based on the fact that adherents of this Christianity

Experience of Salvation Today,” in *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals: A Continuing Dialogue*, ed., S. J. Samartha (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1974), 108-19; Mbiti, “Our Saviour as an African Experience,” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed., Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

⁴²See Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Éla, *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986); Éla, *Repenser la théologie africaine: Le Dieu qui libère* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2001).

⁴³Manas Buthelezi, “The Relevance of Black Theology” (Swakopmund, S. W. A., 1974); Buthelezi, “Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa,” in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World*, ed. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), 56-75.

⁴⁴Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986); Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995); Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press and Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

are acquainted with earlier African Christian theology as described above but on the fact that they draw from the same source that African theology in general also draws – African traditional religious thought. Adherents of this Christianity would hate to think that they have a history in African theology in general. But as would be argued, they are heirs of African theology as far as their understanding of the material realm is concerned. In this chapter we shall first describe what the new Christianity is before engaging some of its major themes as our primary interlocutors see them. As indicated above, our primary interlocutors are Paul Gifford, Professor of African Christianity at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and Allan Anderson, Professor of Global Pentecostal Studies at the University of Birmingham, England.⁴⁵ Gifford and Anderson approach the new Christianity from two slightly different perspectives. While Gifford sees the development of the new Christianity as a response to the socio-economic and political breakdown of African countries, Anderson sees it as largely a form of Christianity that is well rooted in the African context in terms of its African style of worship, liturgy, and its appropriation of African holistic worldview.⁴⁶ For Anderson this new Christianity is part of what he calls the African Reformation and it holds lessons worthy of emulation by the worldwide church.

⁴⁵Gifford and Anderson are arguably the foremost authorities on African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. Their works have been based on extensive field research in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. While Anderson was born in Africa and raised in Africa and is himself a Pentecostal, Gifford is an Englishman and a non-Pentecostal. For examples of their work, see Gifford, “Prosperity: A New Foreign Element in African Christianity,” *Religion* 20 (1990): 382-400; Gifford, “Some Recent Developments in African Christianity,” *African Affairs* 93 (1994): 513-33; Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*; Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*; Gifford, ed. *New Dimensions in African Christianity* (Nairobi: All African Conferences of Churches, 1992); Anderson, “The Prosperity Message in the Eschatology of Some New Charismatic Churches,” *Missionalia* 15 no. 2. (1987): 72-83; Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: The University of South Africa Press, 1991).

⁴⁶See esp. Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 1-19 and Anderson, *An Introduction to Global Pentecostalism*, 121-2.

Chapter Four will examine the contribution of two early critics of what they saw as the humanistic and materialistic tendencies in African Christian theology, namely Byang Kato⁴⁷ and Tokunbo Adeyemo,⁴⁸ influential leaders in African Evangelical Christianity. It will be argued that both Kato and Adeyemo rightly chastise the theology now espoused by NC for its uncritical stress on the material realm as salvific. But it will also be argued that they fail to take the material realm seriously. While Kato presented salvation as a preparation for the hereafter, Adeyemo proposes a dualism of vertical and horizontal spheres that seems to place a theologically dubious separation between the material and the spiritual realm. Thus, in contrast to the dominant trend in African theology that stresses the salvific import of the material realm, these leading evangelical scholars tend to emphasize salvation as essentially spiritual thereby confirming the fears of many African theologians who hold that any theology which is not anthropocentric inevitably undermines the material realm.⁴⁹

Chapter Five will show that Radical Orthodoxy can be fruitfully mined to overcome this dualistic discourse because it attempts to situate the material within the spiritual and vice versa through its stress on participation, in which, against secular nihilism, “the world”

⁴⁷Byang Kato (1936-1975), a Nigerian, was the second general secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) and has been called “the founding father of modern African evangelical theology.” See Mark Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 278. Kato received the doctor of theology in Dallas Theological Seminary and his most controversial book, an offshoot of his dissertation, was *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975). He wrote many other journal articles that will be used in this chapter.

⁴⁸Adeyemo is also a Nigerian who holds a Ph.D. in Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary and another Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He is the most recent past secretary general of the AEA and his most influential work is still his tiny Master of Divinity Thesis from Talbot Theological Seminary published as *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1979), whose views he apparently still espouses.

⁴⁹See Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 179; Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, 113.

is situated “within a theological framework,” specifically from a Christian standpoint “in terms of the Trinity, Christology, the Church, and the Eucharist.”⁵⁰ Here the world participates in the life of God and vice versa and the material realm, in Augustinian fashion, is teleologically oriented towards God, the surplus of creation. In this chapter I shall engage three theologians associated with Radical Orthodoxy – John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Philip Blond – to determine how each of them understands the material realm. It shall be shown that Milbank engages the material realm using the idea of *gift* situated in the context of reciprocity,⁵¹ while Ward deals with the idea of rightly ordering the desire of the *city*,⁵² and Blond addresses the idea of theological *perception*.⁵³ Here it will be emphasized that these theologians, especially Milbank and Ward, make extensive use of St. Augustine in their understanding of the material realm.

The final chapter shall inquire into how the understanding of the material realm discussed in RO can inform the view of the material realm in NC in particular and African

⁵⁰See “Introduction – Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

⁵¹See, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1993), 391; Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* 11 no. 1 (January 1995): 119-61; Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), among others.

⁵²The idea of the city, derived from Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, is common in the discourse of RO, but Graham Ward has made extensive use of it in his recent work *Cities of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁵³See Philip Blond, “Introduction: Theology Before Philosophy,” in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Philip Blond (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 1-66; “Perception: From Modern Painting to the Vision in Christ,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 220-42; “The Politics of the Eye: Towards a Theological Materialism,” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, 439-61; “The Primacy of Theology and the Question of Perception,” in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, eds., Paul Heelas and David Martin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 285-313; “Theology and Perception,” *Modern Theology* 14 no. 4 (October 1998): 523-34.

theology in general, and how such understanding can help Christians meaningfully participate in the economic and political well being of the continent. It shall attempt to show how African Christian theology can fruitfully engage the theological tradition of Augustine, whom many African theologians claim as their forebear but who is mostly cited only in footnotes.⁵⁴

⁵⁴See, for example, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-first Century," *Journal of the Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997): 24 n. 6, citing Josiah U. Young, *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 7.

CHAPTER TWO

Appropriating a Worldview: The Material in African Christian Soteriology

Introduction

It is now generally accepted that African Christianity and theology¹ reflect, in varying degrees, the influence of African Traditional Religion (hereafter referred to as ATR).² This means that for good or ill, African Christianity and theology have been influenced by the worldview of ATR,³ a worldview which missionary Christianity, influenced by the European Enlightenment, tried in vain to extinguish. Andrew F. Walls, one of the leading scholars in African Christianity, makes the point that just as early Christianity was influenced by its Jewish background and Western Christianity by its Greco-Roman background, so too has African Christianity been influenced by “the parameters of pre-Christian African religion.”⁴ Thus, it is not new to claim that African Christianity or theology has been influenced by ATR. What seems new is the claim that

¹For an important discussion of the relation between African Christianity and theology see, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of an Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-first Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997): 5-7. No firm distinction is here made between African Christianity and theology for African Christian theology is assumed to be the work of African Christians.

²Some scholars prefer to refer to it as “African Traditional Religions” rather than “African Traditional Religion.” Whether named in the plural or singular it should be noted that there is a common thread that runs through the various expressions of this religion. The spiritually charged cosmology is a case in point. See Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 14-18.

³See, for example, Gabriel Setiloane, “How the Traditional World-view Persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana,” in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fasholé-Luke et al. (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 402-12.

⁴A. F. Walls, “Introduction: African Christianity in the History of Religions,” in *Christianity in Africa in the 1990s*, ed., Christopher Fyfe and Andrew Walls (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1996), 1.

African Christianity or theology has not substantially or radically modified this worldview, especially in the understanding of the material realm in its soteriological discourse. The case to be made in this chapter is that the conception of the material realm in African theology (especially as expressed in the theology of inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction) is not significantly different from how the same is understood in ATR; the understanding of the material realm in ATR is rather perpetrated in most of African theology.

Describing a Worldview

Descriptions of the African traditional religious worldview show some variations but most scholars acknowledge that most Africans live in a cosmos that is spiritually charged, a cosmos in which the physical and the spiritual intersect. In this cosmos it is clearly understood that the physical is not the spiritual but it is not detached from the spiritual either. This understanding of the relation between the material and the spiritual must be distinguished from some Western views of this same relationship.

First, it must be distinguished from conceptions that make a clear distinction between the physical and the spiritual realms, implying that the physical can exist independently of the spiritual and vice versa. Second, it must also be distinguished from the Platonic and Neoplatonic understanding of participation (to be discussed in chapter five) in which the material realm can only be explained through its relations to the forms or the One, respectively. It must also be distinguished from Aristotle's understanding of substance as a combination of form and matter. This is because Aristotle does not see anything spiritual about that combination. Although for him matter can be both physical

and non-physical it does not appear that the non-physical form of matter is spirit.⁵

Substance as a combination of form and matter seems to describe a physical process with apparently no regard for any spiritual reality. Even more, apart from his notion of God as the unmoved mover, Aristotle's understanding of causality does not appear to make room for the active presence of the spiritual in the material realm. His postulation of material, formal, efficient, and final causality would not be seen as exhausting all possible causes in the African context. In addition to these Aristotelian causes, African traditional religious thought would also posit causes that are not based in rationality but rather in spirituality.

The relationship between the material and the spiritual realms in the African worldview must further not be understood in terms of George Berkeley's understanding of matter and spirit. Jeffrey Eaton points out that according to Berkeley, the dualism of matter and spirit must be abolished because matter is essentially dependent on spirit.⁶ But on closer reading it becomes evident that what Berkeley understands as spirit has to do with the perceiving mind. Matter is essentially dependent on spirit (mind), and is in fact, indivisible from spirit because there is no autonomous existence of matter independent of its being perceived by the mind.⁷ Here we see that spirit is understood within the rubric of the rational. Here spirit appears to be mind and it can be rationally understood as ultimately equated with God.

⁵See Kit Fine, "Aristotle on Matter," *Mind* 101 no. 401 (Jan. 1992): 36. Matter may be non-physical for Aristotle but the non-physical side of matter is not what is known as spirit in the African worldview. Also see, Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 48.

⁶Jeffrey C. Eaton, "The Primacy of the Spirit," in *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen*, ed. Eric O. Springsted (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 87-98.

⁷*Ibid.*, 90.

This is however not how the relation of the material and the spiritual realms is understood in African traditional religious thought. The oneness of the material and the spiritual realms is not simply oneness of the physical with God. It is the oneness of the physical realm with non-physical (spiritual) beings. Being is made up of physical and non-physical beings with God as the highest in the hierarchy of being. This is however not a Neoplatonic ontology because evil is sometimes attributed to malevolent spiritual beings and not seen as non-being. In fact, malevolent spiritual beings actually work against the wishes of God. These spiritual beings are believed to intermingle with the material realm but how this intermingling takes place is not quite clear. The spiritual beings are different yet inextricably bound with the material realm in a way that cannot be explained rationally. That is probably why Anderson has cautioned that for a Westerner to adequately understand this worldview they have to be detached from Western dualism.⁸ In this African worldview we talk of the material realm and the spiritual realm for lack of a better way to not separate the two.⁹ Yet, as we shall see in a later chapter, this worldview is also different from that espoused by RO which is itself critical of the separation that is usually postulated between the material and the spiritual realms.

It is within this context that salvation is understood in ATR. Here, the goal seems to be to gain the favors of spiritual beings such as ancestors, divinities, and ultimately,

⁸Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa), 4-5. Considering that dualistic tendencies have been challenged in some forms of Western philosophy, especially those espoused by RO, it may not be accurate to claim that dualism is a characteristic of Western philosophy. It is more appropriate to say that it is characteristic of some forms of Western philosophy, especially those RO opposes.

⁹For more on this worldview see the chapter on “The Primal Religions” in Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 365-83.

God, so that material well being might be attained. Here also, warding off malevolent spiritual beings is paramount, because it is only when malevolent spirits are warded off and benevolent ones stacked on one's side, that material well being can be attained. In this context salvation means averting situations that diminish human material well being. It means seeking spiritual powers that overcome impediments to fullness of life largely understood as material well being. Kingsley Larbi succinctly describes the situation:

Since survival of man and his [*sic*] community is dependent upon the help given by the ancestors and the divinities, how man relates to the spirit force is crucial to his well-being. The idea of the cosmic struggle is strong in [this] understanding of the nature of the universe. For one to be able to fulfil [*sic*] his or her aspirations in life, requires the "balance of power" in favour of the supplicant. This "tilting of cosmic power" for one's own benefit or for the benefit of his or her community, is what I have referred to as "*maintaining the cosmological balance*."¹⁰

In this context, people offer prayers and sacrifices to the ancestors, to God or the gods, in order to obtain the power that may enhance human material well being.¹¹ And this material well being in the form of enjoyment of long life, health, wealth, children, that is, possession and prosperity that engender happiness in this life, is the crucial denominator in ATR.¹² What this chapter demonstrates is that it is this understanding of salvation as material well being that has been carried over into African Christian theology of inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction.

¹⁰E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra, Ghana: Center for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001), 7. Emphasis in original.

¹¹See John Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 2, 44; David Tonghou Ngong, "God's Will Can Actually be Done on Earth: Salvation in African Theology," *American Baptist Quarterly* XXIII no. 4 (December 2004): 369-71. My understanding of the material realm in salvific discourse has undergone some change from that found in the article just cited. Also see, Ngong, "In Quest of Wholeness: African Christians in the New Christianity," *Review and Expositor* 103 no. 3 (Summer 2006): 520-1.

¹²Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 8.

Theology of Inculturation and African Christian Soteriology

Theology of inculturation is theology that takes the African worldview seriously. It is marked by a tendency to be critical of wholesale appropriation of theology couched in Western concepts and background. Known variously as Africanization, indigenization, adaptation, incarnation, etc., its task, as the Nigerian theologian Justin Ukpong notes, consists of

re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu. It [has] the task of confronting the Christian faith and African culture. In the process there is the inter-penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation contained in Scriptures and tradition are critically re-examined for the purpose of giving them African cultural expression. Thus there is integration of faith and culture, and from it is born a new theological reflection that is African and Christian. In this approach therefore, African theology means Christian faith attaining African cultural expression.¹³

In a context where African culture had been largely denounced by missionary Christianity, Christianity was coming home to African culture through the method of inculturation. Thus it was that the understanding of salvation in ATR came to serve as yardstick for the understanding of salvation in African Christian theology. Of the many advocates of this method, John Mbiti, the Kenyan theologian, is arguably one of its most noted representatives, especially in Anglophone Africa. Thus, it is his understanding of salvation that we are going to engage in this section. It must be borne in mind that this understanding of salvation, like others developed against the background of Western mission and colonialism, tends to be reactionary.

¹³Quoted in Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 68; See Justin S. Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1984), 30.

John Mbiti and Salvation in Africa: From Theocentricism to Anthropocentricism

Mbiti, one of the most respected (if not the most respected) African Christian theologian(s), is probably the staunchest advocate for the appropriation of the African traditional religious understanding of salvation in African Christian theology. Blake Burleson brought this out in his dissertation but one thing he failed to see is that Mbiti was not always such a staunch advocate.¹⁴ His conversion to the African traditional understanding of salvation may not be unrelated to the story he tells of an imaginary African theologian who studied abroad but returned home upon earning a doctorate. People in the village thought that the theologian was capable of performing the functions of an African traditional priest, so when one of the theologian's sisters fell ill, they thought the theologian could be of help. But this theologian did not have the resources to deal with the problem because western education, with its emphasis on the Enlightenment and demythologization (Bultmann), had ruined his understanding of the African cosmology needed to deal with the illness. The people thought that the "man of God" would exorcise the spirit afflicting the woman as African priests do. But the man of God did not have this ability.¹⁵

Although Mbiti says that this story is imaginary, it may indicate the change that took place in him, since he was educated in the West (Cambridge, England). Upon

¹⁴Blake W. Burleson, "John Mbiti: Dialogue of an African Theologian with African Traditional Religion" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1986), 153-65. See Handwell Yotamu Hara, *Reformed Soteriology and the Malawian Context* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Series, 2005), 149-69, which also fails to see any development in Mbiti's understanding of salvation.

¹⁵See Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "The Africanization of Theological Education," in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse*, ed., Edward P. Antonio (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 61-76; John S. Mbiti, "Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church," in *Mission Trends, No. 3: Third World Theologies*, ed. Gerald A. Anderson and Thomas F. Stranky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 6-18.

graduating from Cambridge he might have returned to Kenya only to find that the Cambridge education did not equip him to adequately address issues in a context where the material and spiritual are assumed to be in constant intercourse and in which human well being depends on negotiating with the spiritual realm. It may account for why he embraced the African view of salvation where the struggle for a “cosmological balance” is meant to ensure this well being.¹⁶ Before this time (1976) Mbiti thought that Africans had a very materialistic understanding of salvation, thus missing the point of Christian salvation, which is the enjoyment of God, an immaterial reality mediated by the material.

This is nowhere more evident than his dissertation which was presented to the University of Cambridge in 1963,¹⁷ in which he sought to direct this material understanding of salvation to its proper spiritual *telos*, which is the enjoyment of God in Jesus Christ, manifested especially in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. Mbiti found missionary theology on baptism and the Eucharist to be woefully inadequate as it stressed only the negative aspects of these sacraments such as when not to be baptized and when not to receive the Eucharist, neglecting the immense potential that a Eucharistic theology has for explicating the eschatological message of the Christian faith. In the liturgical context, especially as represented by the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, the materialistic language the New Testament uses to describe its eschatological vision fuses with the non-material realities which it attempts to convey. Here the material acts and objects of baptism and the Eucharist manifest what it means to

¹⁶See Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 7-13.

¹⁷This dissertation was published as *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

be in Christ, thus making the eternal a present reality, albeit a reality that is not exhausted by the material. Through baptism the faithful are endowed with the Holy Spirit who makes possible their participation in Christ, just as the presence of Christ in the Eucharist makes it the most intimate moment between Christ and the eschatological community.¹⁸

This is how Mbiti proposed to remove the gaze of African Christians from a materialist understanding of the Christian faith and a utilitarian understanding of religion, to a more appropriate understanding of the faith. But this was in 1963, when he apparently had not discovered the theological impotence that Western education could instill in African theologians, as the story told above indicates. By late 1960s and early 1970s, he had started calling for a different understanding of Christianity, a Christianity that was more materialistic. By this time, Mbiti had carried out an in-depth study of ATR, which was emerging as a discipline in some African universities,¹⁹ and through this study he discovered that it was important to reclaim some African religious concepts for Christianity.²⁰ The understanding of salvation was one of these.

Two important essays clearly outline how Mbiti thought the Christian understanding of salvation had to be influenced by the understanding of salvation in ATR.²¹ As the title indicates, in “ὁ σωτηρ ἡμῶν as an African Experience,” he sets out to

¹⁸Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 91-126.

¹⁹Blake Burleson, “John Mbiti,” 49-50.

²⁰This is evident in his works such as *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969); *Concepts of God in Africa* (New York: Paeger Publishers, 1970); and *Introduction to African Traditional Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975); *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²¹See John Mbiti, “ὁ σωτηρ ἡμῶν as an African Experience,” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 397-414, and “Some Reflections of African Experience of Salvation Today,” in *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals*, ed. S. J. Samartha (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1974), 108-19. I am in Agreement with

show the African understanding of Jesus Christ as Savior, using the African Independent Churches²² as an example, but pointing out that some mission churches, that is, mainline Churches such as Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, etc., also entertain similar understanding of Jesus Christ as Savior. Of the understanding of salvation which Christianity met in Africa Mbiti writes:

On coming to African peoples, the Christian message of salvation found a well established notion that God rescues people when all other help is exhausted, and that this rescue is primarily from material and physical dilemmas. God does not save because he is Saviour [*sic*]; rather, he becomes Saviour when he does save. The concept of saving is a dynamic one which is rooted in a particular moment of desperation.²³

Thus, for the independent churches, what is important about Jesus Christ is not so much that his death and resurrection cleanses us from sin as it is that they manifest the saving power of God, that is, the power to rescue people from physical dangers. It is therefore at the level of the “personalization of the power of God” that Jesus as Savior makes sense because it is this power that rescues and protects people. To show the importance of physical rescue (especially healing) in the life of these churches, Mbiti shows how in one of the churches, the African Apostolic Church of Johanne Maranke (in Rhodesia, present day Zimbabwe), the highest ministerial office is that of healer with the evangelist being at the bottom of the chain. Even more, since the faithful are concerned with the power of God, it does not matter whether it is God or Jesus Christ who does the rescuing, as the

Burleson on the importance of these two works for Mbiti’s mature understanding of salvation. See Blake W. Burleson, “John Mbiti” 153-65.

²²African Independent Churches (AIC) are churches that broke from missionary Christianity in Africa and started making use of African customs in their understanding of the faith. They were led by charismatic African leaders and are sometimes seen as precursors to the new Christianity in Africa. See Kwame Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*.

²³Mbiti, “ὁ σωτηρ ἡμῶν as an African Experience,” 400.

two are interchangeable. This means that physical rescue is so important for these churches that a theological problem such as how Jesus Christ is related to God is not important. The faithful simply want to be rescued and salvation has to be understood in this light. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is the kind of claim that NC is presently making.

Whatever reservation he expressed about the understanding of salvation in African Christianity in “ὁ σωτηρ ἡμῶν as an African Experience” disappears in the article titled “Some Reflections on African Experience of Salvation Today,” published in 1974. In this article he begins by examining the traditional linguistic and cultural meaning of the word “salvation” among the Akamba people of Kenya. Here he finds that abstract nouns such as salvation or redemption are never used in traditional life, and thus for their meaning to be clear to African people they need to be made practical. He also finds that verbs such as “to save” and “to redeem” are used to describe rescue from practical situations such as illness, famine, drought, danger, and other perilous situations. He then moves on to examine how salvation is understood in ATR and finds that behind the prayer, sacrifices and offerings of adherents of ATR, the basic idea is to seek or acknowledge the saving acts of God and spiritual beings. He concludes:

In these religious considerations of the concept of Salvation, we take note that salvation in African Religion has to do with physical and immediate dangers (of the individual and more often of the community) – dangers that threaten individual or community survival, good health, and general prosperity or safety. This is the main religious setting in which the notion of salvation is understood and experienced. Salvation is not just an abstraction: it is concrete, told in terms of both what has happened and is likely to be encountered by people as they go through daily experiences.²⁴

²⁴Mbiti, “Some Reflections,” 112.

He therefore argues that evangelical theology's stress on salvation from sin is out of place (not simply one-sided) in the African context because it is foreign to Africans' understanding of salvation. African Christians have not rejected the Christian faith, he claims, because they have applied the concept of salvation to concrete, physical dilemmas of their existence. He acknowledges that Christianity has brought the added dimension of salvation extending to the hereafter but insists that the idea of salvation must continue to be applied to concrete situations that negatively affect the lives of Africans today.

Thus, we see that Mbiti moves from understanding the material realm in a theocentric manner to an immanent and anthropocentric one. The ultimate no longer appears to be God but material well being. As we shall see, it is this view that NCA will later espouse. But more immediately, we shall see that it is this understanding of salvation that also came to be espoused by African liberation theology (that is, liberation theology done in sub-Saharan Africa north of the Limpopo River), feminist liberation theology, Black liberation theology in South Africa, and the recent theology of reconstruction. But we shall now turn to how this understanding of salvation is expressed in African liberation theology especially as represented by Jean-Marc Éla.

Jean-Marc Éla: Towards Overcoming an Anthropology of Sickness and Adversity

When the Cameroonian Roman Catholic priest, Father Angelbert Mveng, was found strangled in his home in 1995, Jean-Marc Éla, a fellow priest and partner with Mveng in the African liberation theology movement, fled to Canada where he has apparently lived since then. Mveng, like Éla, had been a vicious critic of those forces responsible for the pauperization of the Cameroonian people in particular and Africans in general. According to him, these forces had confined Africans to what he termed

“anthropological poverty,” “the kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person.”²⁵ This kind of poverty renders people hopeless and useless and destroys communities.

Éla is also concerned with this poverty and this has led him to place so much stress on the material realm that it seems to have become an end in itself in his theology.²⁶ This is brought to the fore in his recent book where he says that the theological question that haunted him over twenty years ago is still the question with which he is struggling today. In it Éla tells the story of how he was assigned to work in a rural area of northern Cameroon where he developed the habit of holding discussions with the people related to some of their pressing questions of life. It was during one of such discussions that “an event which had since marked my life and oriented the entire process of my reflection and research”²⁷ happened. What happened was that he had proposed that the topic for discussion be about God, to which one young woman in the group retorted, “God, God, and after that what?”²⁸ It was then that he realized that for

²⁵Engelbert Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation: A theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosini Gibellini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 156.

²⁶Éla is also a sociologist and most of his sociological work deals with this very matter, specifically with issues of economic development. Some examples of his non-theological writings include: Jean-Marc Éla, *Innovations Sociales et Renaissance de L’Afrique Noire: Les défis du monde d’én-bas*, (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1998); Éla, *Afrique, L’Irruption des Pauvres: société contre ingérence, pouvoir et argent*. (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1994); Éla, *Guide pédagogique de formation à la recherche pour le développement en Afrique* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 2001).

²⁷Jean-Marc Éla, *Repenser la théologie africaine: Le Dieu qui libère* (Paris: Éditions Karthala 2001), 7. This work has not been translated into English. The above quotation has been translated by me and in the French it reads thus: “un événement qui a marqué ma vie et orienté toute ma démarche de réflexion et de recherché.”

²⁸*Ibid.*, 8. In the French, the above expression is as follows: “Dieu, Dieu, et après?”

that young woman and for people like her, the question of God had to be reformulated so that it becomes relevant to their situation. The question of God had to be about the significance of God in a situation of poverty, drought, famine, injustice and oppression. In effect, the question of God had to be removed from the realm of the abstractly theological to the realm of the anthropological where the nitty-gritty of life is lived. This theological, or rather anthropological, orientation can thus be found in Éla's earliest works, two of which have been translated into English.²⁹

In one of these works, Éla begins by addressing the despoliation and alienation of Africans in an activity central to ecclesial life: the Eucharist. Believing that the kind of theology that could properly address the alienation of Africans in a world which oppresses them is one that makes a *mélange* between inculturation and liberation, he begins by showing that such a combination will demonstrate that Africa's problems can be located in this crucial activity of fellowship. According to him, Africans are estranged from being full participants in the Eucharist when the elements that are used, bread and wine, are foreign to them. He sees the insistence on using elements that are foreign to the geography of the people as characteristic of a church (the Roman Catholic Church), which insists on imposing a Eurocentric interpretation of the Christian life on people everywhere and thus alienating them from themselves. "[T]he case of the Eucharist," he writes, "reveals the domination at the heart of the faith as lived in Africa, within a Christianity that refuses to become incarnate in our peoples."³⁰ The cry here is one of

²⁹Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), originally published as *Le cri de l'homme africain* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1980) and *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), originally published as *Ma foi d'africain* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1985).

³⁰Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry*, 5.

inculturation so that Africans may be made to feel at home in the Christian faith. The insistence on using foreign elements in the Eucharist, he notes, also has an economic implication in that it discourages Africans from producing crops that can serve the same purpose; even where such crops are produced, they are not used. In terms of trade, Africans are on the wrong end of the deal because they are made to import the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, elements that could be replaced by viable African alternatives such as millet and beer. If this continues, the Eucharist in effect becomes a site which does not serve the liberation of human beings which the resurrection of Christ engendered but perpetrates neocolonial exploitation and domination of Africa, and its dependence on the West.³¹

This situation of Western domination and alienation of Africa does not happen only in the Eucharist but also in the lives of rural communities in Africa, especially among the Kirdi of northern Cameroon among whom he worked in his early ministry. The Kirdi endure a life of hunger, penury and desperation caused by the replacement of the production of food crops with cash crops, which are good only for export, making money for multinational companies, but leaving the people with an empty granary. Éla wonders how the peasants can survive in a context in which even their ability to provide for themselves has been hijacked by the international economic system that goes to enrich the few at the expense of the many. It is in this light that he calls for a “ministry of the granary” (“*pastorale du grenier*”) because the granary of the African peasants is empty (*le grenier est vide*).³² This is a ministry that recognizes that feeding is a political

³¹*Ibid.*, 1-8.

³²Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African*, 87-101; *Ma Foi d’africain*, 117-32.

problem especially in the villages of Cameroon, where the lands of rural peasants have been seized for purposes of planting cash crops. The ministry of the granary attempts to refill the granary of these deprived villagers so that they may not die of starvation. Thus, rather than using the land of the people to plant cotton as is the case in northern Cameroon, millet should be planted because it is the lifeline of these villagers. The life of the church in these situations should therefore be grounded in providing the ministry of the granary, taking care of this immediate need of the people. It is only in participating in this ministry of the granary that the church participates in the cross of Christ which is located, in a hidden way, among the poor of the Third World. In fact, “today, the oppressed is Jesus Christ,”³³ he claims. The immanent and anthropocentric character of this understanding of salvation is clearly evident here.

According to Éla, theology in Africa has to be radically rethought in such a way that the church’s very existence is put on the line for the well being of the oppressed people of Africa. A church cannot play this role if it sees its life as that of providing “visas for eternity,”³⁴ thus abandoning human material well being here on earth. As a matter of fact, a church that sees itself as a soul-saving organization is not only practicing the faith counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but is also acting counter to African anthropology which, like biblical anthropology, asserts the concrete unity of body and soul, the spiritual and the material.³⁵

³³Éla, *Ma Foi d’africain*, 193. “Aujourd’hui, Jésus-Christ, c’est l’opprimé.”

³⁴Éla, *African Cry*, 7.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 90.

It is this radical rethinking of the Christian faith, which is basically a search for a new paradigm for understanding salvation, that he pursues in his recent theological work, *Repenser la théologie Africaine*. This work describes the modern history of Africa (from Africa's first encounter with Europe to the present), as a history of various forms of slavery (*esclavage*), ranging from the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism, to the present era of the market (*ère du marché*) called globalization.³⁶ It is within this broader context of virtual enslavement, a situation that has exacerbated the poverty and oppression of Africans, that the gospel has to be reread and a new paradigm for doing theology developed.

Thus, African theology has to abandon missionary theology, heir to a western method of doing theology that can be traced to Saint Augustine. Central to this theology is a soteriology based on an understanding of salvation derived from the Augustinian view of original sin. Here emphasis was placed on the doctrine of ransom (*rachat*) or redemption that resulted in Christianity becoming a religion for the salvation of souls from eternal damnation in hell. This, together with an aspect of Neo-Platonism which was embraced by the "Fathers of the Church" (*Pères de l'Église*), led to a devaluation of the world. According to Éla, the aspect of Neo-Platonism that was embraced by the Fathers of the Church and which in turn influenced western theology and the world-denying Christianity that was brought to Africa is that which "neglects not only the values of the person, the body and sexuality, but also the consistency of the world, of

³⁶Éla sees globalization or the market (the dictatorship of money: "dictateur de l'argent") as a continuation of the history of slavery already begun in Africa. It is part of the new forms of slavery (nouvelles formes de servitude) that confronts (Black) Africans, who are "the forgotten of the earth" (les oubliés de la terre). Éla, *Repenser la theologie africaine*, 67, 99.

creation, and the history which constitutes the structures of Christian thought.”³⁷ This world-denying tendency in soteriology, he points out, with its long history in the church, must be combated with a rereading of the gospel (*l'Évangile*). Such a rereading will find an understanding of salvation (*salut*) which neither evades nor surrenders the world. This is a gospel which calls us neither to get out of the world nor to conform to it but to transform, or more radically, to participate in the transformation which God is undertaking (*entreprendre*) in the world. This understanding of the world makes it incumbent on theology to make the present its site (*foyer*) of discourse because the God of Hope (*Dieu de l'Espérance*) can only be made sense of in daily trial (*épreuve du quotidien*). “In Christianity,” Éla insists, “salvation does not exist outside the world and history and outside service to the other,” for the gospel does not simply preach an eternal rest (*repos eternal*) but announces joy (*joie*) and happiness (*bonheur*) for today.³⁸ His reading of the Gospels of Luke (2, 10-11, 4, 21) and John (15, 11, 17, 18) leads him to conclude that when Jesus talks of salvation, joy and happiness, he is not talking about the future but the present. Thus, for the African, salvation has to be understood in its relation to the world and history.³⁹

Éla's theology is probably the most deliberate attempt to discuss the place of the material realm. His claim that the Augustinian understanding of sin and grace and the early Church Fathers' embrace of Neo-Platonism undermine the importance of this world explains why many African theologians have been uneasy with the Augustinian tradition.

³⁷Éla, *Repenser la théologie Africaine*, 79. In the French the above quotation reads: “. . . néglige non seulement les valeurs de la personne, du corps et de la sexualité, mais aussi la consistance du monde, de la création et de l'histoire qui constituent les structures de la pensée chrétienne.” My translation.

³⁸Éla, *Repenser la théologie Africain*, 80-1.

Any attempt that seems to place Christian hope in the future is thus sternly resisted as an attempt to evade the world. In the end, it seems that the *telos* of Christian understanding of salvation is the world or history, rather than God. The quest for a better world, then, seems to become the ultimate. God is seen as a means to this end. As will be argued, the Augustinian understanding of the world embraced by the representatives of Radical Orthodoxy, locates the world within the divine redemptive work that ends with God rather than the world. But presently we will continue with our review of the material realm in African theology by examining the work of the Ghanaian theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the most important representative of African women's theology.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye and the Theology of Life

It may be inaccurate to consider Oduyoye only as a representative of African women's theology because feminist concerns were initially not central to her early contributions as a theologian. In her early works, she considered herself simply as an African theologian and it was only with time that she embraced the cause of women as her theological agenda.⁴⁰ However, this shift in her thinking does not lead her to a different assessment of the material realm but rather towards the same assessment espoused by African male theologians, as, like them, her gaze seems fixed on the material realm and the temporal rather than the eternal. At the beginning of her theological career Oduyoye insisted that ATR should be the primary lens through which Christian salvation

⁴⁰She is considered the founder of the group known as The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, founded in 1989. More about this group can be gotten from the following web site: <http://www.thecirclecawt.org/>. This group recently dedicated a festschrift in her honor (probably the only African woman theologian to have a festschrift in her honor). See Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, ed. *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006). In addition to founding the Circle, she is also the founder of the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture (1998) located on the campus of Trinity Theological College, Ghana.

must be understood in the African context. It was only with time that she mounted feminist critiques of certain facets of African traditional religio-culture and Christianity, facets which, in her estimation, limit the ability of Africans in general and the African woman in particular from participating in the abundant life which Christ brings.⁴¹

Although *Hearing and Knowing*⁴² was not her first book,⁴³ it was her first significant theological contribution to African theology and in it she followed a tendency that had been clear in her earlier theological contributions. Like other African inculturation theologians at the time, she wanted to show that there was an African worldview that should be taken seriously in theological reflections. This view had been briefly outlined in one of her earlier articles entitled “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology.”⁴⁴ In this article she indicated that since salvation seems to be central to African religious beliefs and practices, the focus of African Christian theology should be soteriological. And the understanding of soteriology she advocates is one that sees salvation as rescue from individual and moral evil like racism, poverty, and totalitarianism. She claims that because Africans recognize that life is not entirely materialistic, the desire for salvation from evil forces is the

⁴¹In addition to the Exodus motif, John 10:10 and Luke 4 are central New Testament texts for Oduyoye, as is the case with other African liberation theologians. The idea of abundant life is taken from John 10:10. What this means in Oduyoye has not been clearly defined but it seems to relate to various facets of material well being.

⁴²See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.)

⁴³Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), xiv. Here she faults those who think that *Hearing and Knowing* was her first book.

⁴⁴Oduyoye, “The Value of African Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices for African Theology,” in *African Theology en Route*, 109-16.

yearning for what she called “life after life,” that is, the desire to have a closer relationship with what she refers to variously as Supreme Being, Source of Life, life force, Being Itself or God.⁴⁵ This seems to imply that closer relationship with God is made manifest in the overcoming of impediments to material life. Here the idea that divine life is made manifest in material well being is unmistakable.

In *Hearing and Knowing* she positions herself as an African theologian seeking to correct what Africans had been taught about Christianity and what they now know about it. She contends that there is a yawning gap between what they were taught about Christianity and what they now know, caused by the increased marginalization of the African worldview and experience in the missionary practice of Christianity on the continent. This marginalization of the African worldview and experience in the practice of Christianity on the continent, she claims, is nothing new. It goes as far back as the beginning of Christianity on the African soil: early African Christianity.

For Oduyoye, early Christianity in North Africa was set within a colonial context that marginalized the views of African Christians, the Berbers, whose Christianity was a transformed version of their primal religion. That is why early popular expressions of Christianity such as the Montanists, the Novatians and the Donatists were suppressed, aided by theologians like Cyprian and Augustine who were alienated from their own people by absorbing the mentality of their Roman colonial masters. According to Oduyoye, the imagination of early North African Christians was captured by their understanding of God as one who calls for human holistic well being, and these

⁴⁵Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The Value of African Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology,” in *African Theology En Route*, 114-6. In a later work she writes, “When humans experience the absence of life, they discern and interpret the situation as the absence of God.” See, *Introducing African Women’s Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 40.

Christians were willing to risk their lives for the faith in service and martyrdom. But African theologians such as Cyprian and Augustine let these Christians down by developing a theology that did not take their primal worldview seriously, and by colluding with the Roman colonial administration to suppress them (considering that Augustine enlisted the help of Roman administration to suppress the Donatists). The failure of early North African Christian theologians to adopt the understanding of the faith held by the people undermined their ability to plant a viable Christianity in the African soil. Thus, what came to exist as Christianity was superficial (in the sense that many did not take it seriously) and antagonistic (because it was against a majority of the people). For example, instead of advocating a rigid African morality that funded Donatist sacramental theology, the “universal church” (or catholic church) represented by Augustine, argued otherwise.

In addition, she claims, without saying how, that the Christianity taught by African theologians beginning from Tertullian to Augustine stressed fear more than love. For her, then, it appears that the people were under siege by an elitist theology that undermined their worldview and experiences. Because this Christianity supported by the catholic or universal church alienated the people, they were no longer sympathetic to Christianity as a whole and so when the Muslims invaded North Africa in the seventh century, the people were only too willing to abandon the Christian faith and go over to the Muslims whom they saw as their defenders and liberators. From this fiasco of early Christianity in North Africa, Oduyoye draws the following conclusion:

1. The gospel has to be dynamically related to a people’s “primal religion” if they are to be brought to Christ. Today’s primal religion may not be the worship of gods but other more immediate concerns – an ideology, physical comfort, self esteem, or perhaps a vision of what life on earth could be.

2. A theology that will sustain a people's religion and piety will probably not be one produced by an intellectual elite or a hierarchical power, but one that is born from the people's experience [*sic*] of God-in-action. A relevant theology . . . built upon the understanding of faith that one finds among the people even before the intellectual elite has begun to cast it in scientific language.⁴⁶

Because the Christianity that triumphed in North Africa was one supported by “the European allies of Augustine” it did not represent what the people understood by Christianity and so it did not stand a chance to succeed.

This inability to “learn the ways of the natives” has characterized African Christian theological reflection from the early church to the modern missionary and colonial movements. Although this way of doing church and theology in Africa began to be challenged by churches founded by Africans in modern times, this tendency has not been completely eradicated in African Christianity. She sees Byang Kato and Tokunbo Adeyemo (both of whom will be engaged in Chapter Four of this work) as examples of those whose theology still seeks the approval of their European masters.

Thus, the message to African theologians about the way theology should be done for the welfare of the church and people is clear: theology done for the approval of the west will not take root in the African soil and will have little influence among Africans. Theology that is not rooted in African primal worldview is doomed to creating superficial Christians who do not take the faith seriously. And scholars generally accept that it is because NC takes this worldview seriously that it is presently spreading across the continent in leaps and bounds.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 23-4.

⁴⁷See Birgit Meyer, “‘Make a Complete Break with the Past’: Memory and Post-Colonial modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no 3 (August 1998): 316-49.

It is with the understanding of theology as steeped in the African situation (in both primal religious worldview and the history of mission and colonialism) that Oduyoye does her theology. But unlike male theologians who sought to defend the African primal worldview from colonial and missionary assaults, Oduyoye's understanding of this worldview is nuanced. For her, the African understanding of salvation as rooted in human rescue from material impediments must be maintained, but some African indigenous religious beliefs and practices, including some church practices that undermine human material well being, especially the well being of women, must be criticized and rejected. Like Éla, Oduyoye believes that African inculturation theology must be balanced with a theology of liberation, especially the liberation of women, because there are some conceptions of the Christian faith which are not only oppressive to Africans in general but to women in particular. It is in this light that Oduyoye's turn to feminist (liberation) theology should be understood.

Central to her agenda as a feminist liberation theologian is the critique of patriarchal tendencies in ATR. Coming from the Akan of Ghana whose society is matriarchal, she received a cultural shock when she got married into the Yoruba society of Nigeria, a society which is androcentric, with women seen as the property of men. This context forces her to appropriate those stories that portray the agency of women in African societies. One of these stories is found among the Akan and it credits their rescue from death by thirst during their migratory phase to a woman. The story, like most African stories, is told in different ways by Oduyoye herself⁴⁸ but the gist of the

⁴⁸Compare how the same story is told in Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 35-36 and in Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*:

story is that when a group of Akan people were migrating from the north of Africa to their present location in Ghana, they became very thirsty. They came to a lake but were afraid to drink from it fearing that it might have been poisoned. The leader of the people, a woman named Eku, let her dog drink the water. When nothing bad happened to the dog she drank it. And when nothing bad happened to her, the people drank the water shouting, “Eku-aso” (meaning, “Eku has tasted”). To this day the place is known as Eku-Aso. According to Oduyoye, this woman was the liberator of her people. This story, she points out, indicates that African women, unlike the present backseat which they are made to take by African religious traditions, have often been at the forefront seeking the liberation or well being of their people. “Most migration stories of the Akan,” she writes, “do put women at the center, with women leading the community to freedom and prosperity.”⁴⁹

Such is also the story of the mythical woman, Anowa, whom Oduyoye uses in the title of her second book⁵⁰ that specifically addresses the situation of the African woman, *Daughters of Anowa*. In this work she sees the industry, creativity and life-affirming activities of women as reminiscent of Anowa, a mythical woman representing Africa, who, before the patriarchal take over of the continent, enabled her people to experience

African Women and Patriarchy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 8. The main discrepancy seems to be about who drank the water first: the woman or the dog. In the first case it is the woman and in the second case it is the dog.

⁴⁹Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 8.

⁵⁰Her first book that specifically dealt with the situation of women in church and society, though it was not limited only to the African women, was *Who Will Roll The Stone Away: The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990).

peace and prosperity.⁵¹ While African women (who are daughters of Anowa, that is, descendants of Anowa) have attempted to lead the people to “Anowaland”, where there is peace and prosperity (salvation), patriarchy has tended to suppress women and harm the entire continent. It is this tendency that has to be critiqued through cultural hermeneutics.⁵²

Cultural hermeneutics uncovers and critiques stories embedded in ATR and the Bible that foster patriarchy such as the Ifa Oracle which portrays women as liars, traitors and killers,⁵³ and rituals that diminish women’s well being such as those conducted during birth, puberty, marriage and death (mourning).⁵⁴ Some of these ritual practices not only prevent women from participating in the decision-making process that affects their life (such as when a woman is given into marriage) but they also endanger their health (such as the issue of Female Genital Mutilation [FGM] which still goes on in many African societies). Cultural hermeneutics further uncovers how women’s contribution to the well being of African societies, though crucial, has been curtailed because the

⁵¹Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 6-7, n. 6.

⁵²Mecy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 13.

⁵³Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Christian Feminism and African Culture: The Hearth of the Matter,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology*, ed. March H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 443-6. Bolaji Bateye, from Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, in her paper titled “‘Osa Eleiye’ (The Witches’ Verse): Yoruba Orature, the Babalawo, and Female Power,” presented at the 2006 edition of the American Academy of Religion, Washington, D. C., attempts to show that the “feminine mystique” is an ambivalent phenomenon in Yoruba religious traditions and can thus serve to empower women.

⁵⁴Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Women and Ritual in Africa,” in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, ed., Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 9-24. For more on African women’s engagement with patriarchy, see Musa Dube, ed. *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

political and economic arrangements foster the pauperization of the African woman or, to use her words, “the feminization of poverty” in Africa.⁵⁵

Tendencies that bring down women are not only found in ATR and culture but also in the Bible (or the church) whence the Christian gospel comes. Because the spirituality of women is closely tied to the Bible, the Bible has become part of the African context. Cultural hermeneutics has to be applied to it in order to extract what is liberating and discard what is oppressive.⁵⁶ Her goal is to encourage the promotion of elements that are life-affirming to African women and enhance their full humanity and participation in society.⁵⁷ Here again, it should be noted, the goal seems to be limited to material well being.

It is in pursuit of this vision that she, like most African women theologians, celebrates Jesus Christ as liberator, as the one who is a perfect example of mothering. Drawing from a strand of African theology that stresses John 10:10 (“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” NRSV), and Luke 4 (where Jesus portrays himself as liberator of the oppressed and healer), she portrays Jesus Christ as the one who rescues African women from the various life-denying situations in which they often find themselves, so that they may enjoy

⁵⁵Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 210-11.

⁵⁶Oduyoye, *African Women's Theology*, 11. Also see Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2002). For my review of both of these works see David Tonghou Ngong, review of *Introducing African Women's Theology*, by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Review and Expositor* 102 (Winter 2005): 166-168; and Ngong, review of *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*, by Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 11 no. 4 (September 2004): 477-479.

⁵⁷Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 13.

abundant life.⁵⁸ It is this Christ whom a popular Ghanaian charismatic woman prophet, Efua Kuma, embraces as wonder worker, wise and intimate friend, and one through whom life's battles are won.⁵⁹ This is a Christ through whom the power of God is made manifest in the world. According to Oduyoye, the God of Jesus Christ, whom African women worship, is not different from the God they had known in their pre-Christian religion.⁶⁰ Their understanding of Jesus Christ is not based on the Chalcedonian perspective of the nature of his humanity and divinity but on his mediation of the power of God which enables women to overcome life-denying conditions. We shall see that the view of Jesus Christ as mediating the power of God through which adversities are overcome is also central to NC. In this Oduyoye, like other male African theologians, was foreshadowing NC.

True to her insistence on the centrality of material well being in her soteriological discourse, Oduyoye does not look forward to an eschatological existence in God but rather expects to receive from God here in the world "a life lived fully as God would have it, life as a doxology to God, who first loved us."⁶¹ She is aware of the power of hope in eschatological discourse but her hope is in the transforming power of God who can change life here and now. Resurrection, for her, happens any time new life in Christ

⁵⁸Amoah and oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," 45.

⁵⁹Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's theology*, 59-60.

⁶⁰Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Empowering Spirit of Religion," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 245-58; *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 51-65, esp. 59.

⁶¹Quoted in Njoroge, "Let's Celebrate the Power of Naming," in *African Women, Religion, and Health*, 60.

is experienced.⁶² Oduyoye gives the impression that all that matters is that which is located in the present thus reflecting the dominant emphasis displayed in ATR. It is this same emphasis that is found in black liberation theology,⁶³ especially as demonstrated by Manas Buthelezi, to whom we now turn.

*Manas Buthelezi and the Search for Racial Fellowship*⁶⁴

Buthelezi has been aptly described as the father of Black theology in South Africa. After earning a doctorate in theology from the United States, Buthelezi returned to South Africa in the late 1960s, where he became a leading proponent of the Black theology movement throughout the 1970s.⁶⁵ A Lutheran, he was elected bishop of the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa in 1977. He is one of the unsung saints of the South African church's struggle against apartheid. According to Buthelezi, Black theology is relevant in the South African context because it attempts to overcome apartheid's heretical ecclesiology that is based on ethnicity and race.⁶⁶ He understands Black theology as mission theology which urges black people not to allow themselves to be defined by this anti-ecclesiology that describes them as made in

⁶²Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 119.

⁶³See the critique of South African liberation theology in Anthony O. Balcomb, "Is God in South Africa or Are We Still Clearing Our throats?" *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa* 111 (November 2001): 57-65.

⁶⁴I am in agreement with Dwight N. Hopkins's interpretation of Buthelezi's theology as theology of racial fellowship. See Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 98-109.

⁶⁵See "Editorial: Theology After Soweto," *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa* (September 1976): 3; Hopkins, *Black Theology*, 98.

⁶⁶Manas Buthelezi, "The Relevance of Black Theology" (1974 (?), TMs (photocopy), pp. 2-3, Emory University Library, Atlanta.

the image of white people. It equips them to take the risk of creatively bridging the racial divide, thus recovering their status as made in the image of God.

Apartheid developed from an ecclesiology invented by the Dutch Reformed churches, which saw the Dutch in South Africa (Afrikaner) as God's chosen people.⁶⁷ The privilege of being chosen came to include all white people and all other peoples came to be defined by their relation to white people. According to Buthelezi, this means that other peoples, especially black people, are created in the image of white people rather than in the image of God. Black theology was therefore a missional theology designed to simultaneously help black people recover their true nature as human beings made in the image of God and humanize white people.⁶⁸ Recovering their identity would help them stand in creative relation to whites, thus saving white South Africans from the idolatry of seeking security in the power of the state rather than in the power of God.⁶⁹ Racial fellowship therefore became an overarching framework within which his call for the liberation of black people was couched. Using themes drawn from Christology Buthelezi demonstrates that the liberation of black people in South Africa would not only lead to ecclesial fellowship but also to racial fellowship.

Buthelezi draws from the theology of Christ as the new Adam articulated by Paul (Romans 5:12-21), concluding that humankind is united in Christ and that in this

⁶⁷For more on the theology of apartheid see John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, ed. *Apartheid is a Heresy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983).

⁶⁸Manas Buthelezi, "Six Theses: Theological Problems of Evangelism in the South African Context," *Journal of the Theology of Southern Africa* (June 1973): 55-6. Unlike some sub-Saharan African theologians who wanted to take over evangelization from European missionaries because they wanted to be independent from the missionaries, Buthelezi's insistence on the agency of Africans in missionary activity developed from his goal to humanize white South Africans and thus create a better relationship with them.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 3-5.

“unifying salvation in Christ, the church derives the shape of its life.” Thus, a church based on “separate development” (apartheid), is heretical because it is based on the ontological assumption of human division rather than unity. The experience of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:9), he opines, led to division among human beings, but in Jesus Christ such division has been bridged and human beings have been reconciled to each other and to God. Constructing a theology based on separation as was the case with apartheid was in effect a denial of the human unity derived in Jesus Christ. Thus, Buthelezi’s thought addresses the problematic between distance and proximity represented by the theologies at stake: while apartheid theology prizes the establishment of distance among human beings, Black theology aims to bridge this distance and bring people closer to each other. Apartheid theology is a heresy not only because of the distorted beliefs of its followers but also because of the distorted actions it engenders and sanctifies: it saps the people of color of their creative energy by assigning them to inferior positions in society. Black theology thus enables black people to tell their own story and reclaim their own reality. It is in this light that Buthelezi sees the hand of God in the Black Consciousness Movement, a movement in apartheid South Africa that encouraged black people to become agents of their own destiny.⁷⁰

In fact, Buthelezi does not think that God can act for the liberation of black people only through the church. The church, at least in its apartheid incarnation, is seriously indicted by Buthelezi for being a partner of the crime against African people. This does

⁷⁰“Manas Buthelezi, “Mutual Acceptance from a Black Perspective,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (June 1978): 71-6; Cf. “The Christian Presence in Today’s South Africa,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (September 1976): 5-8; “Church Unity and Human Division of Racism,” *International Review of Mission* 73 (October 1984): 419-26.

not mean that he does not see the church as a site through which God can act for the liberation of the African people. God can act through the church only if the church stands for the unity of the church and of the human race. He uses biblical examples such as that of King Cyrus' liberation of the Jewish people from Babylonian captivity (Isaiah 45:1-8), John the Baptist's statement that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones (Matthew 3:9), and the fact that it was Simon of Cyrene rather than a disciple of Christ who helped him carry his cross, among others, to suggest that God does not need to act redemptively only through Christians.⁷¹

Buthelezi is critical of what he calls "a false unbiblical dichotomy" that "has been made between human life and Christian life." This distinction has led to an abstraction of Christian life from human life, claiming that the more sanctified a Christian is the more irrelevant human and earthly things become. This led to the contradiction in apartheid theology according to which Christians could claim human fraternity and then turn around and enact laws that diminish the well being of some segments of the population because of their ethnic origin and the color of their skin. For him, Christians must overcome such dichotomies and be concerned with human life in general. Overcoming such dichotomies would lead to the acknowledgment that it is Christian responsibility to alleviate societal ills. If Christians fail to do this God may use others for that purpose, he warns.⁷²

⁷¹Buthelezi, "Unity of the Church and Human Division," 425-6.

⁷²Manas Buthelezi, "Daring to Live for Christ: By Being Human and by Suffering for Others," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (July 1975): 7-10. According to him, human life is Christian life and vice versa. What is Christian cannot be separated from what is human.

Because he draws from political themes such as those espoused by the Black Consciousness Movement (e.g., the dignity of black people), Dwight Hopkins presents Buthelezi as one of the representatives of Black political theology of liberation, to be contrasted with theologians who represent Black cultural theology of liberation. According to Hopkins, representatives of Black political theology of liberation do not rely on African traditional religious culture as much as those who represent Black cultural theology of liberation.⁷³ While political liberation theologians such as James Cone (USA) and Buthelezi (South Africa) draw from political themes such as Black Power (USA) and Black Consciousness (South Africa) respectively, liberation theologians like Gayraud Wilmore (USA) and Boganjalo Goba (South Africa) emphasize the importance of African religious culture in their liberation discourse.⁷⁴

Buthelezi is very critical of what he calls the “ethnographical approach”⁷⁵ to doing theology because of its ties to the missionaries’ quest for African indigenous theology. According to him, it was the missionaries who started encouraging Africans to use “the African worldview” as starting point for theology. The call to use African traditional worldview, he claims, was an attempt by the missionaries to soothe a guilty conscience for having previously undermined this worldview in their presentation of the

⁷³Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black Theology*, 96-7.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 35-144.

⁷⁵Manas Buthelezi, “Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa,” in *The Emergent Gospel*, ed., S. Torres and V. Fabella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 56-75. What Buthelezi sees as the ethnographic approach to African indigenous theology is what has come to be known variously as theology of indigenization, inculturation, or Africanization. Also see his “An African Theology or Black Theology?” in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, ed. Basil Moore (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1973), 29-35, which is a shorter version of the 1978 article above. With the exception of the essays by Basil Moore and Sabelo Ntwasa, the essays in the above volume were first published as *Essays in Black Theology* (1972) and immediately banned by the South African government.

gospel, thus portraying the West as standard rather than Jesus Christ. Missionary theologians such as John V. Taylor, Placide Temples and Bengt Sundkler who urge Africans to appropriate the African traditional worldview are some of the enthusiasts of this way of doing theology. This way of doing theology, as Buthelezi sees it, is based on excavating the African past, thus giving the impression that it is the past rather than the present that is important for African theology. The problem, Buthelezi points, is not only that this past cannot be retrieved but also that Africa does not have a static worldview. Dwelling on retrieving the past, he opines, seems designed to evade the situation in which people live in the present. Therefore he calls for a shift from the ethnographical approach to doing theology to an anthropological one based on Africans themselves as they live in the present (under apartheid in South Africa). This anthropological approach would enable Africans to address their present and shape their future, thus “participating in the fullness of life that the contemporary world offers.” It would engender “a ‘post-colonial person’ who has been liberated by Christ from all that dehumanizes.”⁷⁶ This anthropological turn, Buthelezi avers, would lead to a revalorization of human beings which has been neglected as a theological motif in ecumenical theology. In this case, African theology would not be indigenous, and ecumenical theology would not be ecumenical, until the human factor is taken to be central. This means, he claims, that the point of unity for the church would not be based on ideological or theological agreement (orthodoxy) but on the task of enhancing human material well being. Thus the centrality of human material well being is also accentuated in this soteriological discourse.

⁷⁶Manas Buthelezi, “Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa,” 64-5.

Buthelezi's rejection of indigenous theology is based on the fact that this theology seems to emphasize the past rather than the present, making issues such as polygamy and African liturgical forms to be central. However, he does not completely reject the African religious culture as he elsewhere bases his call for the demolition of the apartheid system and the enhancing of the well being of Africans on grounds of African traditional understanding of religion. "It has been rightly said that the African has a sense of the wholeness of life. The traditional African religion was characterized by the wholeness of life; it is even more correct to say that religion and life belonged together," he writes.⁷⁷ It was within this context where the individual and community lived *coram Deo*, he claims, that an African understanding of the human being was crafted. But this understanding was undermined, Buthelezi maintains, when instead of achieving fullness of life upon becoming Christians Africans were yanked from their communities and placed in mission stations where their humanity was placed under house arrest – colonized.⁷⁸ Liberation or salvation in this context would require restoring the African and biblical understanding of the human capacity for power to dominate the world, that is, to be agents in shaping their environment for their well being. Again, the need for power in promoting human well being, a tendency found in ATR, is also stressed here. As Balcomb rightly saw, this theology has not moved beyond the immanent to the transcendent and has thus given the impression that theology is essentially about the immanent. That is why he wonders

⁷⁷Manas Buthelezi, "The Theological Meaning of True Humanity," in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, 93; "Salvation as Wholeness," in John Parratt ed., *A Reader in Christian Theology, New Edition* (London: SPCK, 1997), 85.

⁷⁸Buthelezi, "The Theological Meaning of True Humanity," 101-3.

whether Black theology in South Africa is sufficiently theological.⁷⁹ This shortcoming notwithstanding, Buthelezi was essentially correct in calling the heretical apartheid theology into question. Such theology may however have been warranted in the apartheid context but it does not appear to be tenable in the post-apartheid context. That is why we need a new theological vision like the one advocated in this project.

Theology and the Building of New African Societies

The building of new African societies is the hallmark of what has come to be known in African theology as the theology of reconstruction.⁸⁰ There are at least three prominent representatives of this form of Christian theologizing in Africa: the Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi, the South African theologian Charles Villa-Vicencio, and Kā Mana, the philosopher and theologian from the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is hardly surprising that these theologians began their odyssey into the theology of reconstruction in the last years of the 1980s, leading into the 1990s to the present. The last years of the 1980s saw the end of the Cold War and the yearning for democratic societies that began in Eastern Europe, sweeping into Africa and rekindling the desire for better African societies. Apartheid was also on the verge of collapse with the legalizing of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the release of Nelson Mandela, the most noted political prisoner under apartheid. Theologians were beginning to sense the fact that African societies needed a new form of theology to address the changing situation. Although the theologians discussed here approach the issue of

⁷⁹See, Balcomb, "Is God in South Africa or Are We Still Clearing Our Throats?" 57-59.

⁸⁰For an introduction to this theology see Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology* (Nairobi: Acton 2003).

reconstruction from slightly different perspectives and are hardly aware of the work of each other,⁸¹ they all agree that a theology of reconstruction should help build new African societies that would enhance the material well being of the African peoples. Jesse Mugambi calls for a theology that moves past the theology of liberation that has characterized African Christian theology, to that of reconstruction, using biblical post-exilic themes of reconstruction as guide; Villa-Vicencio calls for a theology that engages the social and human sciences, especially with reference to making laws that guarantee human rights in democratic societies; and Kā Mana calls for the transformation of what he calls the African *imaginaire*,⁸² thus divesting Africans of the inferiority complex that the essentializing of African identity by some Africans and the West has visited upon them.

Mugambi does his theology of reconstruction in the context of what he calls the “New World Order,” the situation of the world after the Cold War. Mugambi sees this New World Order as one in which the nature of the map of the world has changed so that “old ideological enemies have become partners,” thus opening the door to new possibilities of cooperation for the common good. He describes the world as a “spaceship” or “lifeboat” in which the dichotomy between *us* and *them* or *winners* and

⁸¹For example, Jesse Mugambi, whose major work on his theology of reconstruction is published after Villa-Vicencio’s, shows no awareness of the existence of Villa-Vicencio’s work. See J. N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995). For Villa-Vicencio’s work, see Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁸²My understanding of Kā Mana’s theology of reconstruction is indebted to Valenti Dedji’s excellent discussion of Kā Mana’s theology. See Valenti Dedji, “The Ethical Redemption of African *Imaginaire*: Kā Mana’s Theology of Reconstruction,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* XXXI no. 3 (2001): 254-74. We shall see the meaning of this French word, *imaginaire*, when we come to a discussion of Kā Mana.

losers is untenable. What Africa in particular needs, he avers, are “winner-winner configurations” which consolidate the common interests and common destiny of African peoples.⁸³ This language of “winning” (material benefit) is a language that we shall also see in NC.

Mugambi views the world as a dramatically changed place since the end of the Cold War. This change calls the church to move in line with the aspirations of the peoples of the world in general and of Africa in particular. This New World Order, he suggests, is an opportunity to develop a new theme in African Christian theologizing. According to him, the theme of liberation (in its inculturation garment as well) has characterized African Christian theology but that theme seems redundant in a context where what is needed is the rebuilding of society.⁸⁴ He shows that the theme of liberation, with its stress on the Exodus motif, characterized African theology up until the late 1980s, but with the fall of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of apartheid in South

⁸³J. N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, viii-ix. Mugambi has been trenchantly critiqued for uncritically embracing the so-called New World Order. See Emmanuel Katongole, *A Future for Africa*, 153.; Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies,” 23. What Mugambi could not see in 1995 when he wrote *From Liberation to Reconstruction* is that his New World Order would be drastically altered by the new so-called War on Terror that seems to be reenacting the same polarization characteristic of the Cold War.

⁸⁴The theology of reconstruction has been under assault from various African theologians especially with regard to defining what reconstruction is all about. This was one of the problems raised about the theology of reconstruction especially by the respondent to the presentations at the African Biblical Hermeneutics group during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Washington, D. C., November 18, 2006. The theme of the group was “African Biblical Hermeneutics of Reconstruction” and the respondent to the presentations was Edward P. Antonio, of Iliff School of Theology. Antonio called for a precise definition of what reconstruction is all about. However, my main problem with the theology of reconstruction is that it implies the rebuilding of what had been built before. For example, post-exilic Israel had to rebuild the Temple because the Temple had been built before but was destroyed by the Babylonians. If Africa is what has to be rebuilt it implies that Africa had been built before – but this is not the case. Africa has not been built before; it still needs to be built. Thus, what Africa needs is construction rather than reconstruction. It therefore appears to be more appropriate to talk of a theology of construction rather than a theology of reconstruction. This shortcoming is however not central to our engagement with the theology of reconstruction in the project.

Africa, a new imagery was called for. The new imagery, he suggests, is that of reconstruction characteristic of the post-Exilic period in Israelite history.⁸⁵ Thus, he sees Nehemiah (together with Haggai and Ezra) as the central Old Testament text to this theology (considering that the Temple was rebuilt during Nehemiah's time), and the Sermon on the Mount as "the most basic of all reconstructive theological texts in the synoptic gospels."⁸⁶ Mugambi does not elaborate on how the Sermon on the Mount could be considered central to the theology of reconstruction but he locates Jesus Christ within the context of Jewish quest for freedom from Roman imperial power and the reconstruction of the Jewish nation after the destruction of the Temple (70 C. E.). This quest for freedom and reconstruction, he maintains, continues today in the attempts to reconcile the Palestinians and Israelis.

Mugambi understands reconstruction as the redesigning of existing but dysfunctional structures in order to make them fit current needs. In this process some aspects of the old are retained in the new structures while new elements are added to make them suitable for present use. He then applies this understanding of reconstruction to the African context, suggesting that there has to be personal, cultural and ecclesial reconstruction. While personal reconstruction has to do with the inner transformation of individuals, cultural reconstruction has to do with the transformation of the political, economical, ethical, esthetical and religious aspects of societies, and ecclesial

⁸⁵Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 5.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

reconstruction involves the transformation of ecclesial practices and theology.⁸⁷ The theology of reconstruction is therefore clearly interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary.⁸⁸

The mission of the church in this context is to act as salt and light of the world (Mugambi's favorite images) to promote human material well being so as to address what Mugambi and other African theologians have seen as a contradiction in contemporary Africa: the fact that Christianity is expanding amidst desperate poverty.⁸⁹ Mugambi, however, acknowledges that although material prosperity is not a sure sign of divine favor, it cannot be neglected in contemporary African missionary enterprise. Thus, for Mugambi, too, the stress is on present material well being and not on any eternal or transcendent vision. For him, the church does not guide people into any transcendent vision but is essentially concerned with their present material well being. This, contrary to the perspective to be argued in this project, gives the impression that material well being is an end in itself.

Charles Villa-Vicencio, writing in the context of the crumbling apartheid structure in South Africa, calls for a theology of reconstruction with emphasis on the designing of laws that promote human rights as basis for the building of "a new kind of society," a non-oppressive society. For him a principal function of the theology of reconstruction is that of righting past wrongs and a crucial way of doing this is by advocating the designing of laws that promote human rights. Like Mugambi, he acknowledges the importance of the post-exilic period for the construction of a theology of reconstruction

⁸⁷Ibid., 12-17.

⁸⁸Ibid., 16-17; Charles Villa-Vincencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 5.

⁸⁹See Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 33-5, 49-51, 226-43;

but unlike Mugambi, he is aware that the theology of reconstruction is not a completely different theology but “a new kind of liberatory theology.” He does not uncritically appropriate post-exilic biblical theology because of the recent history of South Africa where religion has been used to legitimate oppressive structures. He calls for the critical appropriation of post-exilic theology because not all elements in it are liberating.⁹⁰

Christian theology in the situation of reconstruction, he avers, should not simply baptize another ideology, even if that ideology is reconstruction. It should rather be tempered with the Christian vision of the *eschaton*, the Kingdom of God, “which always demands more than any particular community can offer.”⁹¹ Drawing from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, Villa-Vicencio insists that politics is about the penultimate while the Kingdom of God is ultimate. But the ultimate does not appear to be what is most important to him. The ultimate is important only because it is a “social vision of what society ought to become.”⁹² According to him, the theology of reconstruction has to keep the eschatological vision before it because this vision generates “permanent revolution” in society.⁹³ His understanding of the eschatological vision seems to be just that – a vision that serves human historical processes, especially that of Israel. Thus, he locates Israel’s understanding of God within her experience of God in history. He writes:

. . . the Hebrew people came to associate the liberatory events of their history with a reality which they named ‘God’. In other words, the reality and meaning of the Hebrew notion of God was part and parcel of the Hebrew history of liberation. God came to be understood ‘as an ever new and always surprising recognition of

⁹⁰Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 27.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 11.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

a liberating presence'. This means, God was *experienced* and *acknowledged* within history, rather than metaphysically or abstractly defined.⁹⁴

Here we see that the gaze is directed so much to the historical that instead of the historical pointing toward the ultimate, the ultimate becomes domesticated in the historical, serving the purposes of creation. Thus it is that a theology of reconstruction, among others, must assess all economic systems with respect to whether they affirm “fundamental values inherent in a Christian understanding of human dignity,” promote “political and economic democracy,” provide “basic necessities which enable all people to share fully in life,” enhance ecological awareness, promote economic reconstruction rather than particular economic ideology, foster the creation of structures that enable socio-economic renewal, and spread such renewal to the grassroots of societies.⁹⁵ The problem with this vision of a theology of reconstruction is not the call for societal transformation and the enhancing of the material well being of ravaged African societies. In fact, the cry of African theology in general is to enhance the material well being of Africans. But the point of this dissertation is to promote such material well being without making it the ultimate. Villa-Vicencio attempts to do so but his understanding of God as limited to historical processes, with the vision of the Kingdom of God seen only as a utopian vision or a metaphor that promotes “permanent revolution” in human attempts to construct a viable society, seems to suggest that God, who is ultimate exists simply to serve creaturely (penultimate) purposes. This appears to render the penultimate more important than the ultimate. In the view of this writer, where the penultimate becomes

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 25. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 239-43.

more important than the ultimate, it leads to the promotion of greed, corruption, and other vices that have contributed to the breakdown of life in Africa. Thus, my intention is to shift the gaze from the penultimate to the ultimate, insisting that the penultimate can only be properly appropriated if it is situated within the context of the primacy of the ultimate and its contingency acknowledged.

Such a change of perception is what Kā Mana attempts to do by proposing a reconstruction of the African *imaginaire*.⁹⁶ By seeking a transformation or reconstruction of the African *imaginaire*, Kā Mana wants to change how Africans perceive themselves and their environment so that they may effectively participate in the building of their societies.

Kā Mana's engagement with the issue of the reconstruction of the African *imaginaire* is concisely summarized in his recent work.⁹⁷ He locates his theology of reconstruction within the context of salvation, which he sees as a universal human quest for meaning, comprising humankind's mythical attempt to understand itself historically, structure communities, and locate community aspirations within the context of

⁹⁶Indicating that Kā Mana derived the French word *imaginaire* from the existentialism of Albert Camus, Valenti Dedji avoids translating the term but suggests that "it comes close to 'imagination', the 'entire constellation' of beliefs, patterns of thought or 'inner drive' that motivate one's social behaviour." See Valenti Dedji, "The Ethical Redemption of African *Imaginaire*," 254-5, 272 n. 1.

⁹⁷See his *Chrétiens et Églises d'Afrique Penser l'Avenir* (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Editions Clé, 1999), first published in English as *Christians and Churches of Africa Envisioning the Future: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society* (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Editions Clé, 2002), and later published as *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004). Also see his *L'Eglise Africaine et la Théologie de la Reconstruction: Reflections sur les nouveaux appels de la mission en Afrique* (Genève: Centre Protestant d'Etudes, 1994); *Foi Africaine, Crise Africaine et Reconstruction de l'Afrique* (Lome: HAHO/CETA, 1992); and *La Nouvelle Evangelisation en Afrique*. Paris/Yaoundé: Karthala/CIE, 2000.

transcendence.⁹⁸ Although salvation as such is a universal human quest, for Christians such salvation is found in Jesus Christ. Thus, he maintains that African soteriology must be christocentric. In this case, then, it must be inquired how the message and ideal of Jesus Christ can redeem African broken *imaginaire* thus enabling the building of new African societies.⁹⁹

Of the three representatives of the theology of reconstruction we are investigating, Kā Mana is the most unsympathetic about the failings of Africa. He does not attempt to exonerate Africans from the “massive crisis” that is today present in their societies but rather brutally critiques them. He is appalled “by the inability of contemporary African societies to resolve the fundamental problems confronting them.” He wonders:

“Why, as Africans, can we not respond adequately to the challenges of our destiny? Why are we paralyzed when confronted with problems that only we can resolve? What is wrong with our mental and intellectual capabilities to make us give way to the forces of defeatism so easily, and in such a disturbing manner?” . . . Why then can we not produce effective weapons for the struggles of today? Why can we not create conditions for a destiny worthy of our true possibilities, organize ourselves according to the objectives of dignity and prosperity, and contribute in a decisive manner to the emergence of a new civilization which would be beneficial to all of humankind?¹⁰⁰

The answer to this question, according to Kā Mana, resides not in the lack of wealth, vision or intellectual prowess but “in the lack of significance that tends to characterize our existence; the inconsistencies and the loss of a proper sense of our self-worth which shows up in all areas of our lives.”¹⁰¹ This has led Africans to give a global pathological

⁹⁸Kā Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 1.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 2-5; Valenti Dedji, “The Ethical Redemption of African Imaginaire,” 258.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*

impression of themselves thus undermining their actions and their very existence. Kā Mana catalogues elements that contribute to destroying the self-worth of the African and they include the African conception of themselves as insignificant, their innate shallowness, appalling triviality, inner emptiness, senseless logic, fundamental absurdity, human mediocrity, and hopeless duplicity. (This critique of Africa is strikingly similar to that of Otabil Mensa, a representative of NC in Ghana to be discussed in the next chapter.) The pessimistic portrayal of Africa notwithstanding, Kā Mana calls for an optimistic view of Africa because the signs of the times indicate that it is possible for the continent to turn the corner. He calls for a movement from Afro-pessimism (seeing only what is wrong with Africa) and Afro-optimism (seeing only what is right with Africa) to Afro-lucidity or Afro-lucid consciousness (being aware of impediments to African progress so as to adequately address them). The fact of the matter, he points out, is that Africa has fallen into the trap set for it by others. Breaking from this trap would entail rebuilding the entire African consciousness. Rebuilding the continent of Africa therefore rests on the rebuilding of the African psyche.¹⁰² Crucial to the rebuilding of the African psyche is the critical appropriation of stories and values drawn from ancient Egypt and vital African traditions. These would have to be placed in dialogue with the message and values of Jesus Christ, so as to discover new possibilities for Africa.

But the dialogue which Kā Mana calls for between these traditions seems to end in monologue as Jesus Christ always trumps the traditions of ancient Egypt and modern Africa; it is Jesus Christ or the cross that opens new possibilities, not African

¹⁰²Kā Mana locates the harm done to the African psyche from the period of the slave trade to present. See Valenti Dedji, "The Ethical Redemption of the African *Imaginaire*," 260.

traditions.¹⁰³ Considering that ideas from African background always comes up as limited and therefore needing completion, one may wonder whether Kā Mana's attempt to promote the self-worth of Africans is successful. It does not appear to be helpful in promoting one's self-esteem when one's thought is always described as limited as Kā Mana does to African thought. It seems to replicate the same story that Africans have been told by the West about the nature of their thought.

Such a critique could also be leveled against this project because it charges the African traditional understanding of the material realm with being creation-centered and thus limited, attempting to remedy this situation by employing a theocentric perspective. The approach of this dissertation is, however, different because true to the postmodern context indicated in the first chapter, it proposes the theocentric vision as one alternative through which African understanding of the world could be directed rather than as the only way which should perforce obliterate other ways of seeing the world. It argues that there is a way of seeing the world embraced by African traditionalists, and that, it seems to me, is the anthropocentric and immanent way; it proposes that for Christians, a better way of seeing the world is the theocentric one. By drawing from the Augustinian perspective embraced by the members of RO to be engaged, this project seeks to return to a perspective that is deeply rooted in ancient Africa but which has been neglected in modern African theology. The vision espoused here does not *complete* African religious-cultural thought, but proposes something different for Africa to consider. It is not a dialogue with African traditional religious thought but a different proposal from what African traditional religious thought considers important.

¹⁰³Kā Mana, *Christians and the Churches of Africa*, 31, 43.

To return to Kā Mana, it must however be pointed out that he does not succeed in constructing a helpful African psychology when Jesus Christ is presented as the fulfillment of African hopes because his overriding principle seems to be what he calls “African humanism.” African humanism emphasizes a Christology that imagines the salvation of the African continent “from a perspective of a creative humanism and global ethics.” According to him, creative humanism does not place the human at the center of the universe but

is the process whereby human destiny is found in the discovery of the bonds of life which unites humankind to the whole of creation and to all the spiritual forces which constitute reality, bonds which also unite the past, the present and the future in the building of one and the same vital awareness by which, *here and now, we are responsible for our past and future.*¹⁰⁴

The vision appears impressive but it does not point to any transcendent reality. What seems to be the ultimate reality is what is captured in the here and now. Here we have no transcendent vision but rather a reality that seems to be captured in the immanent. However, it is only by directing our love towards the One who lasts, it is only by directing our love towards the One who is ultimate reality, that we can build societies that last. This is the Augustinian vision that this project seeks to highlight.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show that African theology as a whole has drawn inspiration primarily from the African traditional religious worldview in its conception of the material realm in salvific discourse. Because of this African Christian theology has tended to give the impression that the material realm is an end in itself rather than that which points to God, the source and goal of creation. Even in those cases where African

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 105. Italics added.

traditional religious culture is not explicitly the basis of the stress on the material realm, as in the case of Villa-Vicencio and even Kā Mana, the pull of that background can be felt. Whether it is inculturation or liberation theology or the theology of reconstruction, the goal of salvation seems to be that of improving the material well being of people in African societies so much that this has become the mantra of African Christian theology as a whole. Thus when the so-called NC appears to locate salvation squarely within the framework of human material well being, it is not doing anything new. It is merely intensifying what has been present in African Christian theology and African Christianity. That is why we must always place the “New” in NC in quotation marks – to show that it is not new. It will be the task of the next chapter to show that the so-called NC simply intensifies a tendency already latent in African Christian theology as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE

Perpetuating a Worldview: The Material in the Soteriology of the New Christianity

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that the conception of the material realm in African Christian soteriology, represented by the theology of inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction, has been influenced by African traditional religious culture. Because of this, it tends to see material well being as goal of Christian salvation, portraying God mainly as means to this goal rather than the source and goal of creation. Considering this background, it was suggested, it should come as no surprise that the recent expression of Christianity on the continent, the so-called New Christianity (NC), should be intensely materialistic.

It is the task of this chapter to show just how “intensely materialistic” this recent Christianity is, and the type of materialism at work here, by engaging the views of two scholars who see it from slightly different angles. The first of these is Paul Gifford, Professor of African Christianity at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and the other is Allan Anderson, Professor of Global Pentecostal Studies, at the department of theology and religion, University of Birmingham, England. While the first is an Englishman who approaches this Christianity with a view to assessing its role in African sociopolitical and economic development, the other, a former Pentecostal pastor from South Africa, sees it as a genuine development in African Christianity that is part of what he calls an “African Reformation.”

We shall look at the provenance of this Christianity and then express its main themes as understood by Gifford and Anderson. We shall be arguing that these themes simply intensify similar ones in African theology. But it should here be pointed out that this intensification of similar themes in African theology does not mean that proponents of NC are familiar with the writings of African theologians. What it indicates is that, in their understanding of salvation, they have been influenced by the same source – African traditional religious culture. We shall end by arguing that, in spite of claims to the contrary, this Christianity understands the material realm in essentially the same way as African traditional religious culture and African Christian theology in general.

Identifying the New Christianity

What is the New Christianity? Where is it from? Is it an African or a foreign phenomenon or both? These are the questions that this section will attempt to answer. The New Christianity is rooted in Pentecostalism and is made up of newly organized¹ independent churches, “ministries” and fellowships. Most of the members of these churches are young and from former mainline churches. These churches, ministries, and fellowships are characterized by an international or global sensibility (with the word “international” sometimes at the end of their names even if they are only local),² make

¹The beginnings of this form of Christianity in Africa is usually dated from the 1970s. See Matthews Ojo, “Charismatic Movements in Africa,” in *Christianity in Africa in the 1990s*, eds. Christopher Fyfe and Andrew Walls (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1996), 94-96.

²See Ruth Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating the Global and the Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no. 3 (August 1998): 278-315. A shorter version of the paper with the same title is found in André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, eds. *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnationalism and Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 80-105.

significant use of the media (such as audio cassettes, CDs, TV, radio, etc.),³ and see human material well being as central to what it means to be a Christian.⁴

What is here called the New Christianity is variously called the “new Christianities,” “new churches,” “charismatic Christianity,” “new Pentecostalism,” “new African initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics,” “Charismatic/Pentecostal Christianity,” “newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches” (NPCs), “new Charismatic churches,” “independent ‘non-denominational’ Charismatics,” “independent indigenous Pentecostalism,” “Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches” (PCCs), or “neo-Pentecostal churches.”⁵ These names root the phenomenon firmly within Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity. This understanding of NC should be differentiated from what Philip Jenkins has recently described as “the rise of the new Christianity.”⁶ The phenomenon Jenkins

³See Rosalind I. J. Hackett, “Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no. 3 (August 1998), 257-277; Asonzeh F.-K. Ukah, “Advertising God: Nigerian Christian Video-Films and the Power of Consumer culture,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33 no. 2 (2003): 203-231; Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), 30-40.

⁴See, for example, David Maxwell, “‘Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?’: Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no. 3 (August 1998): 350-73 and “The Durawal of Faith: Pentecostal Spirituality in Neo-Liberal Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35 no. 1 (January, 2005): 4-32.

⁵For the variety in these new churches see Aylward Shorter and Joseph Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publication Press, 2001), which uses Nairobi as a case study for the rise of the new Christianity; Paul Gifford, ed. *New Dimensions in African Christianity* (Nairobi, Kenya: All African Conference of Churches, 1992); Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, which uses Ghana as a case study; For Nigeria as a case study see, I. J. Hackett, “Enigma Variations: The New Religious Movements in Nigeria Today,” in *Exploring New Religious Movements: Essays in Honor of Harold W. Turner*, eds. A. F. Walls and Wilbert R. Shank (Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus, 1990), 121-42. For the most noted of these churches throughout Africa, see Allan Anderson, “The Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches: The Shape of Future Christianity in Africa?” *Pneuma: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24 no. 2 (Fall 2002): 167-84.

⁶Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 79-105. Jenkin’s recent book, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), shows how broad his understanding of NC is. What is here called the New Christianity is just a part of what he considers as the new Christianity.

calls NC, which is sweeping the global south, includes both Pentecostal/Charismatic and non-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity. In fact, they include the mission churches and the older African initiated churches (AICs). What I here consider NC is in line with Paul Gifford's understanding of the phenomenon. He is arguably among the first scholars of African Christianity to recently identify a form of Christianity that was new on the continent and he identifies it with neo-Pentecostalism.⁷ This does not mean that there are not other expressions of Christianity that are new on the continent. There are of course other expressions of the faith that are new on the continent but the most influential ones are the neo-Pentecostal movements and it is these that are referred to as the New Christianity in this project.⁸

Proponents of NC advocate "a complete break with the past,"⁹ and this means that elements from African traditional religious culture must be shunned. In fact, adherents of NC see African traditional religious culture, as well as Islam and other sects and cults, as the quintessence of the demonic.¹⁰ So they would hardly agree with Jenkins' very generous definition of a Christian as "someone who describes himself or herself as a Christian, who believes that Jesus is not merely a prophet or an exalted moral teacher, but

⁷Paul Gifford, "Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity," *Religion* 20 (1990): 373-88; "Some Recent Developments in African Christianity," *African Affairs* 93 no. 373 (Oct. 1994): 513-34. According to him, the "Pentecostal explosion," "the mushrooming of new churches" characterized by the faith gospel of health and wealth, are the new phenomena in African Christianity. He continues this understanding of tNC in his recent work, *Ghana's New Christianity*. In fact, in the African context, the mainline churches such as Anglicans and Roman Catholics, the older AICs, and classical Pentecostal churches are hardly seen as new.

⁸See, for example, Gifford, "Some Recent Developments in African Christianity," 513- 16; Shorter and Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa*, 11-14.

⁹Birgit Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no. 3 (August 1998): 316-49.

¹⁰Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 144-7.

in some unique sense the Son of God, the messiah.”¹¹ They would also be wary of Allan Anderson’s “all-embracing” definition of Pentecostalism “as a movement concerned primarily with the *experience* of the working of the Holy Spirit and the *practice* of spiritual gifts.”¹² According to Anderson, this broader understanding of Pentecostalism does not only include the various shades and hues of this worldwide phenomenon, but includes, in the African context, the African initiated “Spirit” churches or AICs.¹³ But as Kingsley Larbi, the Ghanaian scholar of Pentecostalism, has argued, Pentecostal churches differ from the AICs in both theology and praxis.¹⁴ Yet the new churches must not be equated with classical Pentecostalism, which has to do with older Pentecostal churches such as Christ Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God, The Apostolic Church, or the Church of Pentecost. Classical Pentecostalism is referred to as older Pentecostal churches in order to distinguish them from the new Pentecostal/Charismatic churches that are the subject of this chapter. According to Larbi, these new Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are in many ways like the classical Pentecostal ones in that both are biblicist, Christocentric, spiritually dualistic (differentiate between the Holy Spirit and unclean spirits), eschew instruments and symbols in worship, reject secret societies, alcoholism, polygamy, divorce and other African deities.¹⁵ But the new churches differentiate

¹¹Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 88.

¹²Allan Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14. Emphasis in original.

¹³Allan Anderson, “New African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35.1 (2005): 67.

¹⁴Kingsley Larbi, “African Pentecostalism in the Context of Global Pentecostal Ecumenical Fraternity: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24 no. 2 (Fall 2002): 145-8.

¹⁵Larbi, “African Pentecostalism,” 147-8.

themselves from the classical Pentecostal churches in their emphasis on human material well being, especially as demonstrated in their embrace of the faith gospel of wealth and health and their radicalization of deliverance theology and prophecy. These new churches see the mission or mainline churches and classical Pentecostal churches that do not emphasize these aspects of their theology as dead churches, lacking the power that should be appropriated through Jesus Christ to solve human problems. It is these new churches that are spreading in leaps and bounds in many African urban and rural areas.¹⁶

These new churches began flourishing on the African religious scene about three decades ago, but there is apparently no consensus yet on its background. Gifford, one of the first scholars to study this phenomenon, initially saw it mainly as a foreign intrusion onto the African religious scene.¹⁷ He suggested that the stress on prosperity which characterizes these churches was a foreign element, popularized in Africa especially by the German Pentecostal preacher, Reinhard Bonnke, and the American faith gospel preacher, Kenneth Copeland. According to Gifford, crucial to the dissemination of this new gospel of prosperity was a 1986 crusade which Bonnke organized in Harare, Zimbabwe. This crusade, known as Christ for all Nations (CfAN) crusade, was timed to coincide with another very important Pentecostal gathering in Harare, the “Fire Conference.” Most of the four thousand delegates who gathered in Harare for this conference, and who took part in the Bonnke crusade, were from forty-one African countries. The Fire Conference was organized separately and was led by prominent

¹⁶See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity*, 335.

¹⁷Paul Gifford, “‘Africa Shall be Saved’: An Appraisal of Reinhard Bonnke’s Pan-African Crusade,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17 no. 1 (February 1987): 63-92; Gifford, “Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity,” *Religion* 20 (1990): 373-88; Gifford, “Some Recent Developments in African Christianity,” *African Affairs* 93 no. 373 (October 1994): 513-544.

prosperity gospel preachers such as the Americans Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, the South African Ray McCauley, and the Nigerian Benson Idahosa (1938-1998). This conference addressed issues such as “Evangelism and Finance” (Wayne Myers), “Evangelism and Divine Healing” (Gloria Copeland), “Evangelism and Prosperity” (Kenneth Copeland), among others. While the conference participants were instilled with the theoretical aspects of the prosperity and faith healing message at the seminars, which took place during the day, they received practical demonstrations from various preachers at the crusade, which they attended in the evening. It is this “CfAN Christianity,” (another name for the New Christianity) that the African delegates at the Fire Conference took back to their various countries. This, together with other CfAN crusades that were held in other sub-Saharan African countries, helped spread the faith gospel of health and wealth across the continent.¹⁸

Gifford probes further the American background of the prosperity gospel, suggesting different origins for it at different times, but without making firm connections in some cases. At one point he suggests that the idea that Christianity brings prosperity was developed by the American, E. W. Kenyon, who lived in Boston. Kenyon had developed this theology in the 1890s by drawing from the doctrines of New Thought, Christian Science, the Unity School of Christianity and the Science of the Mind.¹⁹ At another point Gifford links this gospel to Russell Conwell who was pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia beginning in 1879. Conwell’s sermon “Acres of

¹⁸Gifford, ““Africa Must be Saved,”” 63-5, 90.

¹⁹Paul Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe’s Liberia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 148.

Diamonds,” which was preached over five thousand times, is seen as an early expression of this form of Christianity. Gifford also links this gospel to the “positive thinking” advocated by the American Presbyterian, Norman Vincent Peale, in the 1970s. It is this form of Christianity that was popularized in the faith gospel preached by evangelists such as Oral Roberts, William Branham, Kenneth Hagin of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Kenneth Copeland of Fort Worth, Texas.²⁰ Gifford, however, sees Kenneth Hagin as the father of the faith gospel. It was Hagin’s Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, begun in 1974, that helped spread the faith gospel. A prominent expression of this gospel in South Africa (although it has recently been toned down), is found in the Rhema Bible Church of Randburg, established in 1979 by Ray McCauley who studied at Hagin’s Bible Training Center. In 1987, four Americans who graduated from Hagin’s Center, established the Living Water Teaching Ministry in Monrovia, Liberia. Many of Liberia’s pastors were trained at this school and through it the faith gospel spread throughout Liberia. Even Benson Idahosa, the father of the faith gospel in Africa, had an American connection – he attended Bible college in the United States in 1971. Gifford does not deny that the African worldview and present socio-political and economic situation make Africans open to the faith gospel²¹ but he sees its proliferation on the continent as an

²⁰Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 47-8.

²¹*Ibid.*, 1-19, 47. Gifford has recently suggested that the origins of some elements of the new Christianity in Africa are complex. He suggests that this Christianity is characterized by three theological emphases (faith gospel, deliverance, and Christian Zionism), all of which are made up of a mélange between local and external elements. Christian Zionism, however, seems to be clearly foreign. See Paul Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology,” in *Between Babel and Pentecost*, 62-79.

exportation of the “American Gospel.”²² According to him, then, tNC is a stranger who has found a home on the African religious landscape.

However, other scholars of African Christianity see the matter differently. Notable among them is the Nigerian church historian, Matthews Ojo. For Ojo, the story of NC begins in Africa, specifically in Nigeria. He sees the Nigerian Pentecostal preacher, Benson Idahosa, as “the first African evangelist to promote the ‘gospel of prosperity,’ ‘productive faith,’ and miracles.”²³ Even before Idahosa attended Bible college in the United States in 1971, he had started a small, independent prayer group in Nigeria which was later called the Church of God Mission International.²⁴ According to Ojo, NC began when university students and college graduates in Nigeria (beginning with students at the University of Ibadan in January 1970) started claiming the experience of the Spirit, thus spurning a revival that led to the development of a variety of charismatic organizations. It was these Nigerian students who exported this Christianity to French speaking regions of Africa such as Benin, Ivory Coast, and Guinea.²⁵ Ojo points out that there was a similar indigenous beginning to this Christianity in East Africa, especially in Kenya where, by the mid-1970s, Joe Kayo had established his own

²²See Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), especially chapters 8 and 9 on “Christianity in Doe’s Liberia and “The ‘New’ Christianity in Africa,” respectively.

²³Matthews Ojo, “American Pentecostalism and the Growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements in Nigeria,” in *Freedom’s Distant Shores: American Protestants and the Post-Colonial Alliances with America*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), 163.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵For a detailed exposition of how this Christianity is practiced in some francophone African countries see Albert de Surgy, *Le Phénomène Pentecôtiste en Afrique Noire: le cas béninois* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001); Bernard Bouter, *Le Pentecôtisme à l’île de la Réunion: refuge de la religiosité populaire ou vecteur de modernité* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002).

group, the Deliverance Church in Nairobi.²⁶ Although Ojo acknowledges that there were some American influences in the course of the development of this Christianity, he maintains that “[t]he revival started and progressed initially as an indigenous initiative,” specifically in Nigeria.²⁷ This is borne out by the fact that some notable African representatives of this Christianity have a Nigerian background. Nigeria can thus be seen as the center from which this form of Christianity has spread throughout Africa.²⁸

Scholars such as Ogbu Kalu and Allan Anderson see NC as rooted in Africa not because it can be clearly traced back to specific African background but because it perpetrates a tendency that is characteristic of African Christianity. According to Kalu, this Christianity follows the tendency to Africanize the faith, a tendency first demonstrated by Ethiopianism and the Aludara/Zionist churches (forms of AICs).²⁹ Pentecostalism in general and tNC in particular continue this tendency to Africanize by engaging the African worldview.³⁰ In this worldview, the “question of power is still ultimate” as this is what is needed to effectively navigate through the intricacies of life.³¹ Anderson makes the same point when he sees tNC as a continuation of the “prophet

²⁶Matthews Ojo, “Charismatic Movements in Africa, 93-6.

²⁷Ojo, “Charismatic Movements in Africa,” 95.

²⁸Ojo, “American Pentecostalism,” 163; Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 24, 56. For more on the origins and development of the new Christianity specifically in Nigeria, see Matthews A. Ojo, *God’s End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006).

²⁹In Allan Anderson, “The Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches,” 167; See Ogbu Kalu, “The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1 no. 2 (1998): 3-16; The same paper is also present in *Studia Ecclesiasticae Historiae* 24 no. 2 (1998): 1-34.

³⁰Ogbu Kalu, “Preserving a Worldview,” 110-22.

³¹*Ibid.*, 122.

healing” churches, the “spiritual churches,” and “classical” Pentecostal churches, because they all have “responded to the existential needs of the African worldview.”³² This dissertation should be located within this group but with the added dimension that it places NC within the context of African Christian theology in general, a move that has not been made in African theology. Thus, for this author, this Christianity is African because it intensifies a tendency already latent in African theology. This is the tendency to regard the material realm as ultimate rather than penultimate. It is to this tendency that we now turn as we present how Gifford and Anderson portray the soteriology of NC.

Paul Gifford and the Political Economy of the New Christianity

Initially Gifford saw the gospel of prosperity propounded by Kenneth Copeland as the basic element of this NC.³³ It was only later that he acknowledged that there is a diversity of churches within this movement,³⁴ naming the emphases on the faith gospel of health and wealth, deliverance, the prophetic, and what this author will call critical Afrocentrism, as central elements in its understanding of salvation. Following Gifford, we shall first look at the prosperity gospel of Kenneth Copeland and how it is manifested in one African country (Tanzania) before proceeding to other emphases.

According to Gifford, the gospel of prosperity or faith gospel of health and wealth holds that Jesus Christ met all human “needs on the cross and every believer should now share in the victory of Christ over sin, sickness, and poverty. A believer has a right to

³²Anderson, “The Newer Pentecostals,” 167.

³³Gifford, “Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element,” 379; *Christianity and Politics in Does Liberia*, 146-89.

³⁴Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 20-132.

health and wealth.”³⁵ Thus, “prosperity of all kinds is the right of every Christian. God wants a Christian to be wealthy. True Christianity necessarily means wealth: it inevitably brings wealth. Conversely poverty indicates personal sin, or at least a deficient faith or inadequate understanding.”³⁶ He notes that Copeland focuses especially on the aspect of wealth and uses biblical exegesis and personal testimonies to preach this gospel.

Among the key biblical texts which Copeland uses are Deuteronomy 28-30 and Mark 4. The texts in Deuteronomy present God as offering a choice of obedience or disobedience to the Israelites. While obedience leads to all kinds of material blessings such as material prosperity, success and abundance of every kind, disobedience leads to sickness, loss and deprivation. Just as the Israelites had to choose which side to take (obedience or disobedience) so too do people of today. To become a Christian in this version of Christianity is to choose to obey God and thus to reap these material benefits. But that is not all. In chapter 4 of the Gospel of Mark there are three parables that are crucial for how this prosperity must be attained. These parables have to do with sowing (parable of the sower, parable of the growing seed, and parable of the mustard seed). Also included is the statement attributed to Jesus to the effect that “the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Mk 4:24). So, prosperity involves “sowing” or giving (to God/minister), especially considering the fact that God multiplies what one gives thirty-, sixty- and a hundredfold before giving it back to them (Mk 4:20). However, in order for the giving or sowing to be multiplied it must be directed to the service of evangelism as stated in Mark 10:29-30. From this interpretation of scripture, Copeland develops what

³⁵Gifford, “The ‘New’ Christianity in Africa,” 171.

³⁶Gifford, “Prosperity,” 375; *Christianity and Politics in Doe’s Liberia*, 149.

he variously calls God's "law of sowing," "law of increase," or "law of prospering," which states that "if you sow (and to the extent that you sow), you are certain to reap."³⁷ This gospel of prosperity is not a peripheral issue for Copeland but is, according to his understanding of Mark 4:13,³⁸ crucial for the understanding of all the parables in the Bible and all the teaching of Jesus. According to him, therefore, the gospel of prosperity is central to the Christian faith; it is central to the salvation which Christ makes possible.

Gifford notes that apart from his biblical interpretation, Copeland also uses the testimonies of contemporary personalities who have been rewarded for their giving to the work of evangelism. One of these is (David) Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, the largest Christian congregation in the world with over seven hundred thousand members. Cho, whose congregation began on rubbish dump, refused to receive money from the United States, and sent out missionaries instead. Because he gave for the sake of the gospel, he has been rewarded with a huge and prosperous congregation.³⁹ Another example is the late Benson Idahosa of Nigeria.

³⁷Gifford, "Prosperity," 375; *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*, 150.

³⁸Mark 4:13 reads: "And he said to them 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?'" Understanding the three parables outlined above would lead one into a better understanding of all the message of Jesus Christ and this message is one of material prosperity. Copeland's theology can be found in *The Laws of Prosperity* (1974), *Prosperity Promises* (1985), *Giving and Receiving* (1986), and *The Winning Attitude* (1987), all published by Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fort Worth, Texas.

³⁹Cho is himself a proponent of the gospel of prosperity and some see him as one of those who introduced this expression of the Christian faith into Africa. See, Allan Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 138; Annsi Simojoki, "The 'Other Gospel' of Neo-Pentecostalism in East Africa," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66 no. 3 (July 2002): 269-87, especially 273. Cho's theology can be found in *The Fourth Dimension, vol. 1: The Key to Putting your Faith to Work for a Successful Life* (Seoul: Seoul Logos Co., 1979), *The Fourth Dimension, vol. 2: More Secrets for a Successful Faith Life* (S. Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1983), *More than Numbers* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), *Salvation, Health and Prosperity: Our Threefold Blessings in Christ* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), *Our God is Good: Spiritual blessings in Christ* (Basingstoke: Hants, Marshall Pickering, 1988), *How Can I be Healed* (Seoul: Seoul Logos Co., 1999).

At the bidding of God, Idahosa had given away a Mercedes limousine only to find another one in his driveway two days later. (During a Crusade in Cameroon Idahosa had himself claimed that his faith had brought him many clothes and cars, pointing out that one of the cars he drives is better than that of the president of Nigeria.)⁴⁰

Copeland's own life is a testimony to the veracity of the gospel of prosperity. He was once a poor Christian who drove a pick-up truck but he came home one day to find two Mercedes cars in his driveway, one worth \$ 48,000 and the other \$57,000. Since he became prosperous he has given away two or three hundred watches, over fourteen cars, five trucks, and seven airplanes. He possesses a \$5,000 gold Rolex, a staff of two hundred, is on two hundred TV stations and four hundred radio stations around the world.⁴¹ Copeland does not use only contemporary examples but also biblical ones: Abraham, the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:9-16), and, more interestingly, the Jews! These are all people who are prosperous because they have followed God's law of prosperity. This understanding of the Christian faith is what Copeland presented at the "Evangelism and Prosperity" seminar he led during the 1986 Fire Conference in Harare, Zimbabwe. He wanted his listeners to understand that they could also be prosperous if they followed God's law of prosperity. By teaching these laws to their own people the delegates at the conference could also give their people the opportunity to prosper. And so God's salvation in the form of prosperity would go around. It does not take any stretch of the imagination to see here that material accumulation is the goal of this Christianity. That this gospel should find a home in Africa should not be surprising,

⁴⁰Gifford, "The 'New' Christianity in Africa," 171.

⁴¹Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*, 151.

giving that African Traditional Religion and African theology had already paved the way by making material well being central to their understanding of salvation.

This gospel of prosperity is promoted in Africa by noted preachers such as the late Nigerian Charismatic preacher, Benson Idahosa, the Ghanaian who trained at Idahosa's Bible School, Nicholas Duncan-Williams, and the South African Ray McCauley, among others. But an interesting example of this gospel is found in Tanzania and it is promoted by the Tanzanian economist turned preacher, Christopher Mwakasege.⁴² The background of Mwakasege's gospel of prosperity is not clear but Päivi Hasu assumes that its American provenance is unmistakable.⁴³ Drawing from the biblical notion that human beings are created in the image of God, he declares that they should not be poor because being created in the image of God means that they are rich, just like God, the owner of the universe. Mwakasege thus promotes a creation-centered soteriology that holds that having a relationship with God leads to the disappearance of material lack. According to him, being poor gives the lie to the idea that human beings are created in the image of a rich God. Poverty is therefore satanic because those who are poor do not represent the image of God but the image of Satan, prince of deprivation. When God created humans, he maintains, God gave them the ability to create wealth; God taught them how to make profit. In fact, God is not a God of loss but a God of profit. But the wealth that is made should be used in satisfying human needs and spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a rhetorical question that is reminiscent of Paul's missionary enthusiasm in Romans

⁴²See Päivi Hasu, "World Bank and Heavenly Bank in Poverty and Prosperity: The Case of Tanzanian Faith Gospel," *Review of African Political Economy* 110 (2006): 679-92.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 684.

10:14,⁴⁴ he cries, “Who do you think will donate money for the purpose of spreading the gospel if not Christians? And how do the Christians give money if they don’t have it? And how would they have money if they think that it is sin to have a lot of money?”⁴⁵ Mwakasege makes it clear that those who give their money for the spreading of the gospel will in turn receive a hundred-fold of what they give.

Although he is not precise about what the faithful will receive (it could be material or nonmaterial), it does not prevent his hearers from understanding the process as a kind of banking transaction. In this case, one gives money to God (heavenly bank) when one gives money for the spreading of the gospel (in this case to Mwakasege); one therefore has the right to anticipate receiving more money from God. One of his hearers puts it this way:

I follow these matters a lot. If I give offerings, I write down the date and I follow it. It depends what kind of offering I give and what I say to God. . . . I sow the seed for the sake of my life. . . . I say: ‘God, I pray to you. I have placed savings with you, I ask you to give me a hundred-fold’. And I follow my offerings. It is like you have opened a depositor’s book.⁴⁶ And I record. . . . I sow the seed, it is my savings.⁴⁷

Although Mwakasege’s presentation of the prosperity gospel in Tanzania is not drawn from Gifford’s work, it however represents a glaring example of the stress on financial gain which Gifford identifies as crucial to the salvific discourse of this Christianity, especially as promoted by Kenneth Copeland.

⁴⁴“But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” (NRSV)

⁴⁵Quoted in Hasu, “World Bank and Heavenly Bank,” 686.

⁴⁶That is, a bank account.

⁴⁷Quoted in Hasu, “World Bank and Heavenly Bank,” 689.

Other characteristics of this Christianity, Gifford points out, are its emphasis on success and winning, deliverance and the prophetic, critical Afrocentrism, and Christian Zionism.⁴⁸ Apart from Christian Zionism which is exemplified by Zambia, tNC in Ghana clearly manifests all the other tendencies. In Ghana, the emphasis on success and winning in life is found in the name given to churches, on bumper stickers, in themes of crusades (public preaching events) and conventions, hymns, and advertising slogans. Thus, one finds churches named “Winners’ Chapel,” “The Triumphal Christian Center,” “Power Chapel,” “Victory Bible Church International,” among others. Bumper stickers proclaim messages such as “I am a winner,” “I am a stranger to failure,” “The Favor of God is upon Me,” among others. Themes of crusades include “Winning Ways,” “Taking your Possessions,” “The Force of Divine Progress,” “Be a Winner in Jesus Christ,” “Abundance is my Portion,” etc. Popular hymns include “Jesus is a Winner Man,” “I cannot fail/I am destined for greatness/I am a stranger to failure/Born to win,” “I’m a Winner in the Lord,” etc.⁴⁹ For these churches and groups like them, Gifford concludes,

It is success, victory and wealth that matter. . . . The key words are progress, prosperity, breakthrough, success, achievement, destiny, favour, dominion, blessing, excellence, elevation, promotion, increase, expansion, plenty, open doors, triumph, finances, overflow, abundance, newness, fulfillment, victory, power, possession, comfort, movement, exports, exams, visas, travel. The negative things to leave behind are closed doors, poverty, sickness, setback, hunger, joblessness, disadvantage, misfortune, stagnation, negativities, sadness, limitation, suffering, inadequacy, non-achievement, darkness, blockages, lack, want, slavery, sweat and shame.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Gifford, *Ghana’s new Christianity*. Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology,” 62-79.

⁴⁹Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 44-5.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 46; Paul Gifford, “A View of Ghana’s New Christianity,” in *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*, ed., Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 85. Also see David Tonghou Ngong, “In Quest of Wholeness: African Christians in the New Christianity,” *Review and Expositor* 103 no. 3 (Summer 2006): 529.

According to Gifford, the emphasis on success and winning are also funded by a theological vision that sees God essentially as provider and an anthropology that sees human beings as entitled to these provisions – now. Among the noted preachers of this gospel in Ghana are the Ghanaian Nicholas Duncan-Williams of Action Chapel International and David Oyedepo of Nigeria whose Winners’ Chapel has branches in many African countries, including Ghana. Other well known international representatives of this gospel are people such as Matthew Ashimolowo, the Nigerian pastor of the popular Kingsway International Christian Center in London, England,⁵¹ Myles Monroe of the Bahamas Faith Ministries International in the Bahamas, and Mike Murdock of the Wisdom Center in Forth Worth, Texas. Again, in a context where the sole purpose of religion appears to be the promotion of well being, it is not surprising that Christianity is seen as panacea to failure and lack of progress in life. Even more, African theology has promoted this vision of Christianity. What these proponents of tNC are doing now is simply cashing in on the vision.

However, in spite of the claim that material well being is central to salvation, Christians do not always experience it. Their lives are sometimes dogged by misfortunes and tragedies. The radical change for the better which they hoped for sometimes hardly materializes and they still suffer from poverty, sickness, infertility, etc. Why do such things still happen? This question is answered through deliverance and prophetic ministries. The answer these ministries give to believers is that they do not experience the material well being that is their right to experience because of evil spiritual forces that

⁵¹The web site of this church describes it as “the largest independent church in UK history and one of the fastest growing, with around 12,000 people in Sunday attendance at our main church in London.” See <http://www.kicc.org.uk/>, accessed 2nd April 2007.

block their access to these things. Deliverance has to do with unblocking the believer from these malevolent spiritual forces so that they might enjoy material blessings.

Gifford writes:

The basic idea of deliverance is that a Christian's progress and advance can be blocked by demons who maintain some power over him [*sic*], despite his having come to Christ. The Christian may have no idea of the cause of the hindrance, and it may be through no fault of his own that he is under the sway of a particular demon; this can result from a curse on his ancestors or ethnic group.⁵²

This means that the inability to experience material progress is blamed on spiritual forces that are normally outside the control of the Christian. It is to defeat these malicious spiritual forces that impede the material well being of the believer and undermine their ability to participate in God's salvation, that institutions such as prayer camps and night vigils are developed. These deliverance ministries use questionnaires that trace a Christian's background, in order to determine whether they have been involved in compromising situations that may serve as sources of demonic blockages in their lives.⁵³ After the cause of their blockage is determined, they are exorcised of the demonic spirits through prayer and other rituals, and set free for the enjoyment of various material benefits. Asamoah-Gyadu points out that deliverance "means more than exorcism, the expulsion of evil spirits. It has to do with the freeing of people from 'bondage' to sin and Satan."⁵⁴ This claim is in fact correct but it must be stressed that deliverance in the new churches is largely seen as exorcism, the aim of which is to help the believer enjoy

⁵²Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 85-6.

⁵³The sources through which these malevolent spirits enter the lives of believers is known as "demonic doorways," and they include individuals, families, communities and nations. See Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 181.

⁵⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 167.

material well being, be it in the form of fertility or financial success. As Gifford notes, “sin is hardly ever mentioned” in these churches.⁵⁵

Sources of demonic blockages may include participation in secret cults such as Freemasonry, Rosicrucian Order, and African traditional religious culture. One might have participated in any of these groups before becoming a Christian but their demonic effects do not simply go away after one becomes a Christian. Their demonic effects may still linger, dogging one’s footsteps and impeding one’s ability to enjoy God’s salvific blessings or “redemptive uplift.”⁵⁶ Demonic impediment to material progress does not only affect individuals but even societal structures such as state universities and airlines.⁵⁷ It is expected that through prayer and other rituals the demonic stranglehold on the individual or societal structures would be removed and new life of prosperity unleashed on them.

Recently, however, instead of using questionnaires to detect sources of demonic blockages, deliverance ministries are dominated by prophets, people of God who do not need questionnaires to diagnose the cause of one’s blockage in order to rescue them from it. These prophets are understood mainly as seers. Those who suspect that malicious spirits are preventing them from enjoying the material benefits of being Christians, consult these prophets who sometimes do not even need to be told what their patient is suffering from. In fact, their efficacy is partly determined by the fact that they are the ones who narrate their patient’s family history and the problem the patient is facing. This

⁵⁵Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 110.

⁵⁶Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 164.

⁵⁷Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Christ is the Answer: What is the Question?’ A Ghana Airways Prayer Vigil and its Implications for Religion, Evil and Public Space,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35 no. 1 (2005): 98-9.

method of dealing with clients was/is practiced by some African traditional healers. It was taken over by prophets of the African Initiated Churches and is now also practiced by some of these new churches who, ironically, despise the AICs for being unchristian because they are still tied to the African traditional background. Although Gifford recognizes the fact that the prominence of prophetism in Africa is fueled by the African background that assigns spiritual causes to material events, he nevertheless links this phenomenon to the West (to Paul Cain, Bill Hamon, Rick Joyner and Peter Wagner), insisting that it must be understood within the global charismatic experience.⁵⁸ But it must be stressed that the themes of deliverance and prophetism have found a home in African Christianity because a similar notion is found in African traditional religious culture. Since causality in the African worldview is not only material but also spiritual, many believe that their well being might be impeded by malicious spiritual forces. In African Traditional Religion, priests used to exorcise these spirits. With the prevalence of the new churches, pastors are now playing the role that used to be played by these priests. These churches are therefore fulfilling a role of the church advocated by theologians such as Jean-Marc Éla and John Mbiti, as we saw in chapter two.

Among the many representatives of deliverance ministries in Ghana is Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako whose Alive Chapel International specializes in rescuing people from demonic possessions that cause illnesses and other misfortunes.⁵⁹ His vision is clear: “If you serve God for two years and remain the same,⁶⁰ you are not serving the real

⁵⁸Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 83-4, 90.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 90-101.

⁶⁰That is, without seeing visible signs in material blessings.

God, but a devil God.” Being a Christian or being part of his congregation means that, “My days of shame, reproaches, sickness, poverty are over. My days of prosperity, success, health are here.”⁶¹ Even those suffering from AIDS have their “diseased blood replaced” through anointing with oil.⁶² This form of prophetism, according to Gifford, seems to be the growing edge of this Christianity.⁶³

Gifford identifies another trend in this Christianity which I have labeled “critical Afrocentrism,” represented by Pastor Mensah Otabil of the International Central Gospel Church (Ghana).⁶⁴ Otabil still embraces the gospel of prosperity but he sees this prosperity as tied to a critical evaluation of African culture.⁶⁵ His cry for the material improvement of Africans is posited on the belief that “God provides abundance for all” and that “the Christian life is a good life,” not a punishing life. His theological key seems to be the fact that humans are created in the image of God (Gn. 1:26-27).⁶⁶ To be created in the image of God means that human beings have a relationship with God that should bring about the good life, a life of material blessings. This should be even truer of Christians because through Christ they have a special relationship with God. But unlike other preachers who stress the miraculous intervention of God to provide this good life,

⁶¹Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 91.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 102.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 89-90.

⁶⁴Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 113-139.

⁶⁵His prosperity edge can be seen in works such as *Enjoying the Blessings of Abraham* (Accra: Altar International, 1992), *Four Laws of Productivity* (Accra: Alter Media, 2002) and *Buy the Future: Learning to Negotiate for a Future Better than Your Present* (Accra: Altar Media, 2002). But his critical evaluation of the African situation, which Gifford calls “Black biblical theology,” is found in his *Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia: A Biblical Revelation on God's Purpose for the Black Race* (1993).

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 137.

Otabil holds that God created human beings with the creativity to achieve the good life. Thus, he lays more stress on education as a crucial factor in evolving the good life and less stress on what has been described as “magical interpretations”⁶⁷ of events. He sees Africa’s underdevelopment as related mainly to internal issues such as the “magical interpretations” of events and the failure of Africans, especially the ruling elites, to take responsibility for the future of the continent. In fact, according to Otabil, African culture in general holds Africans back. This culture is characterized by “inferiority complex, tribalism, cultural stagnation, idolatry and fetishism, the village mentality, [aberrant] ideas of leadership and apathy.”⁶⁸ Because of the inferiority complex instilled in them by white people, black Africans have come to think that they cannot attain greatness. Due to tribalism, they have learned to care only for their tribes, killing those not from the same tribe like them, as was the case in Rwanda. Cultural stagnation has to do with Africans insisting on living in the past by, for example, perpetrating labor intensive methods of production such as preferring to pound their meal by hand rather than using machines. His critique of idolatry and fetishism strikes at the heart of the prophetic and deliverance emphasis in this new Christianity. It has to do with seeking to attain greatness through spiritual influences rather than through hard work. He undermines recourse to the spiritual to obtain what he thinks can be obtained otherwise. For example, soccer players seek spiritual mediums to help them play well and are thus controlled by those mediums.

⁶⁷Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders, ed. *Magical interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (London: Routledge, 2001). See Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 120-3. It is therefore of no surprise that he is the founder of the Central University College, Accra, Ghana. See their Web Site at <http://www.centraluniversity.org/>. In fact, unlike the deliverance and prophetic expressions of the new Christianity, Otabil expresses little concern for witchcraft and demons.

⁶⁸Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 125.

Women and men seek spiritual means to ignite love in their marriages rather than treating each other well.

What Otabil calls “village mentality” is the tendency to define Africa only in terms of ancient village life rather than through modern life. In this view what is authentically African is what is rooted in the past rather than the present. He notes: “All societies began from the village; villages are not African. Everywhere people have lived in villages, but have grown into more cosmopolitan outlooks of life.”⁶⁹ For him, village life is not African culture but the culture of those Africans who lived in villages in the past. When he talks of aberrant leadership ideas, he is referring to the African ruling elites who see leadership not as opportunity for service to their people but as means of personal aggrandizement. This bad leadership has however been tolerated by an apathetic people who do not care much about the situation in which they live since they are used to living in suffering and squalor. According to Otabil, these negative factors or strongholds are what make up present African culture and they can only lead to dilapidation and ruin. It is only when Africans learn to take pride in themselves and overcome these negative culture that they can enjoy material prosperity, which is God’s will for them. Otabil’s critique of African culture is very similar to Kā Mana’s which we saw in chapter two. Like Kā Mana, he is very critical of African culture but at the same time urges Africans to overcome this culture through Christ so that their material well being can be enhanced. Otabil appears to have made a good diagnosis of the situation but his vision for the well being of Africa can only be attained through a different Christian vision, like the one being proposed in this project, and not that of NC. This is because of

⁶⁹Quoted in Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 128.

the shortcomings which we have already identified as characteristic of the theology of NC.

Gifford also identifies Christian Zionism as important to this Christianity. Clearly from America, Christian Zionism is based on a theological vision that holds that God works in the world mainly through the church and Israel. Thus, to benefit from God's blessing one not only has to be part of the church and on good terms with Israel but must also be against Islam or other perceived threats to Israel and America.⁷⁰ This version of tNC is most strikingly seen in the preaching of the respected Zambian evangelist and former vice president of the country, Nevers Mumba. It was put into practice when Frederick Chiluba became president of that country (1991-2002) and declared it a Christian nation, restored links with Israel, and severed links with Iran and Iraq. These moves were expected to bring the material blessings of God on Zambia since they showed the country aligning itself with God's salvific story. Just as personal alignment with God results in material blessings, national alignment with God leads to the material prosperity of the country. Again, the stress on the fact that relationship with God issues in material prosperity can hardly be mistaken.

Gifford's evaluation of this Christianity is based on whether its theological foundation is sufficient to promote a better economic and political future for Africa. This, according to Gifford, is a Weberian approach which holds that "religious ideas have consequences independent of the motivation of those who hold them;" that there are "essentially unintended socio-political and economic consequences of particular

⁷⁰Gifford, "The Complex Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology," 74-77; Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 40-1.

theologies.”⁷¹ This concern of Gifford’s is not only limited to tNC but extends to African Christianity in general.⁷² It is the primary lens through which he has studied African Christianity.

One of Gifford’s critiques of NC has to do with the way it interprets the Bible.⁷³ According to him, this Christianity claims to be biblical but it demonstrates a heavy dependence on the Old Testament⁷⁴ and is very selective in its use of the New Testament.⁷⁵ It sometimes takes biblical texts wildly out of contexts and promotes miraculous or magical interpretations of scripture. Especially worrisome for Gifford, is the fact that the over-reliance on the miraculous discourages work and hence the level of production in the country. Most of the preaching of these churches, he opines, deals with how God miraculously intervenes in human life to transform a difficult life to one of material well being. Unlike Weber’s Puritans who encouraged work in their understanding of salvation and unintentionally contributed to the development of capitalism, adherents of NC tend to rely on the miraculous, and thus promote laziness.⁷⁶ This is no way to ensure the revival of the crumbling economies of Africa. In fact, as

⁷¹Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 27-9.

⁷²See Paul Gifford, ed. *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995) and *African Christianity: Its Public Role*.

⁷³Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 71-81.

⁷⁴In the Old Testament it draws significantly from stories of biblical figures God blesses such as Abraham, Joseph, Elija, Elisha, David, Daniel, Joshua, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Hannah, Esther, Jabez, and Job.

⁷⁵In the New Testament use is made of Jesus’ miracles, the resurrection, and the statement in makes in John 10:10 (“I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly”). Jesus is hardly presented as poor.

⁷⁶Gifford, *African Christianity*, 27-9; *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 140-60. Otabil Mensah could however be exempt from this critique. The Ghanaian theologian, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu also faults this Christianity for undermining economic development with its spirituality. This was especially the case when a Charismatic preacher was asked to exorcise a declining Ghanaian Airlines instead of asking

Gifford sees it, during the time this Christianity has spread, Ghana, for example, has actually experienced a decline in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁷⁷

For Gifford, therefore, this Christianity is not only bad for economic development; it is also bad for political responsibility, because it tends to spiritualize and moralize politics. According to him, apart from Otabil who calls for responsibility in politics, many of the preachers of this Christianity (in Ghana) tend to interpret political irresponsibility and failure in spiritual terms, that is, as caused by demons or as punishment from God. This means that politicians are hardly held responsible for their failures because the causes of failure are out of their control. The solution for political failure is consequently spiritual – the country and their leaders need to turn to God. This makes the text of II Chronicles 7:14 (“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land”) central to the political rhetoric of these churches. This spiritualizing of politics, according to Gifford, moralizes the political domain, a domain that does not depend on the morality of leaders but on carefully crafted political apparatus such as a constitution and the rule of law. According to him, the task of the state

is not producing the Greek ideal of moral excellence (*arête*), or raising up a nation of the redeemed or replicating Calvin’s Geneva, but effectively delivering the necessary infrastructure and institutions for its citizens to function. Thus a state has come to be judged on far narrower criteria – the impartiality and effectiveness

questions about the mismanagement of the company and finding out how it could be better managed. See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Christ is the Answer,” 93-117.

⁷⁷Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 156. It does not appear to have been established that the spread of NC is the cause of this decline in GDP.

of administrative and legal structures, which are much easier to monitor than morality in individuals.⁷⁸

Moralizing politics, Gifford maintains, may be a healthy theological endeavor but NC attempts to do so at the expense of the provision of basic necessities of life. That is why while Christians articulate their “admittedly noble vision, schools lack textbooks and classroom roofs, and the police lack not only vehicles but typewriter and paper.”⁷⁹

Even more, the “‘Big Man’ syndrome” which many African political leaders display, is clearly evident in these churches. This syndrome glorifies success and makes the “successful” preacher to be master of the people rather than their servants. In many cases these preachers are just as unaccountable and lack transparency as secular political leaders. It is therefore not realistic to hope that these churches are places where democratic principles and values that are crucial for the progress of Africa could be instilled.⁸⁰ According to Gifford, these churches are in effect not promising for Africa’s future. Their theological vision is not conducive for economic development. But Gifford does not provide an alternative theological vision, let alone suggest, as is the case with this dissertation, that their theological vision has to be theocentric. This is understandable, since Gifford’s interest in the phenomenon is not strictly theological. Allan Anderson, to whom we now turn, is far more interested in the theological vision of this Christianity.

⁷⁸Gifford, *Ghana’s new Christianity*, 168. It is however questionable whether this form of political organization (that is, the state) can be trusted with the common good.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 167. As we shall see in the final chapter, moralizing politics is not an inconvenience to the well being of the state as Gifford appears to imply because politics does not rely only on law but also on morality.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 184-8.

Allan Anderson's Pneumatological Soteriology and the New Christianity

Anderson situates NC within the context of what he, following scholars such as James Webster, David Barrett, and Hans-Jürgen Becken, calls an “African Reformation.”⁸¹ This reformation is related to African Initiated Churches (AICs), with special reference to those that are Pentecostal in character. African initiated churches, as the name implies, refers specifically to those churches that were established by Africans and whose principal missionaries are Africans.⁸² Anderson tentatively classifies the AICs into three types, namely the African/Ethiopian churches, prophet-healing/spiritual churches, and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches.⁸³ The African/Ethiopian churches are the first AICs on the continent and they were established mainly because of political and administrative reasons rather than theological ones. This means that in many respects, they are like the mission churches from which they separated. Specifically, they lack the Pentecostal enthusiasm and the strong theological engagement with the African worldview characteristic of the prophet/healing/spiritual churches and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. It is the last two groups of churches, that is, the prophet-healing and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, that Anderson calls “pentecostal-type churches.” It is here that Anderson places NC.⁸⁴ They are placed under AICs because these new churches are established by Africans.

⁸¹Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 4-5.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 10-11, 250-1.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 14-20.

⁸⁴Anderson, *African Reformation*, 167-90.

According to Anderson, all the AICs are involved in the African Reformation, which is an attempt to reform the over-Europeanized Christianity on the African continent, but it is especially these pentecostal-type churches that have seriously engaged the African worldview and have thus captivated the imagination of many Africans. By emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit to address the situation in which most Africans find themselves, these churches have provided the kind of spirituality that missionary Christianity had been unable to provide. They therefore hold valuable lessons not only for these mission churches but also for the worldwide church. More especially, for Anderson, their stress on the power of the Holy Spirit is a very important basis for ecumenical relations and “a unifying factor in a global society” because the Holy Spirit liberates from the vices that perpetrate division.⁸⁵

Although this Christianity has foreign elements, Anderson points out, those who establish them on the African soil continue to be Africans, and they transform the foreign theologies that sometimes characterize it to fit their contexts.⁸⁶ According to him, central to the African worldview is the concept of power or “vital force,” as the Belgian missionary Placide Temples calls it.⁸⁷ In this context a person is seen as a “living force” who is able to increase or decrease in vital force and who can influence or be influenced by other forces. To be, then, is to have power or force; to lack power or force is tantamount to lacking being. Since these forces, both personal and otherwise, are

⁸⁵Anderson, *African Reformation*, 257.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁷Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991), 58-73. Also see Placid Temples, “Bantu Ontology,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 429-34. Like all ideas that appear to generalize what “Africans” think, Temples’ notion of vital force has also been critiqued for essentialising African identity. We shall see more about this in chapter four.

spiritual, it goes without saying that one's materiality and spirituality are inseparable. People have to be able to effectively "manage" the spirit world in order to foster their well being. That is why, Anderson avers, in times of crisis, Africans visit prophets, diviners, and seers who are believed to have a deeper perception of the spiritual realm and who can thus help them achieve cosmological balance. But the reliance on power in traditional African religious thought, Anderson points out, produces a "vicious cycle" that leaves the African in constant "helplessness and weakness." This is because African Traditional Religion understands God as unpredictable and capricious; the ancestors on whom they sometimes rely for protection and security are not omnipotent. This leaves the African in constant need of a power that is reliable and omnipotent, a power that can adequately address their religious context.

The missionary churches largely discounted this context and therefore caused the African to have a split personality – they were partly Christians and partly adherents of African Traditional Religion. In this context, the pentecostal-type churches' presentation of the Holy Spirit as the power that is stronger than any other power is good news to African ears. These churches introduced the idea of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate power that grants the believer the ability to overcome all other powers that sap the life of human beings. The Holy Spirit gives humans the power to be. In fact, the experience of the power of the Spirit can be seen as the hermeneutic key for understanding the theology of the pentecostal-type churches. Anderson notes that,

experiencing the power of the Spirit is a common characteristic of these churches, where the Holy Spirit is the agent of healing and deliverance. In this regard, the experience of the Spirit becomes a self-authenticating key in the hermeneutic process. In these churches therefore, the experience of the Spirit becomes an essential and perhaps the most important key in the hermeneutic. It might even be said that this experience of the Spirit is the dominant theme of the gospel as

understood by pentecostal AICs. The gifts of the Spirit are proof that the gospel is true and the confirmation of the written word of the Bible.⁸⁸

Anderson insists that this pneumatology is essentially more relevant in the African context than the sterile one imported into the continent by the West. The dynamic or power pneumatology that the pentecostal-type AICs preach is relevant because it provides the solution that Africans seek. He continues:

The African traditionalist is in a situation of weakness, or of utter dependance [*sic*] on a power operating from outside to which one does not have permanent access, and which is always conditional. In short, a person's need for *power* which will cater for the necessities of life and protect from its vicissitudes – a life that is full, prosperous, healthy, peaceful and secure. . . . The message that the Spirit-type churches proclaimed was the power of the Spirit given to a person permanently and unconditionally.⁸⁹

Thus, according to Anderson, the pentecostal-type AICs provide a “holistic theology of salvation,” a “pneumatological soteriology” that sees salvation not “exclusively in terms of salvation from sinful acts and from eternal condemnation in the hereafter . . . , but also in terms of salvation from sickness (healing), from evil spirits (exorcism), and from other forms of misfortunes.”⁹⁰ Hear him again:

People want to celebrate life to the full and triumph over prevailing adversity, particularly disease, poverty, and injustice. Sickness and affliction prevent the fullness of life that Christ came to bring, and like the “leprosy” in biblical times, they isolate people from full participation in the community and disturb the social equilibrium. AICs offer solutions seemingly more powerful than those offered either by traditional means or by Western Christianity, and they claim in the name of Christ deliverance from this adversity.⁹¹

⁸⁸Anderson, *African Reformation*, 222.

⁸⁹Anderson, *Moya*, 69.

⁹⁰Anderson, *African Reformation*, 233.

⁹¹Anderson, *African Reformation*, 233-4.

As such, Anderson believes that prophecy, deliverance, and even the so-called gospel of prosperity (in spite of all its weaknesses) are in fact, proclamation of the salvific work of God through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This pneumatological soteriology does something that is hardly done in Christian mission – it combines proclamation and demonstration of the power of the gospel. In fact, unlike Western theology that is highly theoretical, Anderson points out, the theology of the AICs is practical theology.⁹² In this context the healing and deliverance activities of the charismatic leaders of these churches become the important work of pastoral care. Here again the similarity of this understanding of salvation and that of African traditional religious thought or African Christian theology is unmistakable. According to Anderson, this view of salvation does not only adequately address the African worldview but is also deeply biblical.⁹³ Engaging this worldview has helped these AICs, especially its most recent manifestation in NC, to grow exponentially in Africa, thus preventing Africans from relapsing into their pre-Christian religion as happened to them when all they had was Western Christianity. By taking their worldview seriously, this Christianity has also prevented Africans from the secularism that characterizes Western Christianity. The fact that these churches are growing at the expense of Western mission churches, Anderson insists, shows that they are doing something right – they are meeting the felt needs of the people.⁹⁴

⁹²Anderson calls it “theology in practice,” a “dynamic, enacted theology.” See *Ibid.*, 215-19, 120.

⁹³Allan Anderson, “The Prosperity Message in the Eschatology of Some New Charismatic Churches,” 72-83; *African Reformation*, 220-4, 256. The church, Anderson insists, needs to reclaim the emphasis on “biblical holism” characteristic of this Christianity. See P. J. Gräbe, “The Pentecostal Discovery of the New Testament Theme of God’s Power and Its Relevance to the African Context,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24 no. 2 (Fall 2002): 225-42.

⁹⁴Anderson, *African Reformation*, 250-3.

Here, too, we see that just like African theology, the understanding of salvation is influenced by African traditional religious culture. The role of the Spirit is to grant believers the power to be, and gaining this power seems to be the goal of the Christian life because much stress is placed on it in proclamation. We therefore see that becoming a Christian in this Christianity means gaining power to overcome those forces that diminish life. Thus, the material realm appears to be ultimate in their understanding of salvation. Taking this into consideration, it is therefore difficult to maintain, as some do, that this expression of the faith “makes a complete break with the past.” It also makes it difficult to claim that this Christianity provides a solution to the African worldview. We shall now briefly examine whether this Christianity makes a complete break with the past and provides a solution to the African worldview.

Evaluation

Scholars such as Ogbu Kalu claim that although the New Christianity (Kalu talks of Pentecostalism in general) has appropriated the African worldview, it has also transcended it by providing a solution for this worldview that is outside the purview of African Traditional Religion.⁹⁵ Missionary Christianity, he maintains, attempted to address this worldview by rejecting it and behaving as if it did not exist. Because they failed to provide a helpful solution to this worldview, “mainline churches practiced powerless Christianity that has left unconquered the spirits governing the gates of communities,” thus “allowing people to have their feet in both primal religion and

⁹⁵Ogbu Kalu, “Preserving a Worldview,” 110-37.

biblical Christianity.”⁹⁶ This shortcoming, according to Kalu, made the Pentecostal re-evangelization of the continent necessary because Pentecostalism takes this worldview seriously and correctly understands that preaching salvation in the African context means addressing a situation of conflict: the conflict between malicious spirits that threaten to undo people and communities and the Spirit of God. Thus, it implores the faithful to place their faith in Jesus Christ through whom the power of the Spirit, which is capable of overcoming all other principalities and powers, is unleashed.

But it is the case that in spite of the call for them to put their faith in Christ whose Spirit overcomes malicious principalities and powers, these Christians live in the shadows of these evil forces. This has prompted Birgit Meyer to conclude that in spite of the insistence on a “complete break with the past” (that is, the ATR past), the new churches are in fact still mired in it.⁹⁷ Meyer points out how Africans who are now “born again,” that is, members of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, resist participating in ceremonies related to African Traditional Religion. The intention is to break with a past that may impede their experience of material well being. It is therefore assumed that by becoming a born again Christian one is breaking with the traditional past, thus defining their Christian life by their denouncing of that past. But it is clear that the past is never past because they live in it. Meyer correctly suggests that Pentecostals “attribute more immediate power to ‘the past’”⁹⁸ than Christians of the mainline churches because they constantly denounce it. What these born again believers do, Meyer points out, is to

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 130.

⁹⁷Birgit Meyer, “‘Make a Complete Break with the Past’: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no. 3 (Aug. 1998): 316-49.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 328, 329.

engage in a “dialectic between remembering and forgetting,” where remembrance “is used at the service of anti-memory,”⁹⁹ remembering the past only to denounce it. This is no where more evident than in the idea of deliverance where believers have to be reminded of their past in order to get rid of it. But even here too, they never completely break with this past.

Thus, true to the title of Kalu’s article,¹⁰⁰ NC has simply preserved the African traditional religious worldview in a somewhat different form rather than proposing something new. This dissertation does not intend to preserve this worldview but to provide an alternative to it. It does not claim that this is the only Christian alternative that should be considered but that this alternative provides a vision that can ensure a better view of the material realm and hence a better understanding of how to appropriate it in salvific discourse. This is not the first time that this African worldview embraced by NC and African theology in general has been challenged. Two African theologians, Byang Kato and Tokunbo Adeyemo, had done so before and it is to them that we will turn in the next chapter. It will be argued that their challenge to this worldview confirmed the fears of many African theologians who think that any theology that is not anthropocentric undermines the material realm by preferring the hereafter for the here. It will be argued that a theocentric theology does not have to undermine the material realm but rather properly places it.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁰⁰Kalu, “Preserving a Worldview.”

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that NC is not a completely new phenomenon but is rather a perpetration of the understanding of salvation espoused by African traditional religious culture and African theology as a whole. In order to make this argument, it presented this Christianity mainly through the lenses of two noted scholars of this phenomenon, Paul Gifford and Allan Anderson. While Gifford faults this Christianity for being unhelpful to the political economy of Africa, Anderson sees it in a positive light as part of what he calls the African Reformation. Our presentation of their views confirm the position of this project that, in its salvific discourse, this Christianity places more importance on material well being than on God, thus perpetrating the religious vision of African traditional religious culture and African Christian theology.

CHAPTER FOUR

Critiquing a Worldview: On Being an African Christian (Theologian)

Introduction

We have already argued that the conception of the material realm in the soteriological discourse of African theology in general and NC in particular has been influenced by African traditional religious culture. Because of this, the material realm is regarded as an end in itself rather than that which points to God, the source and end of creation. This limited understanding of the material realm has led to the inordinate quest for material well being rather than a conception of the Christian life as a journey towards God, our highest goal. This has made Christians indistinguishable from many non-Christians because both seem to have the same goal in life – the quest for material well being. This project calls such a limited understanding of the material realm into question, insisting that the material realm should be understood within the context of the divine economy of salvation in which the material realm is penultimate and God is the ultimate.

This is not the first time that the African traditional religious understanding of the material realm, espoused by African theology and intensified by NC, has been questioned. Long before the present flourishing of NC on the African continent, two influential Evangelical theologians, Byang H. Kato and Tokunbo Adeyemo, both from Nigeria, had questioned whether African Christian theology should embrace the African traditional religious understanding of salvation. Claiming that African theology and Christianity were becoming humanistic and materialistic, they insisted that a stress on

material well being does not represent a Christian understanding of salvation. Thus, presenting what they considered a biblical understanding of salvation is central to their theological reflections.¹

This chapter presents Kato and Adeyemo as forerunners who questioned the appropriation of the African traditional religious conception of salvation in Christian theology. But it breaks with them because in their zeal to defend what they saw as the essentially spiritual character of the biblical view of salvation, they go to the other extreme by drawing a firm line between the spiritual and the secular, the horizontal and the vertical, and thus undermine the importance of the material realm. This is more so for Kato than it is for Adeyemo.

Some African theologians have however critiqued Kato and Adeyemo for their refusal to appropriate the African traditional religious understanding of salvation. According to them, Kato and Adeyemo's rejection of the African traditional view of salvation demonstrates their surrender to a colonial mentality that rejects things African. This rejection of the African worldview, they imply, marks them as un-African. Kato and Adeyemo are therefore seen as transgressors of the accepted way of doing African theology because rather than appropriating the African worldview they reject it. This raises the issue of what it means to be an African Christian theologian today. Since this project also questions the appropriation of African traditional religious understanding of salvation in Christian theology (though on very different grounds than Kato and

¹Adeyemo has however recently toned down his rejection of the appropriation of the African traditional religious worldview. Compare, for example, his earliest influential work, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1979), 93-4 and his blueprint for an African Evangelical theology, "Towards an Evangelical African Theology," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 7 no. 1 (1983): 147-54.

Adeyemo), and draws from Western theology to correct the perceived shortcoming, it would be needful to answer the charge of mental colonialism that has been leveled against our two theologians.

I shall discuss Kato and Adeyemo's conception of the material realm in their soteriological reflections, present some of the criticisms that have been leveled against them, and then engage the question of whether or not, how and to what degree, one should appropriate the African traditional worldview in order to be an African Christian (theologian).

Kato and Adeyemo on the Material

Kato and Adeyemo are both past general secretaries of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa (AEA).² This association was founded with the help of conservative evangelicals from the West in order to stem what they saw as the rising tide of theological liberalism and syncretism in African Christianity.³ According to these evangelicals, theological liberalism is promoted in Africa especially by organizations such as the All African Council of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). For them, the WCC is very influential because it grants scholarships for Africans to study theology in liberal universities and seminaries in the West and upon returning to Africa, promote a contextual theology that ignores the centrality of the Bible.

²Founded in 1966, this association was formerly known as The Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM). For more on the organization see Christien M. Breman, *The Association of Evangelicals of Africa: Its History, Organization, Members, Projects, External Relations and Message* (The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zotermeer, 1996). A section of this work dealing with Kato has been summarized in Christien Breman, "A Portrait of Dr. Byang Kato," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 15 no. 2 (1996): 135-51.

³Christien Breman, "A Portrait of Dr. Byang Kato," 135-6.

Also of concern to these evangelicals was the rise of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)⁴ which, as we saw in the previous chapter, are sometimes seen as forerunners of NC. These AICs are described as syncretistic because, like NC, their understanding of salvation is influenced by African traditional religious tradition. Kato and Adeyemo are therefore concerned with developing a theology which is faithful to what they consider to be the biblical proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is therefore important to them that this biblical understanding of salvation be distinguished from all other conceptions of salvation.

Kato, the Bible, and Salvation

Kato's understanding of the Bible is stated in one of the ten points which he gives for safeguarding biblical Christianity in Africa.⁵ It states "[T]hat the Bible alone is the final infallible rule of faith and practice. Its verdict cannot be challenged in any court of law since He [*sic*] is the final court of appeal. This propositional revelation is fully inspired, inerrant in the original manuscripts, and faithfully transmitted (2 Tim. 3:16; John 10:35)."⁶ Kato does not give sufficient details to explain what he means when he says that the Bible is fully inspired and inerrant in its original manuscripts, apart from saying that inerrancy should be understood in the sense of infallibility (again, without saying what infallibility means). It would however appear that Kato holds to something like the verbal theory of inspiration where God inspires every word written in the Bible.

⁴Tokunbo Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, 2nd ed., with a foreword by Gottfried Osei-Mensah, (Nairobi, Kenya: Uni-Trade Printers, 1997), 7.

⁵Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1987), 181-4.

⁶*Ibid.*, 182.

In fact, for him, one can only talk of the Christian Scriptures if one sees it as thus inspired, infallible or inerrant. That is why he expresses surprise that liberal ecumenists can lay claim to the scriptures when they do not hold to the same doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy.⁷ For him, therefore, it is only the understanding of the Bible as (verbally) inspired and inerrant that guarantees that it is seen as the only authoritative source for any conception of salvation. In fact, it is on this understanding of the Bible that the fortunes of central Christian doctrines and Christianity itself, turn. He quotes Edward J. Young, a defender of this understanding of the Bible, with approval:

Despite all that is being said and has been said to the contrary, the doctrine of inspiration is of the utmost significance and importance. If the Bible is not infallible, then we can be sure of nothing. The other doctrines of Christianity will then one by one go by the board. The fortunes of Christianity stand or fall with an infallible Bible. Attempts to evade this conclusion can only lead to self-deception.⁸

This view of the Bible is held by the “conservative evangelicals” as opposed to the “liberals,” that is, those who belong to the AACC and the WCC who hold “a shaky view of the Bible.”⁹ While these liberals maintain that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, for conservative evangelicals like Kato the Bible does not contain, but rather *is*, the Word of God. Their shaky view of the Bible has thus led liberals to all sorts of errors regarding the nature of Christianity in general and salvation in particular. Kato’s intention is to disabuse African Christians from this slide towards liberalism, thus directing them towards what he conceives as biblical Christianity. This means that the Bible, whose

⁷*Ibid.*, 141.

⁸Quoted in Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, 141. See, Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 5.

⁹Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, 147; Breman, Christina Maria, *The Association of Evangelicals in Africa*, 390.

gospel is unadulterated and pure, must come to be seen as the sole source of faith and practice in Africa.

It is for this reason that Kato is critical of what he sees as the “syncretistic universalism” and “secularization of Christianity” in Africa. These tendencies, he notes, do not only undermine a biblical understanding of salvation, which prioritizes spiritual values over material and secular concerns, but strikes the death knell on biblical Christianity on the continent.¹⁰ According to Kato, syncretistic universalism has to do with the amalgamation of religions, encouraged by the belief that all religions are equally salvific. This syncretistic universalism, he points out, is out to give the lie to the uniqueness of biblical Christianity which preaches Jesus Christ as the only valid way to salvation. Prime culprits in this endeavor are theologians such as John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu who insist on appropriating the African traditional worldview in their theological discourse. Drawing from African Traditional Religion (henceforth, ATR), Kato seems to suggest, may give the false impression that it is on the same level with Christianity. This fails to see that ATR is idolatrous and must be condemned.¹¹

Kato is not unaware of the situation in African Christianity that these theologians and others like them are trying to address. This is a situation where the African traditional worldview, which the missionaries condemned, has not gone away. Because ordinary Christians still participate in this worldview in order to address their existential problems, theologians insist that this context must inform the theological enterprise.

¹⁰Byang Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos, Nigeria: Challenge Publication, n.d.), 43; Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, 140-51.

¹¹Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 34; Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa: A Collection of Papers and Addresses* (Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1985), 30.

Kato had himself noticed that many Christians still operate within this African traditional worldview rather than a completely transformed one as the missionaries thought. He saw this, however, as a matter to be regretted. He writes: “[i]t is however, disheartening to note that many so-called Christians worship on Sunday but also go to witch doctors with their problems. This is in line with the traditional worshiper’s basic philosophy of life.”¹² The fact that Christians were still involved in the worldview of the traditional worshiper, Kato avers, is a sign that they are only superficial Christians. Mature Christians have to break from this worldview and this maturity comes only when “the heart is truly changed.”¹³ He notes:

A converted Christian receives a new basic philosophy of life. His [*sic*] religious practices will have to fall in line with what his new basic faith is. This new basic faith, obtained from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, is based on the Bible. The Christian will have to examine his whole life-style or culture by the Bible. *The Bible alone is the final judge of every culture.*¹⁴

In a sense, Kato, like NC, advocates a complete break with the traditional religious past. But while that past constantly recurs in the life of the adherents of NC so that it has to be dealt with again and again in rituals such as deliverance and prophesy, for Kato it is a past that seldom recurs and is ultimately overcome. While some African theologians and Christians attempt to deal with this worldview by incorporating it into the Christian life, Kato insists that those aspects not compatible with what he considers to be a proper understanding of the Christian faith must be abandoned.

¹²Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 16.

¹³*Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 30-1. Italics in original.

It is in this light that Kato sees the understanding of salvation in ATR as essentially different from that of the Christian faith. Drawing from his own people, the Jaba [or Hahm] people of the North Central State of Nigeria, he points out that African traditional concept of salvation is different from the Christian one because of their different conceptions of sin. According to the Jaba, he points out, sin relates only to social ills and salvation is obtained by fulfilling social demands. This, according to Kato, points to a humanistic approach to religion which is not supported by the gospel. The “wrong conception of sin,” he maintains, “results in a wrong view of salvation.”¹⁵ Rather than promoting this view of salvation as consistent with the gospel, Kato suggests, it must be exposed as wrong and pointed towards the right direction – the path of eternal salvation in Jesus Christ.¹⁶ He writes: “The Christian message of total deliverance from the original and practical sins of the individual is what African people and the whole world need. To suppose salvation where it was not is indeed no gospel. It is the teaching of human philosophy against which the Word of God has warned the believers (Col. 2:8).”¹⁷ Like all other religions, he points out, ATR can at best be seen only as participating in general revelation which serves to leave human beings without excuse for not turning to the one true God. It is therefore absurd to claim that there is any legitimate understanding of salvation in these religions that should be appropriated by Christianity as some African theologians (and indeed NC) do.

¹⁵Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 42.

¹⁶Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa*, 15

¹⁷Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 43. Colossians 2:8 reads: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.” (NRSV)

Kato's refusal to appropriate the African worldview does not mean that he thinks that the Christian faith should not be contextualized on the continent. What he is against is what he sees as a contextualization that compromises "the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ who declares authoritatively and finally, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man [*sic*] cometh unto the Father but by me (John 14:6).'"¹⁸ This "unadulterated Gospel" is one that purifies all concepts that are based on "false" philosophical worldviews, thus enabling Christians to gain new meanings in life. The fact that they gain new meanings in life does not mean that they completely part with their background, but only that they part with its central philosophical basis. Kato seems to suggest that it is because many African Christians and their theologians are still strongly wedded to some central tenets in the African traditional worldview that they make such superficial Christians, who have one foot in the church and the other in African traditional religious culture. Becoming biblical Christians, according to him, means that African traditional religious culture has to be placed under the searchlight of the gospel. Aspects such as the traditional respect for elders, some musical instruments, and African languages, may be employed in spreading the gospel.¹⁹ But central issues such as the concept of God and salvation simply have to be rejected as unChristian and replaced. He does not see such rejection as un-African or unpatriotic but rather as an acknowledgement of the Lordship of God in Christian life. Since Christians have to abide by the "pure gospel" of Jesus Christ as enshrined in the "inerrant Word of God" (the Bible), anything that compromises

¹⁸Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa*, 30.

¹⁹Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 13-31; *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, 163.

that allegiance must be rejected.²⁰ The Christian's overriding concern should be the verbal proclamation of the gospel of eternal salvation, which has to do with reconciling individual souls with God through Jesus Christ. Syncretistic tendencies in African Christianity lead away from this proclamation.

Syncretism, however, does not shoulder all the blame for skewing the understanding of salvation in Africa; the secularization of the Christian faith must also be held liable. According to Kato, the secularization of Christianity is demonstrated when salvation is understood as overly concerned with "secular" matters such as political liberation and economic advancement rather than with the spiritual issue of human reconciliation with God. This secularization of Christianity, Kato points out, is promoted by the WCC, the AACC, African theology, and South African Black theology. According to Kato, these groups develop theologies of salvation that are unbiblical because they stress human material well being as if this was the central issue with which a Christian understanding of salvation should be concerned. By doing this, Kato insists, they neglect the issue of eternal salvation which has to do with how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ saves individual sinners from their sin and leads them to heaven.²¹

Kato acknowledges that Africa has a history of oppression suffered at the hands of Western colonialists and some missionaries but he insists that that does not make the struggle to overcome oppression the central concern of Christians. He is aware that

²⁰Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 20; *Theological Pitfalls*, 165, 175, 177.

²¹Byang Kato, "The Theology of Eternal Salvation," *Perception* 14 (October 1978): 1-8.

Africa is suffering from desperate poverty but points out that overcoming this situation is not the crucial issue. He writes:

Exploitation, disease, abject poverty and deprivation of the basic necessities of life have been the lot of the majority of African people. But what is the root cause of these human tragedies? Would man's [*sic*] problems be solved after [the] alleviation of physical suffering and material deprivation? Is putting clothes on man's back and food in his stomach the way to solve man's basic need? Is political liberation the final answer? History negates any positive answers to these questions. . . .

The high rate of crimes, the utter discontentment and emptiness prevalent in the industrialized nations of the world is a sad commentary on our Lord's words that "man's life does not consist of what he has." Every inch of the African continent may be liberated from foreign domination, every family may have two cars in the garage, and every African may be a college graduate, but that still will not save the African from his fundamental dilemma. These current ills will only be replaced with new and probably worse tragedies.²²

For Kato, then, oppression, poverty, and other human sufferings are but symptoms of a deeper malaise in human nature – sin. He continues: "The nature of man's fundamental dilemma does not lie in mere physical suffering. It does not lie primarily in horizontal relationships with his fellowman [*sic*]. All human tragedies, be they sickness, poverty or exploitation, are mere symptoms of the root cause, which the Bible calls sin."²³ It is therefore only by addressing the issue of sin, Kato believes, that human problems can be effectively dealt with.

It is in this light that Kato rejects Black theology in South Africa. He recognizes that the apartheid system was deplorable and should be abolished but insists that the greatest concern for Christians should not be such liberation.²⁴ Christians should rather

²²Kato, "Theology of Eternal Salvation," 1-2.

²³*Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴Byang H. Kato, "Black Theology and African Theology," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 1 (October 1977): 35-48

be concerned with those who have not received Christ and have thus not found eternal liberation.²⁵ Among the shortcomings of Black theology that he deplores are that it is relativistic or situational, humanistic, and one-sided. Black theology is relativistic or situational because, according to Kato, it is based on ephemeral human condition rather than on “the absolute Word of God.” For Kato, basing theology on fleeting human condition such as a situation of oppression and exploitation treats such situation as the organizing principle or main source of theological reflection. The main source of theological reflection, he avers, should be the Bible, which is above every human situation because it deals with universal and absolute truths.²⁶ By seeing the oppression of black people in apartheid South Africa as central to its theological and ethical reflection, Black theology falls short of biblical Christianity.

Black theology also falls short of biblical Christianity, according to Kato, because it promotes humanism. Black theology is humanistic because it stresses human dignity at the expense of human depravity. Stressing human dignity, Kato claims, suggests that humans are in charge of their destiny. And when humans are seen as in charge of their destiny, God is eventually dethroned, and humans are enthroned in the place of God. This is nowhere more evident, as Kato sees it, than in the idea of Black Power which has replaced the gospel of Jesus Christ in South African Black theology.²⁷ Because the theology of black power has been brought to the fore, transcendent attributes of God have been rejected and God reduced to the level of created beings. Rather than being the

²⁵*Ibid.*, 35.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 39.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 40.

Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the god of Black theology, Kato sneers, has been reduced to the image of the oppressed crying for liberation. Such theology does not bring dignity to human beings, especially in the African context.

The highest dignity we can bring to our fellow Africans is to invite them to bow to the Lordship of Christ and the Father and join all other loyal creatures in singing, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen’ (Revelation 7:12).²⁸

Finally, Kato claims that the stress on material well being characteristic of Black theology renders it one-sided – it limits the goal of Christ’s mission to social, political, and economic liberation.²⁹ This, again, neglects the central issue of eternal salvation of the individual.

This one-sidedness in the conception of salvation is not only limited to Black theology, but extends to African theology as a whole, especially as represented by the WCC and the AACC. Like Black theology, the WCC’s and AACC’s “Salvation Today” theology or “liberal ecumenical theology”³⁰ insists on conceiving salvation mainly in terms of social, political, and economic liberation, as if that were the center of Jesus’ mission. They consider the preaching of individual salvation from sin and the declaration that those who are not thus saved are hell-bound to be anathema.³¹ They fail to see, Kato insists, that the substance of evangelism, the core of the mission of Christ, is to save

²⁸*Ibid.*, 41.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 43.

³⁰What Kato describes as “Salvation Today” theology or “liberal ecumenical theology” is the theology of a consultation on interreligious understanding of salvation, which was organized by the World Council of Churches in early 1970s. It was intended to discuss how the understanding of salvation in some religions can be practically applied in various contexts in the world. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 143-8.

³¹Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 144.

individuals from hell. “To advocate even a simultaneous transformation of society with the salvation of individuals, is to add some man-made plus to the ‘*eungelion*’ [*sic*].”³² For him, then, salvation is primarily about the reconciliation of individuals to God, thus preventing them from going to hell. Social or “secular” concerns are important but they are not salvific. According to him, the Apostle Paul and Jesus Christ recognized social issues during their time but they did not consider it their central mission to fight against these social issues. As Kato sees it, a crucial social problem during Paul’s time was slavery but Paul did not condemn it. He simply preached Christ because he understood that where Christ is preached such ills are remedied. In this, Paul was following the example of Christ who did not consider these social or secular problems to be central. In fact, these are humanitarian concerns. It was over affluent cities, Kato points out, that Jesus wept (Mt. 11:20, 21; Lk. 19:41).³³ Thus, Kato concludes:

Social concerns have their place in the Christian mandate. But the serving of table must be given second place (Acts 6:2, 4). Man’s life does not consist of material possessions. Affluency [*sic*] in the Western world has not necessarily promoted their spiritual life. For Christians to make social concerns their primary task and neglect their effort to win souls for eternity amounts to fattening a calf for slaughter. This the Bible believing Christian cannot afford to do. . . . Man was made in the image of God. The image has been defaced and the unbelievers are considered dead and estranged from the living God (Eph. 2;1; Col. 1:21). Humanization comes only when one becomes a Christian. . . . [The] primary task [of the Christian] is to preach the gospel of soul salvation.

Thus it was that Kato proposed to shift the gaze of African Christians from a preoccupation with material well being to that of establishing a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. For Kato, the vision of eternal well being with God seemed to have

³²*Ibid.*, 142.

³³*Ibid.*, 178-9; “Theology of Eternal Salvation,” 2-3.

been the overriding concern. He was essentially correct in stressing human relationship with God but wrong in denying that material well being has any salvific significance. As we shall see later, his understanding of the Bible limited his conception of salvation to the hereafter and undermined the importance of the material realm. This may actually serve to confirm the fears of those African theologians who claim that stressing the importance of the hereafter in salvific discourse inevitably leads to the undermining of the here and now. But as we shall see, one of the points this dissertation intends to make is that stressing the hereafter does not necessarily have to undermine the here. But that point will be made in chapters five and six. For now we turn to Adeyemo, who has a similar understanding of the material realm as Kato.

Adeyemo and Salvation in Africa

Adeyemo followed in the footsteps of Kato in stressing this soul-saving dimension of Christian salvation. He later modified his views but the soul-saving dimension is still prominent. In his very short autobiography at the end of his tiny but very influential book, *Salvation in African Tradition*,³⁴ Adeyemo narrates the events that led to his conversion and shapes his vision as a Christian.

Born into a relatively wealthy and influential Muslim family in Ibadan, Nigeria, he was “wrapped in a materialistic worldview,” and “indoctrinated to believe that one’s earthly material success is a foretaste of one’s heavenly destiny.” In fact, as an ambitious, young man he was determined to become the president of Nigeria and because

³⁴Tokunbo Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1979), 97-99; Cf. *Salvation in African Tradition*, 2nd edition (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 112-4. This book was his Master’s thesis at Asbury Theological Seminary. Adeyemo’s story below will be taken from the few pages already cited in both editions of his book and so will not be cited again.

he wanted to achieve this goal he was involved in social and political activities that would eventually lead to it. Materially speaking, his life was quite an admirable one. But like St. Augustine of Hippo,³⁵ he was also an introspective young person who worried about the meaning of life. Thus, in spite of the fact that he had a happy life, materially speaking, he still felt that he was lacking something. “Wealth and fame were there. But I was miserable. There was an emptiness [*sic*] within me.” He wondered what life was all about and what happens after death. He was determined to seek the goal of life.

It was this quest that led him to a church where he “was impressed by what he saw.” What he saw was beautiful people singing joyously. He noticed that materially speaking, he was better off than those who were expressing such joy in worship. Thus, he wanted to know what made them so happy in spite of their material deprivation and what made him so miserable in his material abundance. This was resolved for him when, during a tent meeting in Nigeria, a South African missionary preached from John 10:10 where Jesus gives his purpose for coming into the world: “I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly.” This is a very significant passage for all African theologians, and even more important in NC. But it should be noted that while most African theologians and adherents of NC interpret this statement basically in a materialistic manner, suggesting that the coming of the Son of God made available all what is necessary for material well being, the preacher who helped in the conversion of

³⁵Adeyemo draws a connection between his life and that of St. Augustine by quoting, without any citation, a famous line from Augustine’s *Confessions*. He simply notes that an “African philosopher once said, ‘God has created us for his own purpose, and the soul of man will be restless until it finds its rest in its Creator.’” He then adds: “I was doing everything of my own volition but God was kept outside.” For the idea that the human soul or heart is restless until it finds its rest in God see, Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), Book 1:1. This is an instance in which an African theologian draws from St. Augustine but does so only in a very casual manner, just a note without citation.

Adeyemo apparently did not dwell on this material interpretation of the passage. What he emphasized was “the lostness of man, the power of the blood of Christ to save, and the need for repentance.” It was this “message that gripped my soul, and in response to the invitation given, I went forward as an expression of my faith to receive Jesus Christ into my heart by prayer.” It was in this event that he found his answer to life’s greatest questions, leading to the eventual transformation of his life. Included in the transformation that took place in him was his immediate distaste for politics.³⁶ He gave up his ambition of becoming the president of Nigeria. This was replaced by the “unusual hunger and thirst for God’s Word” in his heart and the burden of verbally preaching the gospel to his own people who were still living in “spiritual darkness.” His desire was to know God and to make God known to his Muslim family and friends.

From this brief autobiographical narrative it seems clear that, for Adeyemo, material well being is not crucial in salvific discourse. His own life is a demonstration that one can be materially prosperous but still in despair regarding the central issues of life such as what happens after death. Salvation largely has to do with answering questions such as what happens after death and not so much about acquiring material wealth. That is why, like Kato, he rejected the conception of salvation in ATR as humanistic, utilitarian, and materialistic. Contemporary African theologians, he points out, have drawn from this understanding of salvation to stress that “salvation is first and

³⁶In this, too, Adeyemo seems to be echoing Augustine’s preference for God and Wisdom rather than a political career. See John Rist, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed., G. R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 4. One can thus see that Adeyemo’s life seems to revolve around some Augustinian motifs but it is hardly made explicit in his work. Reclaiming Augustine for Africa theology so that he may be explicitly appropriated is one of the goals of this project.

foremost a deliverance from the here and now oppression, and only secondarily and remotely spiritual in the sense of the life to come.”³⁷ He continues,

According to this description, salvation today is setting people free from economic, political and social bondage. Where the eschatological concept is brought into the picture, the trend is toward universalism. Under a seemingly biblical cover, the concept of salvation has been so broadened and deprived of its Christian distinctiveness that any liberating experience can be called salvation. Accordingly [*sic*] any participation in liberating efforts would be called mission.³⁸

Like Kato, Adeyemo points out that this wrong view of salvation that was leading to the wrong direction in African Christianity could be remedied through a biblical concept of salvation which “is the positive fact that through [Christ’s] incarnation, death and resurrection, man has access back to God by simply believing Him.”³⁹

Christians need to transmit the message that Africa’s broken rope between heaven and earth has been once and for all re-established in Christ. Africa’s God, who, as they say, withdrew from men to the heavens, has now come down to man so as to bring man back to God. Evil forces have been overcome by Christ. Beyond death lies not the dusty ruins of the conflict, but the shining light of the resurrection and conformity to Jesus Christ for everyone who believes.⁴⁰

But unlike Kato who flatly denied that material well being could be salvific, Adeyemo held that salvation is holistic although he initially did not elaborate on this. For Adeyemo, salvation includes material well being but it must begin with spiritual reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. Even in his recent revised edition of *Salvation in African Tradition*, Adeyemo still describes the understanding of salvation in Black and Liberation theologies as “humanization” that marks “a radical departure from

³⁷Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, 94.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 95.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

the biblical emphasis on the religious relation between God and man [*sic*] to the social relation between man and society – a shift from the vertical dimension to the horizontal.”⁴¹

But it is the view of the present writer that this dichotomy between the horizontal and the vertical mimics the distinction between the spiritual and secular which Kato stresses. It seems to draw a line between God and the world that can apparently not be supported theologically, especially after the incarnation.⁴² Drawing a line between the vertical and the horizontal appears strange because Adeyemo appears to have recently pointed out that African evangelical theology must take the African worldview seriously.⁴³ He acknowledges that NC is growing in Africa because it attempts to address this worldview that does not make a distinction between the vertical and the horizontal, the secular and the spiritual, but yet insists on this distinction. It seems that he insists on this distinction because he wants to attenuate the importance of the material realm in his salvific discourse, something that ATR, African theology, and NC do not do. By drawing a line between the horizontal and the vertical Adeyemo intimates that the horizontal is somehow cut off from God and so does not helpfully portray how the material realm should be understood. To helpfully understand the place of the material realm in salvific discourse, this distinction has to be abolished. As we shall see in the fifth chapter, RO attempts to overcome this dichotomy and shifts the human gaze towards God without undermining the material realm.

⁴¹Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, 2nd ed., 107, 108-9.

⁴²This will be argued in the fifth chapter.

⁴³Tokunbo Adeyemo, “Towards an African Evangelical Theology,” 151-2.

African theologians have not specifically critiqued Kato and Adeyemo for drawing a line between the horizontal and the vertical or the secular and the spiritual but on rather very different grounds. They have been critiqued for, among other things, abandoning the so-called African worldview, thus promoting Western attempts at undermining the dignity of Africans. It is to this and other critiques that we now turn.

Critiquing Kato and Adeyemo

As pioneer Evangelical theologians, Kato and Adeyemo have drawn both praise and scorn in the African theological circles. Of the two, Kato has received the most damning criticisms, perhaps because of his high profile as general secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), his aggressive critique of dominant African theology for embracing liberal and syncretistic tendencies, and his early death that limited his work to the early part of his theological career.⁴⁴ While younger evangelical theologians tend to see him as a courageous predecessor who stood against the theological missteps in African Christianity,⁴⁵ other theologians tend to have a

⁴⁴Suggestions that Kato changed his mind regarding his criticism of African theologians such as Mbiti and Idowu for fostering syncretistic and liberal tendencies have been fiercely denied by his supporters in the African Evangelical circles. Probably he would have changed his mind regarding the salvific significance of the material realm if he were still alive. Perhaps he would not. This, we will never know. What we know is that his controversial positions have both received praise from his supporters and blame from his opponents. For more on this dispute, see Keith Ferdinando, "Kato, Byang (1936 to 1975): Evangelical, Nigeria," in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, 2002 [Dictionary on-line], available from http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/kato1_byang.html; Internet; accessed 12 May 2007.

⁴⁵See for example, Mark Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 278; Paul Bowers, "Evangelical Theology in Africa," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 84-7; Yusufu Turaki, "The Theological Legacy of the Reverend Doctor Byang Henry Kato," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 20 no. 2 (2001): 133-55; Keith Ferdinando, "Kato, Byang (1936 to 1975): Evangelical, Nigeria," in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*.

negative attitude towards him.⁴⁶ Adeyemo, Kato's successor as secretary general of the AEAM, now known as the African Association of Evangelicals (AEA), initially followed Kato's theological vision, especially as far as their understanding of salvation was concerned, but somewhat departed from Kato with regard to his view of the material realm in his soteriology. Thus, only some of the critiques leveled against Kato also apply to Adeyemo.

Followers of Kato have praised him for insisting on the centrality of Christ and the Bible in African theological discourse at a time when many African theologians and Christians were only trying to build a bridge between Christianity and African traditional religious culture.⁴⁷ At the same time, his opponents have accused him of being theologically and biblically naïve,⁴⁸ and un-African because of his rejection of the African worldview.⁴⁹ While the charge of Kato's biblical and theological naiveté can be sustained, the accusation that he is un-African because he rejects the African worldview is itself a naïve one.

This is because it assumes an essentialist notion of what it means to be African when it claims that an African must assume a particular "African" worldview among all

⁴⁶See John Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," in *African Theology En Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 85; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 61-6; Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 386-425; John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 62-3.

⁴⁷Yusufu Turaki, "The Theological Legacy of the Reverend Doctory Byang Henry Kato," 133-48; John Parratt, *Reinventing African Christianity*, 62-3.

⁴⁸Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 386-425; John Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," 85.

⁴⁹Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 62; John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 63.

the worldviews that are present on the continent and around the world. Essentialism suggests that “identities are naturally given and that people can have integral and unproblematic identities,”⁵⁰ notions that are difficult to sustain especially in the African context which has undergone much change in modern times. Suggesting an essentialist notion of what it means to be African is thus naïve because it seems to imply that Africans can overcome the colonial context in which the African intellectual imagination has been shaped. We shall later have more to say about what it means to have an essentialist notion of African identity but for now let us look at the accusations of theological and biblical naïveté and un-Africanness leveled against Kato (and Adeyemo).

As we already saw, Kato and Adeyemo do not privilege the material realm in their soteriological discourse. Kato’s insistence that the biblical understanding of salvation deals primarily with eternal salvation (that is, with issues of heaven and hell) rather than present material realities has been critiqued for ignoring the Bible in which Kato places so much store. The Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako correctly makes the point when he notes:

Whilst one can readily appreciate Kato’s concern to safeguard the spiritual character of God’s salvation, it is also evident that Kato did not recognize that there could be other concepts of salvation which had just as much validity within the overall teaching of the Scriptures. Consequently, Kato tended to minimise the value of those dimensions of Biblical teaching which did not seem to suit his “individualistic” and “spiritual” conception of Biblical salvation.⁵¹

Because Kato does not acknowledge other dimensions of salvation that do not suit his “individualistic” and “spiritual” views, he rejects Old Testament understanding of

⁵⁰Tom Young, “Introduction,” in *Readings in African Politics*, ed. Tom Young (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 2.

⁵¹Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 406.

salvation as physical deliverance for what, according to him, is the New Testament understanding of salvation as deliverance from sin, the fundamental human dilemma.⁵²

It thus appears that Kato's approach to the Bible is not only selective, but also runs the risk of splitting the Christian canon of the Old and New Testaments. In this case the Old Testament understanding of salvation is no longer tenable because the New Testament has replaced it. This comes very close to Marcion's intentions when he made his own canon of scriptures that rejects the Old Testament for the New, or rather, parts of the New. As Bediako puts it, Kato "operated with 'a canon within a canon'."⁵³

Kato's biblical naiveté is not only evident in his selective use of the Bible but also in the more basic issue of biblical hermeneutics. Kato insists that Christian understanding of salvation must be biblical and he seems to give the impression that what is biblical is the same for every reader of the Bible. He fails to realize that the Bible must be interpreted and that interpretation may be affected by one's presuppositions. That is why he does not see that his interpretation of the Bible has been influenced by the conservative evangelical tradition, especially as found in North America,⁵⁴ that Christians are not all conservative evangelicals, nor that evangelicals have a monopoly on sound biblical interpretation. In fact, he mistook his interpretation of salvation in the Bible for what the Bible has to say about salvation, and the Christian commitment of those who do not agree with him is questioned.⁵⁵ Kato could therefore talk of a "pure" and

⁵²Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 163.

⁵³Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 405.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 386-7.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 397.

“unadulterated” gospel because he believes that such a gospel is accessible to anyone who simply reads the Bible in good faith.

He also demonstrates theological naiveté by failing to understand the theological positions which he assails.⁵⁶ This is evident in his rejection of Black theology because of his claim that it is the same as situation ethics. He interprets the claim that Black theology is situational to mean that it allows immorality, provided that love dictates the situation, rather than that it addresses particular situations such as that of apartheid. He draws this erroneous conclusion from the claim, made by one of the proponents of Black theology, that it is situational.⁵⁷ Because of this lack of appreciation of theological concepts, Bediako rightly concludes, Kato judges Black theology on faulty assumptions. Bediako writes: “Thus, in the final analysis, Black theology is judged not on the basis of its *theological* response to the situation of Black existence in South Africa, but on the grounds of the unacceptability of ‘John Robinson’s *situation ethics*’.”⁵⁸

This situational or relativistic theology, Kato further claims, is based on “human experience as the basic term of reference” rather than on the Bible which is the absolute Word of God. According to Kato, it is wrong to base theological reflection on human experience because human experience is fleeting. In this connection, he fails to realize that theology does not only draw from the Bible but also from the human experiences in various contexts. It seems that, for Kato, by taking human experience seriously and constructing a theology that responds to that experience, African theology and South

⁵⁶Mbiti, “The Biblical Basis for present trends in African Theology,” 85; Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 394-5.

⁵⁷Kato, “Black Theology and African Theology,” 39.

⁵⁸Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 395. Italics in original.

African Black theology have undermined the Bible.⁵⁹ This is of course not the case because, as Mbiti has convincingly argued, African theology and South African Black theology, in spite of their shortcomings, have been deeply biblical.⁶⁰ In fact, it has recently been correctly pointed out that no theology can appeal to most Africans if it is not Biblical because the Christianity that has historically appealed to them has been of the fundamentalist strand.⁶¹ Kato and Adeyemo's claim that African or Black theology undermines the Bible appears to be unfounded.

Kato and Adeyemo's biblical and theological blind spots can hardly be defended but the claim that they are somehow un-African because they reject the African worldview cannot be sustained either. Because of their rejection of the African worldview, Kato and Adeyemo have been described as pawns in the hands of their Western theological masters, intent on undermining attempts at promoting the dignity of Africans. "This rejection [of the] African worldview by [Africans]," Oduyoye writes, "shows how successful the Christian missions were in alienating Africans from their 'Africanness'."⁶² For John Parratt, an Englishman, by rejecting the African worldview Kato fails to "make any specifically African contribution to theology, but is content to reiterate the position of a particular brand of Western Christendom."⁶³ This appears to suggest that that in order to make a "specifically African contribution to theology" one

⁵⁹Kato, "Black Theology and African Theology," 39.

⁶⁰Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," 83-94.

⁶¹See John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 62; Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-17.

⁶²Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 62.

⁶³John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 63.

must wholly appropriate the African worldview. This promotes the essentialist idea of what it means to be African as we shall shortly see. But as will be argued, basing a specifically African contribution to theology on whether or not one wholly appropriates the African worldview seems to be a very limited criterion for judging what comprises or does not comprise African theology. It fails to take the multifaceted nature of the present day Africa into consideration. One would rather hope that theology would be considered African based on how it deals with the totality of the African situation, which, in addition to the so-called African worldview, includes postcolonialism, dilapidated nation-states, and globalization, among others. In other words, one would hope that Christian theology could be African based on far broader criteria than the limited criterion of whether one appropriates the African worldview or not. What follows is an attempt to broaden the criteria used in judging what should count as African Christian theology.

On Being an African Christian (Theologian)

As we have already seen, it is because NC is appropriating the African worldview that it is growing in leaps and bounds on the continent. In fact, it has been argued that what makes this NC African is that it has preserved the African map of the universe, as one scholar puts it.⁶⁴ Many African theologians have counseled on the necessity of appropriating this worldview, especially as far as the Christian understanding of salvation is concerned. Thus, failure to appropriate this African map of the universe in theological reflection seems to immediately mark off the theologian as un-African. This essentialist notion of what it means to be African is demonstrated by an African theologian such as

⁶⁴Ogbu Kalu, "Preserving a Worldview: Pentecostalism in the African Map of the Universe," *Pneuma* 24 no 2 (Fall 2002):110-37.

Kwame Bediako who sees the primary concern of African Christianity as that of searching for an African Christian identity. He relates African identity to the African traditional religious and cultural past (which he calls the “old”). But he is also conscious that African identity should not be based only on the old because there is also the “new” (Christianity) that has become an inextricable part of the lives of many Africans for centuries. It is for this reason that he calls for a creative *mélange* between the two so that a new identity may develop.⁶⁵

The problem with this reasoning is not that he calls for a mingling of the old and the new to form a new identity but rather that he appears to give the impression that without the African traditional religious past it is impossible to construct an African Christian identity. He approvingly quotes Andrew F. Walls, one of the foremost scholars in African Christianity:

No question is more claimant than the African Christian identity crisis. It is not simply an intellectual quest. The massive shift in the center of gravity of the Christian world which has taken place cannot be separated from the cultural impact of the West in imperial days. Now the Empires are dead and the Western value-setting of the Christian faith largely rejected. Where does this leave the African Christian? Who is he [*sic*]? What is his past? A past is vital for all of us – without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are. The prime African theological quest at present is this: what is the past of the African Christian? What is the relationship between Africa’s old religions and her new one?”⁶⁶

Leaving aside the questionable claims that the Empires are now dead and that Western value-setting of the Christian faith is now rejected, one may still wonder whether African

⁶⁵See Kwame Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” *Themelios* 20 no. 1 (October 1994): 14-17.

⁶⁶Adrew F. Walls, “Africa and Christian Identity,” *Mission Focus* 6 No. 7 (November 1978): 12; Quoted in Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” 15.

Christian identity necessarily has to be an amalgamation between the African pre-Christian past and its Christian present. Even if it is granted that the past in this sense is not a chronological past but an ontological one, as Bediako claims, African Christian identity is tied essentially to the past. This means that we have to remember our past because without such memory we have no past “and if we have no past, then we lose our identity.”⁶⁷ There is no doubt that the past is important but to tie anyone’s identity essentially to the past is biblically, theologically, and philosophically problematic. It is biblically problematic because in the Bible we have not only the injunction to remember, but also to forget, the past.⁶⁸ In fact, the Bible is replete with events that had not happened before, such as the Exodus and the Resurrection. This means that the past, present, and future are not always interdependent. There may and may not be continuity between the past and the present or future, so that to tie both present and future to the past, sometimes misses an important biblical point. Theologically, seeing the past as inevitable to the present and the future seems to see the relation between God and creation as essentially predictable. At least, there are certain things that are predictable in this relation but such predictability should not ruin the fact that God is a God of surprises. In fact, such surprises are the stuff with which miracles are made. This means that human identity, as dependent on God, is not essentially tied to the past but is open for divine construction in surprising ways as it journeys into God. This of course does not mean that the past is not important (for it is important) but only that it should not be essentialized as Bediako seems to do. Philosophically, as we shall shortly see below,

⁶⁷Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” 15.

⁶⁸ On biblical grounds for the tensive relation between past, present, and future, see for example, Isaiah 43:18-19; 65:17.

there is hardly any fixed past on which present identity is based, but a constructed past designed to address the exigencies of the present and the future. By positing an African past as central to the construction of African Christian identity, Bediako therefore misses these biblical, theological, and philosophical problematics. It is no wonder that for Bediako and other African theologians like him, it is essential that the Christian faith be translated into African idioms so that Africans can easily understand it.⁶⁹ That is why the translation of the Bible, a very laudable and inevitable missionary move, has been touted as groundbreaking in African Christianity. There is no doubt that translating the Bible and other Christian ideas into terms easily understood by many Africans has helped the spread of the faith. But it is also the case, as many African scholars have pointed out, that such translation has also left much to be desired.⁷⁰ Even more, translation promotes essentialism by insinuating that Africans can better understand only what they are already familiar with. In this light, the African has a particular way of being that can only respond to the other if the other is accommodated in the African thought system. It does not appear to think, as is in fact the case, that Africans can learn new things that are entirely foreign to what they are already familiar with. It is this essentialist way of thought that the concept of Bantu philosophy, championed by philosophers such as Placide Temples and Alexis Kagame, promoted.⁷¹ It buys into the Western

⁶⁹Bediako, "Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century," 16-18.

⁷⁰See Dora R. Mbuwayesango, "How Local Divine Powers Were Suppressed: A Case of Mwari of the Shona," in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed., Musa W. Dube (Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature/WCC Publications, 2001), 63-77; Gomang Seratwa Ntloedibe-Kuswani, "Translating the Divine: The Case of Modimo in the Setswana Bible," in *Other Ways of Reading*, 78-97.

⁷¹See, Placide Temples, *La Philosophie Bantoue*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1948; Alexis Kagamé, *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'être* (Bruxelles: Académie Royale des Sciences Colonial, 1956).

anthropological discourse that suggests particular ways in which black Africans (Bantu) think. This essentialism that claims that Africans think only in particular ways has been rightly rejected by other African philosophers.⁷² The propriety of uncritically appropriating this essentialist African worldview has been questioned not only on philosophical but also on religious grounds.

First, on religious ground, some have argued that most African theologians who appropriate this worldview undermine the dignity of ATR in spite of their claims to the contrary.⁷³ This is because theologians who adopt this worldview give it a subordinate position to Christianity. This perpetrates missionary and colonialist perception that ATR is inferior, thus undermining its position as an autonomous and complete worldview which must be systematically studied in its own right. Because of this, proponents of ATR think that those African theologians who appropriate this worldview are “‘intellectual smugglers who refuse to appreciate ATRs as valid religions possessing a peculiar identity.’”⁷⁴ This means that African Christian theologians only see ATR as a source from which ideas could be drawn to construct an African Christian theology but never as an autonomous worldview by which many people live and die. Where it is seen as an autonomous worldview, it becomes an incomplete one that needs to be completed by Christianity. This view of ATR, because it promotes “[t]he tendency to subordinate

⁷²See, for example, D. A. Masolo, “African Philosophy and the Postcolonial State: Some Misleading Abstractions About ‘Identity’,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudu Eze (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 283-8.

⁷³See Ezra Chitando, “The (Mis?) Appropriation of African Traditional Religions in African Christian Theology,” in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, ed. Edward P. Antonio (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 97-113.

⁷⁴Ezra Chitando, “The (Mis?) Appropriation of African Traditional Religions in African Christian Theology,” 104, 108-9.

ATRs to Christianity can also be interpreted as a subtle form of cultural imperialism with the notable exception that it is the African himself [*sic*] who reduces his own culture and religion to an inferior position!”⁷⁵

By not completely appropriating this worldview, this writer recognizes the religiously pluralistic context in which contemporary theology is done and grants that ATR is a unique and autonomous worldview that must first be studied in its own right before engaging it in any critical and comparative manner. This means that ATR does not have to be seen as a *preparation evangelica*⁷⁶ as some early African theologians did, but as an autonomous religion that does not have to be validated through its relationship to Christianity. Moreover, completely appropriating this worldview tends to limit the Christian understanding of salvation to material well being and thus shortchanges African Christians when it comes to explaining how the material realm should be viewed. Those who insist on confining African Christians only to this worldview seem to give the false impression that they (Africans) cannot understand ideas that are not based in it. However, the present postcolonial and global situation seems to suggest otherwise. Most Africans are open to other ideas and not only to ideas that are alleged to be African. That brings me to some philosophical arguments against appropriating this worldview.

Philosophically, African theologians, especially proponents of the theology of inculturation, have been rightly critiqued for giving “hermeneutical primacy to cultural meanings as opposed to dogmatic or philosophical meanings.” This means that “[i]t is

⁷⁵Quoted in Chitando, “The (Mis?) Appropriation of African Traditional Religions in African Christian Theology,” 104.

⁷⁶Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 15.

the impact of culture – not the logical coherence of ideas – on doctrine, beliefs and on the explanation of ritual practices which is their central concern.”⁷⁷ This is nowhere more evident than in their appropriation of the African worldview. By uncritically appropriating this worldview they imagine that it is sacrosanct and can only be subsumed, in part or in whole, in the Christian faith. And so most African theologians seem limited to what has been described in African philosophy as ethnophilosophy.

African philosophy can roughly be divided into ethnophilosophy, sage philosophy, nationalist philosophy, and (for lack of a better term) critical philosophy.⁷⁸ We talk of *ethnophilosophy* or “folk philosophy” when the beliefs and practices of a people have not been “subjected to systematic and critical analysis” in order to determine their plausibility.⁷⁹ Ethnophilosophy is believed to be the raw material for critical philosophy. *Sage* philosophy deals with individual dissenting voices in the context of contrived ethnophilosophical unanimity.⁸⁰ *Nationalist* philosophy has to do with the ideological rhetoric of nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkruma of Ghana, Leopold Sedar Sengor of Senegal, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, developed during the period of

⁷⁷Edward P. Antonio, “The Hermeneutics of Inculturation,” in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, 31.

⁷⁸“Critical philosophy” may be a tautology in Western universities because it is assumed that philosophy is necessarily critical. But ethnophilosophy is hardly critical; it rather accepts the African worldview as given and necessarily plausible. For more on the taxonomy of African philosophy see Lucius Outlaw, “African, African American, Africana Philosophy,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 24-26.

⁷⁹Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 86.

⁸⁰See Henry O. Orla, “Sage Philosophy,” in *The African Philosophy Reader*, ed. P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (London and New York, 1998), 99-108. Ethnophilosophy seems to give the impression that everyone in the community holds the same idea. But there are sages who sometimes hold ideas not common in society. This is the domain of sage philosophy.

the struggle for independence from colonial rule. *Critical* African philosophy is the rational examination of the beliefs and practices of African peoples. It does not announce the supremacy of rationality as obtained during the Enlightenment but insists that there should be good reasons for promoting beliefs and practices.⁸¹

African theology can be rightly critiqued for limiting itself to ethnophilosophy. This is because, in most cases, theologians have simply accepted the African worldview as given, without interrogating whether it is worth keeping or not. Ethnophilosophy simply affirms that there is a particular way most Africans think and that this way of thinking characterizes their view of the world. Because Africans think in this particular way, they should be approached in that way. It does not address the issue of whether that way of thinking is helpful or not, true or false. The classic text of this philosophy is *La Philosophie Bantoue*, the work of Placide Temples, the famous Belgian missionary to the Congo. It claims that central to the metaphysics of Black Africans is the idea of vital force.⁸² To live is to have this force and not to have it is to die. We have already seen how this philosophy has colored the view of some of the proponents of tNC (such as Allan Anderson and Ogbu Kalu) in their portrayal of the Holy Spirit as the Source of vital force. It is this same philosophy that is found in John Mbiti's *African Philosophy and Religions* and *The Concept of God in Africa*. Although this philosophy has been rightly criticized and rejected by serious African philosophers,⁸³ it is still the mainstay of many

⁸¹For more on how this applies to Africa Christian Theology see, Elias K. Bongmba, "African Theology and the Question of Rationality," in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse*, 241-65.

⁸²Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 94.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 85-106.

serious African theologians.⁸⁴ For them one has to take seriously the central elements of this worldview such as its understanding of the relation between the material and the spiritual realms and simply incorporate that into theology.

On the other hand, for most African philosophers, the African worldview can be retained in part, in whole, or completely jettisoned based on its plausibility and not on whether adopting it makes one African or not. The question that should be asked, as Kwame Anthony Appiah and Kwasi Wiredu, both eminent Ghanaian philosophers, suggest, should be whether the worldview is true and helpful rather than whether it is “African” or not.⁸⁵ For Wiredu and Appiah, colonized minds are minds that work within the framework of thought developed by colonialists but without being conscious that they are so confined. By working only within the framework of the African worldview, some African theologians and philosophers are succumbing to the binary between the West and Africa, initiated by the West. They are still caught in the Western *imaginaire* without being conscious of it. One way to transcend this confinement, or, to use Wiredu’s term, one way to be “decolonized” is through the use of “due reflection” on both the African and foreign categories with which one is working.⁸⁶ The cardinal sin, Wiredu rightly

⁸⁴See, for example, E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra, Ghana: Center for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001) and Todd M. Vanden Berg, “Culture, Christianity, and Witchcraft in a West African Context,” in *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*, ed., Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸⁵Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 96, 103-4; Kwasi Wiredu, “Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion,” in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, 291-329.

⁸⁶Wiredu, “Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy, 295, 296, 302. Due reflection is of course not neutral since one begins reflecting from somewhere and not from nowhere. Wiredu seems to have a skeptical attitude toward religion so that his due reflection seems to be based entirely on reason. This should of course not be the case for an African theologian whose philosophical reflection is done from a Christian perspective.

points out, is to uncritically adopt worldviews, be they traditional African or otherwise.

He writes:

An African is not to be debited with the colonial mentality merely because she/he espouses Christianity or Islam or any other foreign religion. It just may be that salvation lies elsewhere than in African religions. But an African should not take it for granted that this is the case simply from having been brought up in a foreign religion. The issue, in other words, needs to be confronted in the spirit of due reflection.⁸⁷

He continues,

An associated phenomenon, which is doubly ironic, is that in reaction to what is perceived as the colonial denial of philosophical capabilities to the African psyche, some contemporary African philosophers [read “theologians”] are apt to approach African communal philosophies [read “ethnophilosophy”] in an almost warlike spirit. Any criticism of any aspect of these philosophies is regarded as a racial affront or, if it is by an African, as nothing short of a betrayal. This is a retrograde inflexibility for which, by and large, we have colonialism to thank.⁸⁸

Working within the framework of the dichotomy between Western and African thought perpetuates the colonial mentality rather than liberates from it. Consciously applying due reflection on all conceptual framework, seeking what is true, good, beautiful and just, in particular contexts and generally, seems more helpful.

The view that it is un-African to side-step the African worldview has also been critiqued on grounds that it fails to take into account the interpenetration of cultures in the current postcolonial and global contexts. This is the case Edward Antonio makes when he links the theology of inculturation to postcolonial discourse, insisting that by ignoring postcolonial theory, the theology of inculturation “repeats certain errors on identity,

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 296.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 304.

culture, and the nature of colonialism itself.”⁸⁹ Part of this mistake is the tendency to think that to be African means the espousal of a specifically “African” way of being in the world or a particular “African” worldview insulated from all other worldviews. This ignores the fact that Africans, like all peoples of the world (both the formerly colonized and the former colonizers), have mutually influenced each other’s worldviews. Even more, the power of the Western world to influence life even in very remote areas of Africa and elsewhere, under the guise of globalization, makes it difficult to claim racial or cultural distinctiveness for Africa or anywhere else.

This tendency to ascribe what it means to be African to possession of particular “African” traits has been described as nativism or essentialism and rightly discarded as passé.⁹⁰ This does not mean that what is called the African worldview does not exist or that it is not important but rather that it is, strictly speaking, not peculiarly African.⁹¹ In fact, elements of this worldview also existed in pre-modern Europe and early America. Thus, to claim it as essentially a trait of black Africa does not only ignore the mutual influence of worldviews occasioned by colonialism and the present globalization; it is also unhistorical.⁹² It is unhistorical because it fails to see that the so-called African worldview is contingent.

⁸⁹Edward P. Antonio, “Introduction: Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse,” in *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, 2. Also see, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, “Toward a Critical Theory of Postcolonial African Identities,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, 339-44; Jean-Marie Makang, “Of the Good Use of Tradition: Keeping the Critical Perspective in African Philosophy,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, 325-38.

⁹⁰Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 47-84. Antonio, “Introduction,” 15.

⁹¹Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 104; Cf. Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and African Culture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 47.

⁹²For more on my claim that African theologians deal with the African worldview in an unhistorical manner see David Tonghou Ngong, “In Quest of Wholeness: African Christians in the New

Because of the present mutual influencing of cultures it is therefore untenable to link what it means to be African with only one particular way of being. What it means to be African was well spelt out by the eminent Nigerian man of letters, Chinua Achebe, when he said that “[t]here isn’t a final identity that is African. But, at the same time, there is an identity that is coming into being.”⁹³ It is largely because most African theologians seem to operate on quite a different wave-length from that of other African scholars with whom they are attempting to address similar problems that they seem to ignore the fact that there are many ways of being African. Of course, African theologians do not need to have the same views as non-Christian African scholars but they should be aware of intellectual developments that affect the continent and then decide how to engage them. Simply proceeding as if these intellectual developments do not exist, as is presently the case, borders on intellectual irresponsibility.

Let me give the last word to the philosopher whose work seems to have summarized the matter of what it means to be an African with great insight. Drawing from John 14:2,⁹⁴ the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, entitles his book *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. The book is in part an autobiography that tells of the various identities of members of his family. His father is a

Christianity,” *Review and Expositor* 103 no. 3 (Summer 2006): 524-8. Cf. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Witchcraft: European and African* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 15, 138; Ralph Austen, “The Moral Economy of Witchcraft: An Essay in Comparative History,” in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed., Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 89-110.

⁹³Quoted in Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 73, from an interview Appiah had with Achebe.

⁹⁴In the John 14:2 passage, Jesus is quoted as saying, in part, that “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” (NRSV) Appiah uses this statement to say that there is enough room for various identities in his Father’s African house. There is therefore no need to circumscribe African identity to only racial identity or nativism; other identities are welcome.

Ghanaian and his mother an Englishwoman. Thus, he and his siblings are children of two worlds – Africa and Europe. He has Lebanese uncles, American, French, Kenyan and Thai cousins; his sisters got married to a Nigerian, a Norwegian and a Ghanaian, and he lives in America (currently professor of philosophy at Princeton University). It is all these identities in his father's house that he attempts to negotiate in this classic work. In the end he concludes thus:

If there is a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous *echt*-African culture awaiting salvage . . . (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots). . . . the postulation of a unitary Africa over against a monolithic West – the binarism of Self and Other – is the last of the shibboleths of the modernizers that we must learn to live without.⁹⁵

It is in the spirit of the understanding of African identity, or any other identity in the world today, as already mixed, that I draw from some proponents of RO (a Western theological sensibility) in an attempt to remedy what I have already portrayed as shortcomings in the conception of the material realm in tNC in particular, and African theology in general. It is to this that we will turn in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Byang Kato and Tokunbo Adeyemo as forerunners who questioned the appropriation of the African worldview in African theology,

⁹⁵Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 155. Some have argued that it is myopic to claim a serious interpenetration of cultures in contemporary global context. It is claimed that the dominant culture in the world today is that of the West and the rest of the world is involved in promoting the project of Western modernism, such as the belief in material and moral progress, rights and liberties, and the nation-state. See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 15-19. Even if this claim is correct, it must still be acknowledged that the Western modernist project has not completely obliterated local cultures and that in some cases local cultures domesticate this project. Thus, it is still plausible to talk of the contamination of cultures as Appiah does.

specifically in soteriological discourse. It argued that Kato and Adeyemo were, in principle, right in questioning the appropriation of this worldview but that their understanding of the material realm remains inadequate. It further argued that refusing to appropriate the African worldview does not render a theologian un-African because of the religious, philosophical, and cross-cultural critiques that have been leveled against a monolithic view of what it means to be African. It is against this background that this project draws from Radical Orthodoxy, a Western theological sensibility, to correct the shortcoming in the understanding of the material realm in the salvific discourse of African theology in general and the new Christianity in particular. It is to this rectification project that we shall turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Radical Orthodoxy and the Suspension of the Material

Introduction

It has been argued throughout this work that because African theology in general and the New Christianity (NC) in particular have been influenced by African traditional religious cosmology, their conception of the material realm has been anthropocentric rather than theocentric. Because of this anthropocentrism the material realm is regarded as an end in itself rather than as pointing to God, the beginning and end of created reality. Regarding the material realm as an end in itself has led to the inordinate quest for material well being. The present sorry situation of most African countries is not unrelated to this state of affairs.

This project claims that a theocentric conception of the material realm may remedy this situation by portraying the material realm as penultimate, and God as ultimate, reality. If the material realm is penultimate and God is ultimate, it means that pursuing material well being as if it were an end in itself is idolatrous. It is only when one sees the material realm as moving towards its fulfillment in God that it can be better understood and appropriately utilized. For this to be attained, as Augustine rightly saw, human desire has to be properly ordered toward that which is ultimate, God.¹ This does not mean that humans have to despise the penultimate but rather that it [the material realm], as created reality, has to be properly subordinated to God, the creator. Because

¹Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity* (De Doctrina Christiana), trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1996), Book 1. 26-29.

the material realm is part of created reality its destiny is therefore not limited only to the creaturely but extends to its transcendent creator whose amorous pull always entices creation towards it in the deification process. Any understanding of the material realm that appears to give it a different destiny than its divine *telos* is, from this Christian perspective, defective.

The subordination of the material realm to God has been regarded with suspicion, especially in African theology. Such subordination has been described as Platonic/Neoplatonic rather than Christian, and Augustine has been blamed for promoting it in the early church (see Jean-Marc Éla in chapter two).² Appropriating this view of the material realm, African theologians claim, is not conducive to promoting the material well being of impoverished Africans because it tends to portray the world as a preparatory ground for heaven. Thus, like their disciples in tNC, they tend to treat the material realm as an end in itself. But as we shall see in this chapter, insisting on the dependence of the material on God or subordinating the material to God does not undermine materiality. As Radical Orthodoxy (RO), following Augustine, has amply demonstrated, insisting on the dependence of the material on God, rather than undermining materiality, enhances it. This chapter is therefore dedicated to unearthing some of the resources of RO that may be appropriated in remedying the already identified shortcomings of African theology in general and NC in particular. In this process, three representatives of RO namely, John Milbank, Philip Blond, and Graham Ward, will be engaged. The limited understanding of the material in African theology and NC

²For an excellent summary of the extent of Platonic/Neoplatonic influence on Augustine, see Robert Crouse, “*Paucis mutatis verbis*: Augustine’s Platonism,” in *Augustine and His Critics*, ed. Robert Dadaro and George Lawless (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 37-50.

identified in this project can be remedied through Milbank's understanding of salvation as gift situated within the context of reciprocity, Philip Blond's theological perception which sees the material realm as more than it presents itself (it being the case that the material or natural is already laden with the supernatural), and Graham Ward's theology of the city, which strives to rightly order the loves of city dwellers. All of this is however situated within RO's doctrine of participation in which salvation is understood as deification.³

Linking each of these representatives of RO to single themes as stated above does not mean that each of them should be confined only to one of these themes; they should not. Milbank, for example, does not use only the idea of the gift in his salvific discourse to the exclusion of the city and perception. In fact, all the adherents of RO make use of each of these themes. I shall use each theme only as one of the dominant ideas in their understanding of the material realm in salvific discourse.⁴ This chapter is dedicated to discussing how each of the RO authors understands the material realm. But before we go into that we shall first discuss what RO is all about, defining some key expressions that may help illuminate the work of the theologians engaged here.

³Deification has to do with how created reality shares in the divine life both now and eschatologically and it has historically been interpreted differently by different theologians of the Church. In this project deification will be understood as participation in God now while also emphasizing the movement towards full participation in the triune divine life eternally. Although the idea of salvation as deification has been attributed largely to the Eastern Church it has recently been shown to be central to the understanding of salvation in the Western Church, especially as seen in Augustine. For the most recent, authoritative and in depth study of deification, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in Greek Patristic Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Appendix 1 of this work (pp. 321-32) attempts to make the study more comprehensive by giving a summary of the views of deification in the Syriac and Latin traditions. For more on salvation as deification in Augustine, see Richard Clifford and Khaled Anatalios, "Christian Salvation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 764-7.

⁴The idea of theological perception is however central to Blond's theology.

Describing Radical Orthodoxy

RO is a Western theological phenomenon that began in Cambridge, England, and, like all important developments in theology, has received mixed reviews throughout the world. Although its background can be traced to John Milbank's magnum opus, *Theology and Social Theory*,⁵ it was launched as an identifiable theological project with the publication of the book⁶ that gave the movement⁷ its name. Central to Milbank's argument in his *Theology and Social Theory* is his rejection of an autonomous secular order based on universal reason and investigated by the social sciences such as political science, political economy, sociology and philosophy. According to Milbank, this so-called autonomous secular order, whose genesis he traces to the Late Middle Ages, is actually a distorted form of Christian theology, a heresy or anti-theology that posits violence as ontologically prior to peace. Following St. Augustine, Milbank's intention in this work is therefore to challenge this autonomous secular order by insisting on the recovery of a Christian vision that does not separate the secular from the sacred, and by

⁵John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1990). It is a mark of this work's influence that many symposia were held to discuss it and two journals dedicated special issues to addressing the issues it raised. See *Modern Theology* 8 no. 4 (October 1992) and *New Blackfriars* 73 no. 861 (June 1992). A second edition (2006) of the book has been issued and its preface is dedicated to answering some of Milbank's critics.

⁶John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, ed. *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). This work was reprinted in 2000, 2001, and 2003.

⁷As to whether this theological phenomenon should be called a movement or a theological sensibility, see Graham Ward, "In the Economy of the Divine," *Pneuma: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 25 no. 1 (Spring 2003): 115-20. For more on the background of Radical Orthodoxy see James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 2004), 63-86; Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley, ed. *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), xiii-xviii.

crafting a narrative in which peace as ontologically prior to violence.⁸ This can be seen in the final chapter of *Theology and Social Theory* where Milbank attempts to work out this “counter ontology” as part of the worldview in the *altera civitas*.⁹

Already embedded in the above descriptions of the beginning of RO are concepts such as the relation of the secular to the spiritual or the natural to the supernatural and the promotion of the ontological priority of peace to violence. These are important concepts in the RO project, so we shall briefly unpack them. First, we shall look at what Milbank means by the ontological priority of peace to violence. For Milbank, one’s attitude towards the material realm depends on the kind of ontology one has embraced. Where it is believed that chaos or violence is ontologically prior as is the case in secular modernity and postmodernity, the material world is viewed in a nihilistic light and “peace is created by the arbitrary limitation of a preceding state of violence.”¹⁰ This form of peace which is merely the limitation of violence is not true peace and, in Augustinian terms, is characteristic of the earthly city. By prioritizing violence this earthly city drifts towards nothing because violence is an encroachment on peace and is of itself *nothing*, a participation in the *nihil*.¹¹ This is because creation itself gets its being by remaining in God so that that which does not remain in God, in effect, becomes nothing. By positing conflict or chaos as prior to peace and (in some cases) as the end of everything,

⁸See Fergus Kerr, “Simplicity Itself: Milbank’s Thesis,” *New Blackfriars* 73 no. 861 (June 1992): 307.

⁹Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 422-7.

¹⁰See James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 100-3; Kerr, “Simplicity Itself,” 307.

¹¹Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-25.

modernity and postmodernity traffic in nihilism. It is in this nihilistic context that modern social theory evolved and Milbank is therefore not surprised when secular political science and political economy only attempt to mediate between competing interests through force rather than promoting total human flourishing within the context of charity.¹² Modern theology's uncritical appropriation of these secular social theories means that it is promoting systems that are, in effect, anti-Christian.¹³

Against this ontology of violence that only admits the arbitrary limitation of conflict, Milbank posits the ontology of peace characterized by "a state of harmonious agreement" in a community that promotes love and the attainment of justice for all.¹⁴ This ontology of peace can only be more effectively realized in the Church which is the body of Christ but its acme is the triune God who creates a situation of peaceful difference. The Church is therefore called and enabled to be a community of peaceful difference through its participation in the life of the Trinity.¹⁵ Within this ontology, creation, salvation, and the church itself are regarded as gifts meant to direct humans towards that infinite peace who is the triune God. For Milbank, then, it is only when the ontological priority of peace is assumed that we can approximate a more truthful view of the material realm. Milbank's understanding of salvation as gift and how this is related to the material realm must therefore be understood within the context of the ontological priority of peace rather than violence. The aim is to overcome modern and postmodern

¹²Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3-4, 10-45.

¹³*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴Kerr, "Simplicity Itself," 307.

¹⁵Milbank, *theology and Social Theory*, 423-4.

secular nihilism by positing a vision of harmonious peace as the goal of human life.

Where this is not the ontology embraced, life becomes empty and idols take the place of God.

A second concept which is central to Milbank, as we saw above, is the issue of the relation between the natural and supernatural, the secular and the sacred. That the natural should be separated from the supernatural or the secular from the sacred has not only be embraced by secular social theory, especially sociology, which “polices the sublime” by postulating a given natural order which is separate from religion and assigning religion to a marginalized remainder; it has also been embraced by theology itself, especially as manifested by liberal Protestantism and some forms of neo-orthodoxy.¹⁶ According to Milbank, therefore, neo-orthodoxy (especially as epitomized by Karl Barth¹⁷), perpetrates the liberal separation of the secular from the sacred by positing a radical separation between philosophy and theology.¹⁸ This separation cannot adequately call the secular into question because it has already granted legitimacy to an autonomous secular order. Granting autonomy to a supposed secular realm is not the vision that RO has of the material realm.

According to Milbank, Roman Catholic attempts to overcome this separation of the natural and the supernatural, especially as represented by the idea of “integralist revolution” or integralism in the twentieth century, did not do much to help the situation

¹⁶Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*,” 101-6.

¹⁷It must be pointed out here that RO’s reading of Karl Barth, like that of most of its sources, has been disputed. See, for example, Joseph L. Mangina, “Mediating Theologies: Karl Barth Between Radical Orthodoxy and Neo-Orthodoxy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 427-43.

¹⁸John Milbank, “Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,” in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 21-2, 32-4 n. 1.

either.¹⁹ The idea that the material realm (especially humans) has to some extent been graced so that one cannot analytically separate it from the supernatural goes as far back as Augustine but that idea has been interpreted differently in different epochs.²⁰ Three questions dominated discussion of this idea: 1.) “Does the Christian, next to his [*sic*] supernatural vocation, also have a natural end, or is human nature entirely oriented toward a single, supernatural goal?” 2.) Is there any natural desire in human beings for the supernatural end? 3.) Was the primitive condition of humankind (that is, Adam and Eve before the Fall) one of “pure natural state, or was it a state of ‘grace’?”²¹ The idea of integralism was an attempt to answer these questions and, as Milbank points out, two rival interpretations of this idea, the French and the German, were given. It was the German interpretation that appeared to have carried the day because it was the interpretation that went on to influence one of the most remarkable developments in modern theology, Latin American liberation theology. But according to Milbank, this German interpretation of integralism, especially as represented by Karl Rahner, wrongly

¹⁹The expression “integralist revolution” was embraced by the Second Vatican Council and it means that “in concrete, historical humanity, there is no such thing as a state of ‘pure nature’: rather, every person has always already been worked upon by divine grace, with the consequence that one cannot analytically separate ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ contributions to this integral unity.” See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 206. As we shall see below, it is specifically a Rahnerian interpretation of integralism that Milbank rejects.

²⁰See, Louis Dupré, “Introduction to the 2000 Edition,” of Henri de Lubac’s, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), ix-xv. It appeared to have been the singular duty of Henri de Lubac (whose views on the supernatural Milbank approves) to trace these varied interpretations of this Augustinian vision of the supernatural to see whether the various interpretations remained faithful to the letter and spirit of Augustine. This was crucial for him because he rightly saw that only a robust understanding of the supernatural could stem the tide of secularism that was sweeping the Western world in the twentieth century. Also see, David Schindler, “Introduction to the 1998 Edition,” of Henri de Lubac’s *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), xi-xxxi.

²¹Louis Dupré, “Introduction,” ix-x.

“naturalizes the supernatural.”²² This is because Rahner’s notion of “supernatural existential” (which suggests that there is an inner orientation to the beatific vision already planted by God in human beings from creation, but which is conceptually distinct from human nature) renders the operation of the supernatural or grace ahistorical and so does not take seriously the historical mediation of grace in the incarnation and the church.²³ This ahistorical understanding of grace, Milbank contends, promotes a universal humanism and a rapprochement with the Enlightenment and its idea of autonomous secular order.²⁴ This is because although Rahner’s notion of supernatural existential appears to presuppose that creation is grace imbued, he still argues for the notion of ‘pure nature’, thus making room for an autonomous secular sphere that may lead to secular practice.²⁵

Against this interpretation of integralism Milbank posits the French version propounded by representatives of the *nouvelle théologie* such as Maurice Blondel and Henri de Lubac. This version “supernaturalizes the natural,” is historical, and does not make room for an autonomous secular sphere. This is “because it refuses even to formally distinguish a realm of pure nature in concrete humanity.”²⁶ This is what Blondel’s philosophy of the *suraturel* does when it uses human action to explicate how

²²Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 207.

²³*Ibid.*, 215; 221; Schindler, “Introduction,” xxiii.

²⁴Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 207.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 208, 221.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 207-8

the supernatural is inextricably bound with the natural.²⁷ “According to Blondel,” Milbank writes, “the logic of every action, demands the supernatural.” This is because for Blondel, every good action goes beyond the intention of the agent, “becoming other to itself,” “deepening, not betraying the author’s purpose.” In this case, every action requires the supernatural because every action can only fit well in the whole (synthesis) through supernatural mediation.²⁸ By taking the historical plane of human action seriously as the venue for the mediation of grace, Blondel, unlike Rahner, does not naturalize the supernatural but rather supernaturalizes the natural. Here the supernatural is inextricably bound up with the natural without the remainder of an autonomous secular sphere; but this supernatural does not constitute a universal humanity irrespective of the nature of human participation in history.

Influenced by Blondel, among others, de Lubac developed “a properly theological integralism,” where

On the one hand, the extraordinary, the supernatural, which is always manifest within Creation, is present at the heart of the ordinary: it is ‘precisely real’ or ‘the real in its precision’ On the other hand, the ordinary and given always at its heart points beyond itself and in its spiritual nature aspires upwards to the highest. Grace is always kenotic; the natural is always elevated but not destroyed. Yet by a symmetrical paradox, the more that is demanded by nature can only be received from God as a gift.²⁹

Thus, the view of the supernatural in Blondel as historically mediated comes to fruition in de Lubac for whom the supernatural, though within creation, still has to be constantly

²⁷*Ibid.*, 210-9.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 214.

²⁹John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 5-6; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 219.

received from God as gift. This touches at the heart of one important element in Milbank's theology of the gift that we will see later – that of reciprocity. But it suffices to state at this point that the vision of the supernatural espoused here understands the supernatural as grace or the activity of God in the world. It is this understanding of the supernatural that Philip Blond espouses in his theological perception and, as we shall see, this view of the supernatural is different from that espoused by African theology and NC.

It is this supernaturalized cosmology, guided by the vision of the ontology of peace, that the RO project has carried over into what has been described as its manifesto, when, at the very beginning of the text, the following declaration is made:

For several centuries now, secularism has been defining and constructing the world. It is a world in which the theological is either discredited or turned into a harmless leisure-time activity of private commitment. . . . And today the logic of secularism is imploding. Speaking with a microphoned and digitally simulated voice, it proclaims – uneasily, or else increasingly unashamedly – its own lack of values and lack of meaning. In its cyberspaces and theme-parks it promotes a materialism which is soulless, aggressive, nonchalant and nihilistic.

It then goes on to declare what it is all about:

[Radical Orthodoxy] attempts to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework. Not simply returning in nostalgia to the premodern, it visits sites in which secularism has invested heavily – aesthetics, politics, sex, the body, personhood, visibility, space – and resituates them from a Christian standpoint; that is, in terms of the Trinity, Christology, the Church, and the Eucharist.³⁰

Thus, returning to the premodern period is important for the RO project but the purpose of this return is to creatively appropriate premodern ideas in our modern/postmodern context in an attempt to envision an alternative modernity. This, among other things,

³⁰Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, "Introduction," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 1. For another brief summary of the agenda of RO, see John Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 33-45.

means that RO's "central theological framework is 'participation' as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity."³¹ Thus, although various contributors to the RO project sometimes have different views on certain matters,³² it is within this participatory worldview that they operate. Situating the world within a participatory framework that posits God as granting worth to the material realm is described variously as "suspending," "fracturing," "interrupting," "consecrating," or "sacramentalising" the material. This means that it is only when the material realm is seen as deriving its source and ground from the transcendent Deity who is in, and yet other than the material realm,³³ that the beauty of the material realm can shine through. According to RO, therefore, the story of the world as told today by secularity portrays the world as nihilistic, drifting towards nothing because it has cut itself off from the source of its being. It is this story, told especially by secular philosophy, that the various contributors to the book, *Radical Orthodoxy*, seek to challenge by telling another, very different story, with a kind of virtuosity that they love to describe as "out-narrating." But, as we already saw, the central theological framework in which this challenge is carried out is that of 'participation'. What then is participation?

Very briefly stated, the idea of participation as developed by Plato was occasioned by his inquiry into the causes and nature of things. This led him to develop

³¹Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, "Introduction," 3.

³²Ward and Milbank have quite different views of the place of secular theories in theological discourse. Compare, for example, Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, which seeks to abolish theology's appropriation of the social sciences and Ward's *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, 2d ed. (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 2000), which counsels theology's constructive engagement with social and critical theory.

³³See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, prima pars, q. 8, "Whether God is in all Things."

the concept of Forms or Ideas through which he maintained that individual things can only be explained in terms of their relation to these Forms. For example, one can only know that a thing is beautiful not because it has bright colors or a particular shape but because of its sharing or participation (*methexis*) in the Beautiful. In fact, an object comes to be because of its “participation in its essential Idea” (μετασχὼν της ἰδίας οὐσίας), and so for one to know the nature of a thing one must know its Form.³⁴ These intelligible and eternal Forms are the standards or criteria (παράδειγμα) “by which sensible things (actions or objects) can be identified and distinguished from each other.”³⁵ Material things are therefore said to be only in so far as they share or participate in the Forms, which are the source of their being or nature.³⁶

While RO critically appropriates Plato in making its case for participation as the only ontologically viable option in arresting modern and postmodern devaluation of the material realm,³⁷ it also critically appropriates Neoplatonism’s hierarchic ontology of emanation. According to this Neoplatonic ontology the world is produced through the overflowing of the divine One but the world is not this divine One. Because the world came about through the divine One it can only be sustained if its gaze remains

³⁴See Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 8-9; Plato, *Phaedo*, 100d-101c, in *Five Dialogues of Plato*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 139-40.

³⁵Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology*, 9.

³⁶Rudi A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), x-xi; Charles P. Bigger, *Participation: A Platonic Inquiry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), vii-x.

³⁷See, for example, Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 3-46. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 41-42. Also see, James K.A. Smith, “Will the Real Plato Please Stand Up?: Participation Versus Incarnation,” in *Creation, Covenant, and Participation: Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*, ed. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 61-72.

continuously fixed on this One. When it drifts away it loses its being. Neoplatonism, especially the theurgic form as represented by Proclus and Iamblicus, saw human thinking and making as participating in this divine One so that for them, like for Plato, the material finds its fulfillment in remaining in the intelligent source of its being.³⁸ It must however be stressed that both the Platonic and Neoplatonic versions of participation are important but limited steps in the right direction – ensuring that the material realm is constantly anchored in the source of its being.

It is ultimately in Christianity that RO anchors its understanding of participation.³⁹ This understanding of participation is different from the Platonic notion of the original intelligible Idea to which the material world is but a copy or the Neoplatonic emanational ontology which may be (wrongly)⁴⁰ understood as monistic. The Christian understanding of participation is rooted in the idea of divine creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) so that the material realm is sustained in being not by participating in the Form (Plato) or in the One (Neoplatonism) but rather in the Trinity, especially as evidenced in the activities of

³⁸John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London and New York, 2003), 114-5. Also see John Milbank's presentation entitled "Recovering the Christian Imagination," delivered at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, Thursday, November 9, 2006. The Neoplatonic conception of participation as prelude to recovering the Christian imagination is important to the paper.

³⁹It is important to note that RO ultimately anchors its understanding of participation in Christianity in order not to mistake its appropriation of Plato as the main source of its understanding of participation, as James K. A. Smith appears to do. This leads him to give the impression that RO posits participation in opposition to incarnation (which he links to materiality and not specifically to the assuming of human body by the second person of the Trinity). As will be argued below, generally RO does not oppose participation to incarnation. See James K. A. Smith, "Will the Real Plato Please Stand Up: Participation Versus Incarnation."

⁴⁰Neoplatonism is not pure monism because the essence of the One cannot be participated in. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 114-5.

the Logos (*verbum*) and the Spirit.⁴¹ While Plato held that the world was created from preexisting matter and the Neoplatonists held that creation emanated eternally from the highest principle (the One), Christian theologians, from late second century, had started stressing creation out of nothing; this was espoused by St. Augustine and it finally became the standard doctrine of the Church.⁴² *Creatio ex nihilo* implies that the world is nothing if not linked to its creator because it was brought about by the creator out of nothing.⁴³ This means that human and creaturely destinies must be ultimately understood from the perspective of its source. Tying human destiny only to created things, in Augustinian terms, means giving ultimate value to that whose value is only penultimate, thus giving more worth to what would be *nihil* without God. It is the modern world's attempt to pull off this feat that RO rejects by insisting that it is only when the immanent material realm is viewed as finding its origin and fulfillment only in the transcendent, that its worth can be ascertained.

Critically reclaiming the premodern participatory ontology is thus RO's attempt at supernaturalizing the natural by hinging the material world, which secularism had unhooked from its supernatural source, back to that source.⁴⁴ The story of the unhinging

⁴¹That participation should be understood within the context of the Trinity can be seen especially in Milbank's *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), where the Logos is central, and *Being Reconciled* where the activity of the Spirit becomes crucial. For Milbank, the centrality of the Logos in the *Word Made Strange* accentuates theology while what he calls "theopneumatics" (pneumatology) is accentuated in *Being Reconciled*.

⁴²Simo Knuuttila, "Time and Creation in Augustine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103-4.

⁴³The first time the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is mentioned in the Bible seems to be in 2 Maccabees 7:28.

⁴⁴Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 206-55.

of the material world from its supernatural source is told slightly differently by the different advocates of RO but its early beginnings is usually traced to Duns Scotus' (1266-1308) account of the univocity of being which matures with the Enlightenment, especially with Kant's "policing of the sublime," which denies knowledge of that which is outside space and time (in order to make room for faith). The idea of univocity relates to Scotus' postulation of being (*ens*) as a higher idea which can be predicated of both God and creation – a third *thing* in which God and creatures share. It was only when being was univocally predicated of God and creation, Scotus thought, that God could be known naturally.⁴⁵ The road from this attempt at diminishing the transcendence of God to completely unhinging the "natural" from God was not a long one. It came in the Enlightenment that gave primacy to human reason.

But this move towards denuding the world of the transcendent has never been a smooth one as there has always been those who have insisted that the material world only makes sense if it is suspended on the transcendent or supernaturalized. These range from authors such as Giambattista Vico, Hans Georg Hamann, Franz Heinrich Jacobi, Søren Kierkegaard, Blaise Pascal, to twentieth century French Roman Catholic theologians associated with the *nouvelle théologie* and some French postmodern philosophers – all of whom attempted to maintain a participatory ontology. The intention of this ontology is to portray the material world as charged by and dependent on the transcendent, as it

⁴⁵Philip Blond, "Introduction: Theology Before Philosophy," in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Philip Blond (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 6.

advances into the beauty of the transcendent and is ultimately transformed when God will be all in all.⁴⁶

Although RO has received considerable support from some quarters,⁴⁷ it has also been significantly challenged. Among the many criticisms that have been leveled against it are the claim that it seeks to reinstate the premodern and the Christian hegemony that dominated Christendom, and the intolerance that was its hallmark; the confusion of ontological and historical reality; the promotion of Western imperialistic tendencies; the misreading of the sources from which it draws in order to make its case against the secular; and even that it undermines the material realm which it claims to uphold.⁴⁸ These are important charges against RO and, in this chapter and the next, attempts will be made at addressing them. We shall now turn to the three theologians to be engaged in this chapter by first looking at Milbank's understanding of salvation as gift.

John Milbank and the Gift of Salvation

Milbank's conception of the material realm in his salvific discourse is to be understood within the framework of gift, rooted in the biblical and theological notion that creation, grace, the Incarnation (*verbum*) and the sending of the Holy Spirit (*donum*,

⁴⁶See John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Edith Wyschogrod, ed. *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003); John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 25-8.

⁴⁷The Radical Orthodox agenda is most frequently articulated by the journal *Modern Theology*. A monograph series on RO is edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, and published by Routledge.

⁴⁸See, for example, Laurence Paul Hemming, ed. *Radical Orthodoxy?*; Christopher J. Insole, *The Politics of Human Frailty: A Theological Defence of Political Liberalism* (London: SCM, 2004); Insole, "Against Radical Orthodoxy: The Dangers of Overcoming Political Liberalism." *Modern Theology* 20 (April 2004): 213-41. Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley, ed. *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*; and Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau, ed. *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

according to St. Augustine⁴⁹) are gifts.⁵⁰ This notion of the gift is examined within a participatory ontology that, on the one hand, stresses reciprocity,⁵¹ thus strongly eschewing unilateralism, and, on the other hand, locates reciprocity within the context of radical unilateralism where God is the sole giver of the gift of creation and salvation, without “receiving” anything in return.⁵² The notion of radical unilateralism posits God as “the single influence, the single unilateral cause of everything,” but which allows creatures to exercise secondary causality in their lower levels only as they receive their

⁴⁹See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), Book V. 3; John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, ed. *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 54.

⁵⁰Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 423; Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, ix. The idea of the gift is the central organizing principle in Milbank’s *Being Reconciled*. That Milbank’s idea of salvation as gift is biblical and theological must be insisted upon because some argue that his theology of the gift heavily relies upon a “narrow range of terms drawn from the anthropological gift-giving discussion” without paying sufficient attention to scripture. It is true that Milbank engages anthropological and philosophical discussions of the gift and does not meticulously exegete scripture but this does not mean that his theology of the gift is not biblically and theologically grounded. Grounding his theology of the gift (and salvation) in the doctrines of creation, grace, Incarnation, and the Holy Spirit, as Milbank does in *Being Reconciled*, seems to indicate that the work is theologically, rather than anthropologically, grounded. For the accusation that Milbank’s understanding of the gift is anthropologically driven, see Billings, “John Milbank’s theology of the ‘Gift’ and Calvin’s theology of Grace: Critical Comparison,” *Modern Theology* 21 no. 1 (January 2005): 88.

⁵¹Milbank talks of asymmetrical or spiraling reciprocity where the give-and-take involves both the ontological and the historical or narrative, the finite and the infinite, as in the case of the Incarnation where through the body of Christ the material world is conjoined eternally to God. Reciprocity in this case implies give-and-take carried out in the context of a supernaturalized world with an eye to the supernatural end of creation in the triune life of God. Here reciprocity “implies not a fixed circle, but an unending spiral, in which each response only completes the circle by breaking out of it to reestablish it – like a ring on a finger where the ends bind by overlapping, but do not actually meet.” See, Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two,” 485-6, 504-5; Milbank, “The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice,” *First Things* 91 (March 1999): 38

⁵²See John Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* 11 no. 1 (January 1995): 119-61; Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One: Reciprocity Refused,” *Modern Theology* 17 no. 3 (July 2001): 335-91; Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two: Reciprocity Granted,” *Modern Theology* 17 no. 4 (October 2001): 485-507; Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 88-92; Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), chapter two; Milbank, “Gregory of Nyssa: The Force of Identity,” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 94-116; Milbank, “The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice,” 33-8.

being from God.⁵³ In this case, as we shall see, even reciprocity or exchange is located within this unilateralism. We shall first look at Milbank's stress on reciprocity before looking at how this reciprocity is situated in the context of radical unilateralism.

Milbank's stress on reciprocity is not intended to promote an economy of competition as some have feared⁵⁴ but rather to challenge modern and postmodern notion of the autonomous subject trapped in individualism. It is in this light that Milbank's theology of the gift attempts to recover and understanding of the soul which, he insists, is central to reciprocity. Thus, he challenges those modern and postmodern notions that promote the autonomous subject or annihilate relationships by promoting unilateralism or disinterested love. The soul, Milbank points out, is the "soul of reciprocity" because, being the form of the body, it awakens humans to the spiritual, thus enabling them to better respond to the divine through the spiritually charged material realm.⁵⁵

Milbank points out that with the rise of the modern subject, especially as advocated by René Descartes and Immanuel Kant, there was a "turn to the subject" that eliminated the soul by conceiving the human being as a 'thinking being', "a subject, a bare grammatical 'I' [and] no longer an informing *anima*."⁵⁶ This reduction of human

⁵³Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 91.

⁵⁴See, David Albertson, "On 'the Gift' in Tanner's Theology: A Patristic Parable," *Modern Theology* 21 no. 1 (January 2005): 108.

⁵⁵For Milbank, modifying Aristotle, the soul is the animating (*anima*) form of the human body which comes from God and goes back to God. It is the soul that connects human beings to the world and to God and it orchestrates sensing, movement and knowledge. See, Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One," 335-6; Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two," 485, 492-3.

⁵⁶Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One," 335.

beings not only led to the undermining of the material realm (the body), but also to the loss of intimate connection with the world and its *telos*. Because of this lack of intimate connection with the material world, and especially with other human beings, theories of how human beings should be related to each other (intersubjectivity), in spite of the attempts to modify the Cartesian subject, still end up in individualism and even the obliteration of the subject. But where the premodern idea of the soul is recuperated and reworked in the postmodern context,⁵⁷ intersubjectivity “simply rides on the back of interobjectivity,” intensifying it “to an extraordinary degree.”⁵⁸ In this case, rather than talking of an intersubjectivity that generalizes the other and renders them anonymous,⁵⁹ we talk of the interaction of souls, which

is always reciprocal and always involves the concrete exchange of concrete specificities – since a body may only affect another body in opening itself to return effect and establishing a wider, shared embodiment. Psychic interaction is therefore neither a one-way respect for the other, nor mere mutual respect for freedom – although these tend to be the limited options for intersubjectivity in the wake of Descartes and Kant.⁶⁰

This stress on reciprocity, it must be noted, is not only limited to immanent intersubjectivity but also includes transcendent divine life (who is, however, also immanent). This is because the soul which informs the material realm is intimately connected to transcendence from whence it comes and to where it returns. Like the

⁵⁷Milbank reclaims the premodern idea of the soul in the postmodern context by linking it to time, event, embodiment and language through a rereading of the idea of the soul in Aristotle and the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One,” 339; Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two,” 490-7.

⁵⁸It appears that Milbank prefers to talk of interobjectivity rather than intersubjectivity because he considers intersubjectivity to be the wrong term. This is perhaps because intersubjectivity tends to direct people inward rather than outward. See Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One,” 339.

⁵⁹Milbank, “The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice,” 34.

⁶⁰Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part one,” 339.

divine life which informs it, the soul, like the body, is not limited to immanence; both the soul and the body transcend immanence in immortality and resurrection, respectively.⁶¹ And it is only when this transcendent relationship, which is a participation in the infinite reciprocity of the triune divine life, is taken seriously that salvation as gift makes sense. It is for this reason that Milbank rejects unilateral accounts of grace, Derridean and Marionian accounts of the gift, and the idea of disinterested love, as either promoting unilateralism or the annihilation of the subject. We shall briefly look at how this is so in an attempt to clarify Milbank's understanding of reciprocity.

First, Milbank rejects the unilateral, passive, extrinsic or imputational accounts of grace found in Luther and some Protestant and even Roman Catholic understandings of salvation.⁶² These are accounts that see grace as effecting "a kind of purely nominal change in status by the decree of an arbitrary God mediated by the power structure of a church."⁶³ According to Milbank, these accounts of grace do not include sanctification and ethics because it minimizes the New Testament participatory notion of grace as the "putting on of divine nature."⁶⁴ For Milbank, therefore, salvation in a participatory ontology should not only be understood as the imputation of grace which effects only a nominal change in the status of the recipient, but also as including sanctification that

⁶¹Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two," 505.

⁶²Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 138; Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 22. I am aware that Milbank and RO's readings of Luther and other reformation theologians have been disputed. For more on this see, Piotr J. Malysz, "Exchange and Ecstasy: Luther's Eucharistic Theology in Light of Radical Orthodoxy's Critique of Gift and Sacrifice," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 294-308. RO initially had very negative view of Reformation theologies, especially with regards to the theology of grace. But that appears to have been attenuated as Milbank now has positive views about Calvin and his French followers. See James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 151 n. 28.

⁶³Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 22.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

stretches to ethics and technology or *techne* (as a field of human making based on their sharing, even to a limited extent, in the divine mind). Expressed in the language of the debate concerning the supernatural, unilateral accounts of grace do not portray it as elevating “nature in such a way that it further develops the natural.”⁶⁵ Unilateral accounts of grace are therefore not participatory and do not encourage reconciliation and relationships. They rather promote the myth of the autonomous subject who is not intimately linked to a transcendent *telos* and to other creatures.

Second, Milbank rejects the understanding of the gift proffered by Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. Derrida problematizes the very possibility of the gift by suggesting that there is no gift that is not already implicated in the economy of exchange. And since the gift is already implicated in this economy of exchange, Derrida claims, it is impossible for it to present itself as gift.⁶⁶ For Derrida, this economy of exchange is one that requires reciprocity, circulation, and return. These are activities that nullify the gift and so for there to be a gift the cycle involved in the economy of exchange, reciprocity, circulation, and return, must be broken. He writes:

If there is gift, the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving . . . It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*.⁶⁷

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6-7. Also see Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

⁶⁷Derrida, *Given Time*, 7. Italics in original.

It is because the economy of exchange is inextricably bound up with the gift that renders the gift “the impossible.” This is because, for there to be gift, it must fracture or suspend economic circulation; but since it cannot do this, the gift becomes impossible.

According to Derrida, the gift is implicated in the economy of exchange by the very presence of the giver, the gift, and the recipient. When the giver gives a gift to the recipient, the recipient feels indebted to the giver and once this happens, the gift has been nullified. For the gift to break the economy of exchange the giver must be removed from the picture and the recipient must not acknowledge what has been given as gift. In fact, as soon as the gift presents itself as gift, its giftness is nullified even if the recipient treats it with indifference. This is because once something is regarded as a gift a return is automatically made, whether such return is a positive gesture of gratitude or a negative one of ingratitude. Even more, the giver of the gift must also not recognize what is being given as gift because if this happens it may help shape the identity of the giver (as a magnanimous one, for example), thus making a counter-gift. For Derrida, therefore, for a gift to exist the giver, the gift, and the recipient have to be removed.⁶⁸

This understanding of the gift, it appears, does not only deny reciprocity, but also annihilates the giver, the gift and the recipient, thus canceling the event of the gift itself.⁶⁹ The theological implication of the Derridean problematizing of the gift is that it makes it difficult to talk of the relationship between God and the world, especially when it comes to talking about creation as a gift and how God is revealed through it. Because Derrida

⁶⁸Derrida, *Given Time*, 11-14.

⁶⁹Derrida, however, claims that when he talks of the impossibility of the gift, it does not mean that there can be no gift but rather that the gift must be experienced as the impossible. See John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, ed. *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, 59-60.

appears to obliterate the giver, the gift and the recipient, Milbank describes Derrida's view of the gift as nihilistic: Derrida's gift drifts towards nothingness. This is a view that not only makes intersubjective reciprocity impossible, but also separates the world from its transcendent source and *telos*. Milbank therefore concludes that for Derrida, a "true gift would have to be from no-one, to no-one and of nothing."⁷⁰

Marion, on the other hand, attempts to navigate through the *aporia* of the economy of exchange that destroys the gift developed by Derrida by bracketing the gift from the giver and the recipient in order to portray the gift as "pure givenness." In this case, attention is not drawn to the giver or the recipient of the gift (for this would reinstate the economy of exchange) but rather to the situation of givenness in which the self of consciousness "receives *itself* right off as a gift (given) without giver (giving)."⁷¹ In a sense, then, the giver, gift, and recipient coincide in givenness although this does not abolish the distinction among the giver, the gift and the recipient.⁷² This distinction is maintained by a 'distance' or 'gap' that separates and yet unifies the giver and the recipient so that in the very act of giving there is a giving back.

The giving traverses distance by not ceasing to send the given back to a giver, who, the first, dispenses the given as such – a sending destined to a sending back. Distance lays out the intimate gap between the giver and the gift, so that the self-withdrawal of the giver in the gift may be read on the gift, in the very fact that it refers back absolutely to the giver. Distance opens the intangible gap wherein

⁷⁰Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?" 130.

⁷¹Jean-Luc Marion, "Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Gift," in *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 122-43, especially 141. For more on Marion's phenomenology of the gift, see his *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1988) and "The Saturated Phenomenon," *Philosophy Today* 40 (Spring 1996):103-24.

⁷²Marion, "Sketch of a Phenomenology of Gift," 142.

circulate the two terms that accomplish giving in inverse direction. The giver is read on the gift, to the extent that the gift repeats the giving of the initial sending by the giving of the final sending back.⁷³

This appears to be the description of radical unilateralism espoused by Milbank, in which reciprocity is engineered by the initial act of giving and the giving back is enabled by the given. But Milbank reads Marion's attempt at reduction of the giver, gift and recipient as encouraging unilateralism in which "the recipient of a gift [and] the giver of the gift must be reduced or bracketed out, because if he [*sic*] is named, then one will have some minimal sense that the giver was obligated, . . . or else that he can be compensated for his giving, if only by the return gesture of gratitude."⁷⁴ By bracketing the giver, for example, Marion intends to protect the gratuity of the gift, an attempt which, according to Milbank, undermines the gift itself by suggesting that there can be pure, free gift. For Milbank, therefore, Marion's gift is one that has "no identifiable object, derives from no known source and passes to no willing recipient."⁷⁵ Theologically, this means that the source of the gift (God), and consequently the gift itself and the recipient of the gift (creation and salvation) are not clearly identified in Marion. Thus, in Marion's attempt to overcome the economy of gift-exchange, he falls into the trap of imagining that it is possible to theorize the pure gift⁷⁶ for which there is

⁷³Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 104.

⁷⁴Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One," 344.

⁷⁵Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 156. Also see Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?" 133-44.

⁷⁶See Richard Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 284-304. For more on the understanding of the gift in Derrida, Marion, and Milbank, see Tamsin Jone Farmer, "Revealing the Invisible: Gregory of Nyssa on the Gift of Revelation," *Modern Theology* 21 no. 1 (January 2005): 67-85.

no reciprocity. According to Milbank, the idea of the “pure ‘free gift’” that does not demand reciprocity is a modern invention⁷⁷ and does not fit in the Christian economy of salvation represented by the Christian notion of *agape*, which demands reciprocity. This is so because the idea of pure gift denies reciprocity; but the divine-human salvific relation and intersubjective relationships demand reciprocity. We shall see in the next chapter that a kind of reciprocity in gift-giving is also important for tNC but that they see it [reciprocity] in a different light than Milbank.

A third group of unilateralists whom Milbank challenges is that made up of those who propose disinterested love of God or humans as the highest ethical standard. Included in this group are, among others, Kant, François de Salignac de la Mothe Fènelon, , Emmanuel Levinas and Anders Nygren. This group of writers either promotes disinterested love in intersubjective relationships or “the idea of loving God for himself [*sic*] alone, quite apart from questions of one’s own salvific destiny and the regard of God towards oneself.”⁷⁸ While Fènelon advocated that the self be lost in God in pure self-denial, for God’s own sake and glory, Kant called for disinterested obedience to the moral law;⁷⁹ while Nygren interpreted *agape* (‘giving’ love) to denote disinterested love that excludes *eros* (‘desiring’ love), Levinas sees the ethics of self-sacrifice as one that is to be engineered by disinterested love.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” 122.

⁷⁸Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One,” 369.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 369-72.

⁸⁰Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” 124, 132; Also see Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1982); Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One,” 342; Milbank, “The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice,” 33-8.

Against these unilateralist interpretations Milbank insists that reciprocity and exchange are unavoidable in any viable relationship, be it intersubjective relations or the relation between creation and God.⁸¹ But, according to Milbank, the nature of the exchange must be purified from the mercenary exchange that obtains in modern capitalistic systems. It is in this light that Milbank proposes the notions of “purified gift-exchange” and “delay and non-identical repetition of the counter-gift.” Milbank proposes the notion of purified gift-exchange because the idea of the gift as unearthed in archaic societies by anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss,⁸² though “by no means purely ‘economic’ in our sense,” was already contaminated by “a self-interest not totally dissimilar to capitalist self-interest.”⁸³ This is because although the gifts given were not strictly economic in our sense in that they dealt with political and familial alliances as well as goods, they were sometimes carried out in the context of competition among rivals (the “big men”). Purified gift-exchange, on the other hand, transforms the notion of gift by linking it not with purism (pure gift) but with *agape*. And *agape* in this case is not disinterested love as understood by Nygren or Kant. According to Milbank, the understanding of *agape* as disinterested love not only disassociates it “from the giver’s own happiness or well being,” but also “from *eros* or any kind of desire to be with the recipient of your love,” from justice (“giving the other his due”), and from “power, or the inescapable persuasion of the other involved in every offering”⁸⁴ – all aspects that are

⁸¹Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” 121, 124.

⁸²See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁸³Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” 126-7.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 132.

important in reciprocal exchange. The notion of purified gift-exchange removes the gift from mercenary exchange but it does not remove the obligation and interestedness that are sometimes also found in contracts.⁸⁵

Because the notion of purified gift-exchange does not sufficiently delineate the gift, it must be supplemented with the notion of delay and non-identical repetition of the counter-gift. These notions suggests, first, that gifts may not be immediately returned, second, that what is given back in place of the gift must not be exactly the same as what was given, and third, that what is given back must not necessarily be given to the person who made the initial gift. For example, if one is given a meal, for it to be a gift, one must not immediately give the giver a meal in return (delay), one may not give back only the same meal that was initially given, and not to the person who made the initial gift (non-identical repetition). Milbank clarifies the point:

Therefore, if a gift can be given at all, it must be given within the *logos* or measure of a necessary *delay* (whose term is indeterminate, though not infinite) and of *non-identical repetition* between the gift and counter-gift. . . . correct use of a gift always involves in some sense a ‘giving-back’, if not to the individual donor then at least to the wider social forces which that individual represents, such that ‘return’ can occur by way of a ‘giving in turn’, or a ‘passing on’ of the original gesture. Non-identical repetition, therefore, includes not only the return of an equivalent but different gift, but also a non-exact *mimesis* (but therefore all the more genuinely exact) of the first gesture in unpredictably different circumstances, at unpredictable times and to unpredictably various recipients.⁸⁶

This, theologically, means that the gift of creation and redemption, the gift of God’s self to creation and humans in particular, should be understood in this context of gift-exchange and non-identical repetition. It means that as God has given us the gift of

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 122-3. According to Milbank, there is ambiguity in trying to differentiate a gift from a contract even in our time.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 125.

forgiveness through Christ, Christians should likewise return the gift of gratitude to God and forgiveness to others. It also means that as God has given us the gift of creation through which we are nourished, so too do we have to nourish others. It means that

To be a Christian is *not*, as piety supposes, spontaneously and freely to love, of one's own originality and without necessarily seeking any communion. On the contrary, it is to *repeat differently*, in order to repeat, *exactly*, the content of Christ's life, and to wait, by a necessary *delay*, the answering repetition of the other that will fold temporal linearity back into the eternal cycle of the triune life.⁸⁷

In fact, the gift of forgiveness which has engendered reconciliation between creation and God is not a disinterested gift but one that requires reciprocity. The reciprocity has to do not only with a return to God in gratitude but also with intersubjective gift-giving. The reciprocity is thus a spiral that contributes to the deification process, a process that situates the material realm within the transcendent through liturgy (also understood as *poesis* that includes *techne*) and *theoria* (contemplation).⁸⁸

From the above one may have the impression that Milbank's insistence on reciprocity is based on creaturely or human ability to reciprocate. But this insistence on reciprocity must however be tempered by his embrace of a radical unilateralism which locates reciprocity within itself. For Milbank, as already seen above, the reciprocity that obtains in the relation between God and creation is not a symmetrical one. It is asymmetrical because in this relation God is the absolute initiator of the gift-giving process so that creation, salvation and the reciprocal response from the side of creatures are themselves understood as gifts. Although reciprocity at the lower level involves the

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 150. Italics in original.

⁸⁸Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 46-7; Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two" 486.

give-and-take among creatures, this is not the case with the relationship between God and creation. There is not simply give-and-take between creation and God as creation does not and cannot give anything to God. The response in gratitude, praise and intersubjective gift-giving are themselves given by God. Here, therefore, humans only make use of that which has already been given so that even though they are free as creatures, their ability to respond is derived from God.⁸⁹

This, Milbank has captured in the idea of the “radically unilateral”⁹⁰ gift derived from a reading of Aquinas that supernaturalizes creation by positing radical divine causality. This is drawn from the concept of divine influence (*in-fluentia* or a “flowing in”), which understands influence as pertaining to something higher flowing in to “something lower to the degree that it could be received.”⁹¹ Applied to the relation between God and creation, it means that, to the extent that creation can receive God, God is so infused in creation that even the ability to reciprocate (in gratitude) is attributed to this divine influence. This does not, however, mean that creatures or humans do not exert any causality. Creatures exert the kind of causality that is appropriate to their creaturely existence as “radical gift.” This is expressed within the framework of radical hierarchy

⁸⁹Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 90.

⁹⁰Milbank links the notion of the radically unilateral gift to the notion of “gift without contrast” in Henri de Lubac. Here the notion of gift without contrast is one of three central points in de Lubac’s understanding of the supernatural: the second being the inseparability of spirit from grace, and the third having to do with “the orientation of the cosmos *as such* to the supernatural.” The notion of gift without contrast implies that grace, like creation, brings forth something out of nothing so that like creation, grace makes it possible for things to be what they ought to be – be deified. See, Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 45-6, 52-3, 96-8.

⁹¹Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 89-90.

where the distinction between free unilateral giving and gift-exchange is overcome. In this case

God is the single influence, the single unilateral and total cause of everything. Yet since he [*sic*] causes by sharing his own nature, by giving his gifts to be, the lower levels exert within their own sphere their own secondary and equally total causality. This is a kind of “exchange without reciprocity.” There is reciprocity in the Trinity, and reciprocity within creation, but not between creation and God, because even though there is ‘exchange’ in the sense that creatures receive by returning, God properly receives nothing.⁹²

Here, we do not simply encounter free unilateral gift but rather a paradoxical “unilateral exchange” where unilateral giving is situated within the context of exchange.⁹³ Here, we do not find unilateralism as one pole which is generally contrasted against reciprocity as Milbank appears to do elsewhere (see above), but a unilateralism that goes together with exchange. One can therefore see that Milbank does not totally reject unilateralism. What he rejects is a unilateralism that is not situated within reciprocity.

Milbank therefore places the material realm within the context of creation and salvation as gifts, but gifts that require reciprocity. He eschews unilateralism but not in all forms. What he eschews are those forms of unilateralism that appear to grant autonomy to the subject and by extension to the rest of creation. Where such autonomy is granted, creatures act not in view of their *telos* in God but in view of a lesser and

⁹²*Ibid.*, 91. Although for Milbank “God properly receives nothing” from creatures it does not mean that there is no exchange between God and creation. What this means is that even the possibility of giving anything back to God has already been given to creatures by God. It also means that creatures do not add anything to God but rather that God gives everything that makes it possible for creatures to be. Even the possibility of creatures rendering praise and adoration to God has already been given them by God so that when they praise and adore God, they do not add anything to the life of God but rather fulfill the purpose for their creation.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 90-1.

unsatisfactory end, such as death.⁹⁴ Because the material realm is bound to God and finds its end in God, it is in the process of exchange that the material realm is constantly graced and enabled to be more than it is. Milbank's understanding of the gift of salvation within the framework of reciprocity is one of the theological perspectives of RO that will be mined in addressing NC's limited understanding of the material realm, as we shall see in the next chapter. For now we have to move on to our next representative of RO whose understanding of the material realm will also be appropriated in this project: Philip Blond. His call for a theological perception or vision is one of the ideas that will be used in our attempt to remedy the identified shortcoming in NC.

Philip Blond and the Primacy of Theological Perception

While Milbank is concerned with placing the gift of creation and salvation within the context of reciprocity in his attempt to root the material realm in divine life, Blond is concerned with advocating a way of seeing the world that intertwines divine and material life, without collapsing the divine into the material and creaturely. For Blond, participation in the triune divine life is the highest possibility for creation, meaning that creation is meant to be fully actualized only in God. He therefore challenges those modern and late modern (or postmodern) views that either reject or inadequately acknowledge the presence of the transcendent in immanent, material life, thus failing to see the triune God as the source of creation's full actualization. Blond's view of the material realm should specifically be placed against modern atheism, transcendentalist philosophy, and some modern and postmodern conceptions of God that either reduce God

⁹⁴Milbank, "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice," 38.

to immanent phenomena or portray God as unconcerned and perhaps even opposed to the good of creation. These views, Blond claims, lack the appropriate theological vision that may enable them see the material realm as a spiritual phenomenon intimately tied to the life of the triune God.⁹⁵

The first group of people who lack the vision that may help them appropriately understand reality is atheists. This is because atheism rejects God and instead posits autonomy as the destiny of humanity and the rest of creation. The vision of atheists is impaired because they live in a closed, immanent world where what one sees is what one gets. They only drift towards nihilism because their vision has reduced them to “powerless creatures” and “beings who desire nothing but the effect of their own potency,” throwing “themselves into the void, and embracing the anonymity therein as if it were a true destiny and a real proof of their ultimate autonomy.”⁹⁶ Atheistic vision of the world is therefore a nihilistic one because it does not see anything more than immanence. In short, the vision of atheists is limited to the material realm which they treat as an end in itself. In fact, for them, there is no spiritual dimension that undergirds the material realm.

Similar to atheists, because their vision of reality inevitably leads to immanentism, are those who embrace transcendental philosophy, especially as

⁹⁵See Philip Blond, “Introduction: Theology before Philosophy,” in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, 1-66; Blond, “Emmanuel Levinas: God and Phenomenology,” *ibid.*, 195-228; Blond, “The Primacy of Theology and the Question of Perception,” in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Paul Heelas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 285-313; Blond, “Theology and Perception,” *Modern Theology* 14 no. 4 (October 1998): 523-34; Blond, “Perception: From Modern Painting to the Vision in Christ,” in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 220-242; Blond, “Prolegomena to an Ethic of the Eye,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 16 no. 1 (2003): 44-60.

⁹⁶Blond, “Introduction,” 1-2.

epitomized by Immanuel Kant. Blond has convincingly argued that by viewing the world as a construction of the human mind and portraying cognition largely as mind-dependent, Kant brought only a transcendental ideality to perception. This transcendental ideality is different from the transcendent because it sees the human mind as that which informs the phenomenal world and not God who, as transcendent, is other than the human mind. By viewing the phenomenal as a construction of the mind, Kant promoted the modern illusion of self-sufficient finitude and interiorized faith. Thus, rather than making room for faith as it was hoped such a reduction of the phenomenal world would engender, it has rather interiorized faith and limited the possibility for knowing of reality. Faith is interiorized because, with the elevation of the mind as the determinant of what knowledge is possible, faith comes to be dependent on the mind as the seat of the knowledge of what is possible. The Kantian faith, then, is one that privileges philosophy (or transcendental philosophy) and not theology.⁹⁷

It is for this reason that Blond insists that the world must be reconceived within a framework where theology comes before philosophy. In this case the importance of the human mind is not undermined but it is placed within a theological framework because it is informed by God. Here, ideality and materiality are seen as intertwined though not in a Hegelian sense where “all matter, or rather all material form, is held to signify something higher beyond itself, in respect of which its phenomenal appearance is but a pale manifestation.”⁹⁸ This Hegelian understanding of the intersection between the material

⁹⁷Blond, “Introduction,” 9-10; Blond, “The Primacy of Theology,” 287-90; Blond, “Prolegomena to and Ethics of the Eye,” 53-4.

⁹⁸Blond, “Prolegomena,” 55.

and the ideal, Blond complains, does not take seriously the existence of each particular material entity. The interaction between materiality and ideality which Blond advocates is one where it is possible to know particular material things because they are already immersed in the transcendent who gives them to be known. In this case, then, material things are known not in themselves but rather in relation to their telos.⁹⁹ It is thus that God is seen as discernible in creation and creation is made beautiful, true and good because it is anchored in this transcendent source.

A third way of understanding the material realm which Blond rejects is, on the one hand, those who conceive of God and the world in the same category of being in general (ontotheology) and, on the other hand, those who separate God from the world. Ontotheology, Blond points out, could be traced as far back as Duns Scotus who used a third term, being (*ens*), to try to understand the relationship between God and the world. The term 'being' was seen as a term that could apply to both God and creation so that God came to be seen as only quantitatively different from creation simply because God possesses infinite being, whereas creation has only finite being.¹⁰⁰ This God, as Heidegger would later complain, came into metaphysics as a God who gives ground to beings and is in turn grounded by beings who elevate God to the highest possible Being. In this case, the ontological notion of being is used as the basis for understanding God

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 45, 57; Blond, "Perception," 220-2.

¹⁰⁰Blond, "Introduction," 6, 8; Blond writes: "This univocity of God and creatures therefore marks the time when theology became idolatrous. For theologians had disregarded what Thomas [Aquinas] had already warned them against, that nothing can be predicated univocally of God and other things. . . . that which is predicated of God can only be participated in by finite creatures via analogy. . . . For it appears that a discourse about God, philosophical or theological, is idolatrous in nature when it understands the ground of objects as being utterly synonymous, and hence exchangeable with, the ground of God." Also see Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 303.

and the world instead of the other way around. But when ontology is used to understand the relation between God and the world, philosophy is placed before theology and God is limited to ontology. This is counter to a theological understanding of the world which posits God as the One from whom everything comes. If it is the case that everything comes from God, it means that theology must come before philosophy.¹⁰¹

Even more, the idea of being in general as a term that should be distributed equally between God and creation is problematic because there is no being in general which is not known through particular beings. Therefore, just as God gives all that there is, God is known only through these things.¹⁰² This implies that God and creation are intimately intertwined but also that creation is not in the same ontological category as God, their creator. God is other from creation but revealed in creation as creation's origin and goal. A proper distinction must thus be made between the two but the two must not be separated (as the Chalcedonian creed said of the human and divine nature of Christ).

According to Blond, this distinction between God and creation is carried out to a fault by forms of phenomenology that fail to see a connection between the two. These forms of phenomenology sometimes attempt to elevate phenomena as they appear to the point of eliding God, and, at other times, elevate the otherness of God to the elision of phenomena.¹⁰³ Inasmuch as these forms of phenomenology hold that God and phenomena have to be kept separate for them to preserve their natures, they are fulfilled

¹⁰¹Blond, "Introduction," 6-11.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 12. Blond writes: "Being is not accessible except through beings."

¹⁰³Blond, "Emmanuel Levinas," 197, 215-6.

in Emmanuel Levinas who identifies God with the radically other who is unconcerned with phenomena and even threatens to obliterate them.¹⁰⁴

Against this separation of God from creation, Blond posits a Christian understanding of the relation of God to creation where God is seen as a loving Creator who is not indifferent to what God creates. This is a God who “wants us to fulfill our form and so understand that we are not the merely possible creations of an indifferent power but an actuality that reveals His glory.”¹⁰⁵ Phenomenology’s concern with phenomena to the exclusion of God, on the one hand, or its concern with God to the elimination of phenomena, on the other, is therefore not justified. Phenomenology must come to see that phenomena are given and that one cannot address the given without addressing the One who gives.

Some phenomenological inquiries fail to acknowledge God as the one who gives phenomena because for them God is invisible. But Blond insists that phenomenology must be brought to that place where it would be enabled to see the invisible God as not only tied to visibility but also as visible. He writes:

For phenomenology, that which is given to us is actuality as visibility, and since God is not reducible to the gifts given to us, he must in some sense be beyond visibility, that is, he must be in respect of the visible, *invisible*. However, if *invisibility* is not ultimately separable from visibility, and clearly if it is more than nothing it is not, then insofar as we are given actuality, God as the highest possibility of actuality, must in some sense be visible to us. For if invisibility is not visibility’s ‘other’, then that which is beyond visibility also gives itself to vision and appearance. Which means again that God as the invisible is not then separated from, nor indeed denied to, vision and manifestation.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 215-20.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 221. Italics in original.

It is for this reason that Blond draws from the French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to argue that phenomenology can indeed show how this invisibility is bound with visibility and that the invisible can manifest itself in the visible. According to Blond, Merleau-Ponty calls for a “perceptual faith” (*la foi perceptive*) that “acknowledges the presence of the invisible in the visible.”¹⁰⁷ This perceptual faith enables us to see in the visible or material world, more than what appears. Merleau-Ponty writes: “On comprendre alors pourquoi, à la fois, nous voyons les choses elles-mêmes, en leur lieu, où elles sont, selon leur être qui est bien plus que leur être-perçu.”¹⁰⁸ Because this “more,” this invisible, presents itself to us in the visible, Blond calls it the transcendent.¹⁰⁹

At first sight it would appear that this either leads to immanentism, as the invisible (transcendence or ideality) “is not a departure from the world but an immersion in it,” or to dualism, because talking of the visible and invisible appears to separate the two.¹¹⁰ But, in the first place, this is not immanentism because for Merleau-Ponty, this invisibility or ideality, though tied to materiality, is at the same time higher than sheer materiality and, in fact, gives matter “a glorious body” (*un corps glorieux*).¹¹¹ Blond writes: “Merleau-Ponty sees in the heart of immanence that which will forever forbid

¹⁰⁷Blond, “Perception,” 232, 235.

¹⁰⁸Quoted in Blond, “Perception,” 242 n. 26. See Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 178. “We then see why we simultaneously see things themselves, in their place, where they are according to their *being*, which is more than their *perceived being*. (My translation and italics)

¹⁰⁹Blond, “Perception,” 235-40; Blond, “The Primacy of Theology,” 308-11. The “more” should be understood not in an ontic fashion but in an epistemological sense.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 235-6.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 236. Also see, Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et invisible*, 195.

sheer visibility from believing itself to be the only description of the world: he sees the higher order of the invisible,” which is distinct but bound to the visible. In the second place, this is not dualism because although the visible and the invisible are distinct, they are not separable.

As Blond is aware, the problem with appropriating Merleau-Ponty is that his metaphysics is not a religious one and he does not call the “higher order of the invisible,” God. In fact, he appears to identify the invisible with thought.¹¹² Blond however insists that Merleau-Ponty went astray when he identifies the invisible with thought and opts to call this invisible God.¹¹³

Ultimately, however, Blond’s understanding of the relation between the visible and the invisible realms is based not in phenomenology but in Christian theology. He draws from a Pauline theology of general revelation but roots it specifically in the Incarnation. Blond’s Pauline theology of perception lays much stress on Paul’s statement that, “Ever since the creation of the world [God’s] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things [God] has made.”¹¹⁴ This means that God’s visibility can be seen through the material realm and those who fail to do so simply have skewed perception. In fact, for Blond, those who do

¹¹²Blond, “The Primacy of Theology,” 307, 309.

¹¹³Blond appears justified in doing this even though Merleau-Ponty did not go that far because it appears that Merleau-Ponty was himself inching towards calling this invisible God when he entertained the thought of ending his work, *Le visible et l’invisible*, with a chapter on God. See, Blond, “Perception,” 237. But we cannot be sure that Merleau-Ponty would have called this invisible, God.

¹¹⁴Romans 1:20 (NRSV).

not have this theological perception “are not really *seeing* anything at all.”¹¹⁵ But it is through Christ, however, that the union between the visible and the invisible has been effected and the visible material world has thus been drawn into the very life of the triune God. Blond draws from the Incarnation to say that the enfleshment of the *Logos* registers the unbroken link between the transcendent God and immanent material world, the visible and the invisible, so that one can talk of “the union of word and flesh in Christ.”¹¹⁶

Blond thus attempts to supernaturalize the world through his theological perception that lays particular stress on vision. What Blond is aiming at is for the world to see differently, for people not to see only the material when they look at the world. Blond’s rejection of the vision that sees the material realm as ultimate is akin to the critique this project has made against the worldview which informs African theology and NC. However, his concern that the material realm be seen as spiritually charged also seems remarkably similar to the vision of NC which does not separate the spiritual from the material realm. But we shall see that there is a basic difference between the worldview advocated here by Blond and that espoused by NC. As we shall see in the next chapter, although NC does not separate between the material and the spiritual, its vision of the relation between the two is immanent and anthropocentric. Blond’s theological perception will be used as a possible corrective to this worldview. For now we shall move on to Graham Ward, our next representative of RO, whose view of the material realm will be appropriated to remedy the anthropocentric vision of African

¹¹⁵Blond, “introduction,” 4; Blond, “Theology and Perception,” 524. Italics in original. When Blond talks of *seeing* he means both that the spiritual can be seen as it manifests itself aesthetically in creation and also that it cannot be seen because creation does not exhaust its reality.

¹¹⁶Blond, “Perception,” 235.

theology and NC. It is to his theology of rightly ordering the desire of the city that we shall now turn.

Graham Ward: Rightly Ordering Desire in the City

By now the issue of whether or not RO undermines the material realm should have been put to rest because one of the points that is consistently insisted upon in our discussion of RO above is that the material realm must be taken seriously in Christian understanding of salvation. We have seen from both Milbank and Blond that it is only when it is situated (suspended) within the divine life that the material realm is taken with penultimate seriousness. But the accusation that the material realm is undermined in RO has especially been leveled against Ward whose Christology appears to eliminate the physical body of Christ.¹¹⁷ That RO in general and Ward in particular undermine the material realm can, however, hardly be sustained if one considers Ward's theological reflections on the city. Unlike William Cavanaugh who sees the city as a false replica of the church which is the only locus of salvation and calls for resistance to it (the city),¹¹⁸ Ward not only sees the city as a metonymy for the "material and temporal realities in which we live" but also as the actual cities in the world today in which Christians, enticed by the eschatological vision of the beautiful city in God, must begin to experience

¹¹⁷For the claim that RO in general and Graham Ward in particular undermine the material realm, see Lucy Gardner, "Listening at the Threshold: Christology and the 'Suspension of the Material'" in *Radical Orthodoxy?*, 126-146. Ward's Christology displaces Christ's body from the crucifixion to the ascension, giving the impression that Christ's male body simply disappears. This appears not to augur well for a theology that prizes materiality. See Graham Ward, "Bodies: The Displaced body of Jesus Christ," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 163-81; Ward, *Cities of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 97-116. For a feminist critique of Ward's displaced body of Christ see Virginia Burrus, "Radical Orthodoxy and the Heresiological Habit: Engaging Graham Ward's Christology," in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 36-53.

¹¹⁸See William T. Cavanaugh, "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 182; Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

salvation.¹¹⁹ For Ward, therefore, the problem with the city or the state is not so much that it is a simulacrum of the church and must therefore be resisted; rather, the problem with the city is the aberrant nature of its desire. Thus, Ward does not advocate resistance to the city, to be apparently replaced by the church; he rather advocates the correct ordering of its desire.¹²⁰

While for Cavanaugh the city is a simulacrum of the church, for Ward it is rather the imitation of the biblical heavenly city gone awry and it thus has to be redirected towards a proper imitation of this heavenly city which beckons it into eternity. Positioning the church against the city, for Ward, leads to a dualism rejected by the RO doctrine of incarnation which sees the material as having been taken up into the divine in Jesus Christ. While Cavanaugh seems to work within a strand in RO (seen partially in Milbank and intensified in some American expressions of RO) that seems to think that with the rise of modernity God had abandoned the world,¹²¹ Ward sees modernity as a mixed blessing.¹²² In this case, Ward's nuanced theological engagement with the modern

¹¹⁹Graham Ward, "Why is the City so Important for Christian Theology," *Cross Currents* 52 no. 4 (2003): 462-73.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 472; Ward, *Cities of God*, 225-60. The Augustinian notion of rightly directing desire or love is also central to the theology of John Milbank although he does not locate it within specific earthly cities like Las Vegas, Manchester or Los Angeles as Ward does. Milbank's is rather situated within the Augustinian distinction between the earthly city and the city of God. See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380-438.

¹²¹One can get this impression from Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, Cavanaugh's *Theopolitical Imagination*, D. Stephen Long's *The Divine Economy: Theology and the Market*. London: Routledge, 2000; and Daniel Bell, Jr.'s *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹²²See Ward, *Cities of God*, 264 n. 15. Although tucked in one endnote in a work of 314 pages, Ward acknowledges that "Certain things of divine and salvific importance came about in and through the projects of modernity. Such things cannot be passed over lightly or effaced by a contemporary call to orthodoxy." This is a rare admission in the entire corpus of RO, in spite of its insistence that it does not intend to turn the clock back to the premodern but to a different kind of modernity.

and the postmodern helps RO stay true to its own doctrine of participation which is sometimes endangered by its zealousness to renounce the modern. For him, then, God has not abandoned the modern city in spite of its steady slide into decadence. Because God has not abandoned the modern city, the Christian attitude towards it should not simply be resistance or countercultural.¹²³ Rather, Christians perform redemption by attempting to direct the desire of the city towards its *telos*, the heavenly city. Such reflection,¹²⁴ then, does not devalue materiality but rather attempts to direct it towards its fulfillment in God. Considering the fact that NC is enacted mostly in the cities of sub-Saharan Africa, Ward's Augustinian view of rightly directing the desire of the city should help remedy its gaze of the material realm which is shun of the transcendent, as we shall see in the next chapter.

As already mentioned, for Ward, the problem with the modern city is the aberrant nature of its desire. He arrives at this conclusion through his attempt at discerning the "signs of the times."¹²⁵ This is carried out within a framework in which the world and its cultural artifacts are regarded as signs. But discerning the signs of the times may be arbitrary considering that signs, because they do not unambiguously point to any specific thing, are themselves arbitrary. Ward is aware that we may not completely overcome the arbitrary reading of signs but points out that we move towards the right direction in doing

¹²³Ward, "Why the City is so Important," 470.

¹²⁴Ward describes the focus of his theological project as "the negotiation between Christian living and thinking and the contemporary world." See Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2005), 4.

¹²⁵See Graham Ward, "Introduction: 'Where We Stand'," in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001), xii-xxvii; Ward, *Cities of God*, 1-24.

so through a theological semiotics or Christian theology of signification that reads “objects and actions in the world analogically and eschatologically.”¹²⁶ This means sacramentalizing the world by understanding it only in relation to God – as revealing and offering praise to God. The world, in a sense, does not simply draw attention to itself but points beyond itself to the source of its existence.

But reading the signs of the times reveals that the time in which we live is one which is variously referred to as postmodernism, late-capitalism, or postfordism. It is a time characterized by the undermining of the analogical worldview, a tendency that began as far back as the late medieval period, resulting in the rise of the autonomous secular realm, and reaching right to the present “re-enchantment” of the world through the “commodification of religion.”¹²⁷ This is nowhere more evident than in the postmodern “cities of eternal aspiration”¹²⁸ such as Las Vegas and Los Angeles, which mimic Christian salvation by reducing the transcendent to the immanent attempt at satisfying all human desires immediately, now. Here people have been trained not only to be consumers of goods and services but also of religious experience. It is a time characterized by “cities of endless desire”¹²⁹ where people desire without end (limit) and desire itself has no goal (*telos*). In these cities “[t]he market turns us all into consumers

¹²⁶Ward, *Cities of God*, 5.

¹²⁷For the idea of postmodern ‘re-enchantment of the world’ see Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, 160-71. For the commodification of religion in postmodern times, see Ward Graham, *True Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003); Ward, “The Commodification of Religion, or the Consummation of Capitalism,” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 328-39; Ward, “Transcendence and Representation,” in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, ed. Regina Schwartz (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 127-47.

¹²⁸Ward, *Cities of God*, 27-51.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 52-77.

who produce only to afford to be more powerful consumers. Cities become variants of the theme-park, reorganized as sites for the satisfaction of endless desire. Here the “*libido dominandi* is implicitly both economic and sexual.”¹³⁰

This aberrant desire is manifested not only in the greed for material goods but also in the incredible superficiality that trades in simulacra and reduces religion to special effects, with the intention of satisfying human desire for the transcendent in the present. Here the sublime is reduced to a kitsch (the superficial and artificial) as the experience of the transcendent is engineered or simulated. It is a time in which desire itself becomes bankrupt and signification is obliterated (for signs signify nothing) and religion is reduced to a consumer experience.¹³¹

The postmodern city is therefore a city that appears to be plunging headlong into its own destruction. It is a city that devalues the material not only by its aberrant desire that loses sight of the eternal but also through its addiction to simulacra, the kitsch and the virtual world of cyberspace. Rather than abandoning this city to its fate, Christians have to be concerned about its welfare because Christians are part of it.¹³² In fact, as Ward points out, in seeking the salvation of the city Christians participate in God’s work of redeeming creation. But seeking the salvation of the postmodern city entails healing its aberrant desire through a Christian account of desire that correctly places the material realm in its proper orientation toward God. Ward attempts to heal the desire of the city

¹³⁰Ward, *Cities of God*, 56.

¹³¹Ward, *True Religion*, 73-153.

¹³²Ward, *Cities of God*, 69-70.

and rightly order it by drawing from the Augustinian theology of signification, the two cities and the order of their love, probing the relation between the two.

But before we look at what Ward has to say about these aspects of Augustinian theology, a brief caveat about RO's use of Augustine is not out of order at this point. RO's reading of Augustine, like its reading of many of its sources, has been questioned.¹³³ Todd Breyfogle, for example, claims that "Radical Orthodoxy [by which he means Milbank, for he largely engages only with Milbank's reading of Augustine] renders Augustine's thought unrecognizable or abandons it all together."¹³⁴ But such a claim seems to ignore the fact that people do not come to texts with a blank mind; their reading is influenced by the purpose for which they want to put the texts.¹³⁵ Ward points this out when he acknowledges that his reading of Augustine, like other Augustinianisms, is a construction.¹³⁶ This does not mean that all readings are equally valid because there are several possible interpretations of texts, but rather that one should acknowledge that there are possible readings of a text that may be different from one's own. Even more, it is within the context of contesting interpretations of texts that intellectual inquiry is

¹³³See James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 108-120, 231-59; Todd Breyfogle, "Is There Room for Political Philosophy in Postmodern Critical Augustinianism?" in *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*, 31-47.

¹³⁴Breyfogle, "Is There Room for Political Philosophy in Postmodern Critical Augustinianism?" 31.

¹³⁵For the ambiguity that obtains in reading any text, see Ward, "John Milbank's Divina Comedia," *New Blackfriars* 73 no. 861 (June 1992): 318. Ward wonders whether it is possible to ready any text without, in some sense, misreading it.

¹³⁶Ward, *Cities of God*, 236. Although Milbank is not unaware of the fact that readings of texts and theological constructions are not ideologically free, it is Ward who displays a persistent awareness of this. See Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, vii-xx; Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, 1-19; Ward, "Theological Materialism," in *God and Reality: Essays on Christian Non-Realism*, ed. Colin Crowder (London: Mowbray, 1997), 144-59.

situated. What RO has done is that it has contested other readings of texts by proposing alternative readings which are also liable to be contested, as Breyfogle has done. It is in that spirit that RO's Augustinianism (and its reading of other texts) is appropriated in this project.

Coming back to Ward, we already saw that his evocation of the analogical worldview is partly based on the Augustinian theology of signification in which things point beyond themselves. This therefore suggests, as Augustine saw, that the world and the Scriptures are God's books meant to help us understand and participate in God, who is our highest good.¹³⁷ This means that the material realm does not point to itself and is therefore not self-sufficient. This view can help the modern city out of the morass of consumerist capitalism and the perpetuation of simulacra and the kitsch by pointing it to the Good which it only blindly gropes after. Rather than discounting the material realm this view implies that we cannot know God without it; it portrays the material as essential to our deification, as valuable especially because it leads us to God.

This understanding of the material realm is probably no where more evident than in the Augustinian theology of the city derived from his *City of God*. Here Augustine talks of the creation of two cities based on two different loves or desires.

the two cities were created by two kinds of love (*civitas duas amores duo*): the earthly city was created by self-love (*amor sui*) reaching the point of contempt for God, the heavenly city by the love of God (*amor dei*) carried as far as contempt of self. . . . In the former, the lust for domination (*dominandi libido*) lords it over its princes as over the nations it subjugates; in the other both those put in authority and those subject to them serve one another in love (*serviunt inuicem on caritate*),

¹³⁷See Ward, *Cities of God*, 7; Ward, "Kenosis and Naming: Beyond Analogy and Towards *Allegoria Amoris*," in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, 233- 57, especially 252-3 on signs; Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), Book II.1.

the ruler by their counsel, the subjects by their obedience. The one city loves its own strength (*diligit virtutem suam*) shown in its powerful leaders; the other says to its God, 'I will love you (*diligam te*), my Lord, my strength.'¹³⁸

Here Augustine presents self-love or love of the “creature more than the Creator” as a limited form of love because it misrepresents the order of love. According to Augustine’s understanding of the nature of reality, God is the highest good and it is communion with God which must be loved or desired most. This does not mean that creatures are not to be loved or desired (for the commandment of love entails the love of God and neighbor), but rather that all loves should be referred to the single end of love of God.¹³⁹ Love that seems to find its end in the creature rather than the creator, like the love of the earthly city, is thus not properly ordered but is rather complicit in the construction of idols. This is manifested in the *libido dominandi* which usurps the place of God by placing some created reality in the place of God, according it the kind of power due only to God.

This *libido dominandi* is the kind of power which the material realm seems to exert on the postmodern psyche. Postmoderns love the earthly (*cupiditas*) at the expense of the heavenly (*caritas*), thus limiting the possibility of their salvation. The love which is rightly ordered understands that temporal things are to be used as means that lead to the enjoyment of God and not as ends in themselves. The cities of endless desires and endless consumption facilitated by postmodernity are therefore shallow cities whose love

¹³⁸Quoted in Ward, *Cities of God*, 227. Also see Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Book. XIV. 28.

¹³⁹See Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Book. I.22, 20-29, 30.

needs to be deepened by an Augustinian understanding of the material realm as in itself only a limited good.

That the temporal world is a limited good is thrown into relief by the idea that those who belong to the heavenly city are pilgrims in this world, they are on their way to God. But that people should be regarded as pilgrims in this world appears to undermine the material realm since it does not portray it as a home. Does this then make the world only a training ground for life in the hereafter?¹⁴⁰ Ward does not think so. Life on earth is not merely a preparation for heaven but is rather a part of the very economy of redemption facilitated through participation in the Trinity whose infinite love and justice inform their earthly counterparts. For Ward, then, secularism can only be redeemed from its nihilistic self-consumption and the atomism of *amor sui* (self-love) if its love and justice are informed and attracted by the divine.¹⁴¹ In this case, use is made of things in this world, as Augustine saw, not by regarding them as our final good or as ultimate goal, “but in order to do whatever we do in the reasonable use of temporal things with an eye to the acquisition of eternal things (*aeternorum adipiscendorum contemplatione faciamus*), passing by the former on the way, setting our hearts on the latter to the end.”¹⁴²

Ward does not develop this “passing” in much detail but it is well developed in Milbank’s notion of “the politics of time,” which takes seriously the fact that things in this world pass away and can better be accounted for not by representing creation as

¹⁴⁰Ward, *Cities of God*, 233.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 235-6.

¹⁴²See Ward, *Cities of God*, 235; Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), Book XII. 21.

eternal but rather by recognizing its contingency and treating it as such. It is in this context that Milbank places his politics of time which “treats life and the moments of life as only passing, and focus on how they might pass gloriously.”¹⁴³ This politics of time prioritizes the otherworldly as a precondition for justice in this world, rejects the secular drift towards nihilism, and ritualizes “all of life as passage, in order to capture in the lineaments of passage certain traces of the eternal.”¹⁴⁴ Regarding those who belong to the heavenly city as pilgrims in this world has the potential of instilling a vision that gives proper regard to the material world in light of its end in the divine life. It has the potential of helping those who are moving towards the heavenly city appreciate the beauty of God in the present but without forgetting or undermining the movement towards full participation in divine life.¹⁴⁵

But it may be argued that talk about two cities represented by two groups of people with two different loves create a dualism which the RO doctrine of participation rejects; that a neat distinction evoked by the idea of the two cities tantamounts to drawing a neat line between the saved and the damned in the mean time (*saeculum*). Such a clear distinction is implied in some (Milbankian) RO opposition between the sacred and the secular,¹⁴⁶ which apparently suggest that because the secular failed to give due regard to God, God was effectively out of the secular. But this view of the secular does not appear to be tenable in the participatory ontology embraced here. In this ontology, even the

¹⁴³Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 177.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 177-80.

¹⁴⁵See John Milbank, Graham Ward and Edith Wyschogrod, *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty* (London: Trinity Press International, 2003).

¹⁴⁶See note 119 above.

“secular” is itself not secular because its very existence suggests that it participates in the divine. It would have passed into oblivion were this not the case. Recognizing that that which is not explicitly Christian is not out of the participatory ontology agrees with the Augustinian spirit which gives due regard to the church as the locus of divine salvation but also sees the two cities as commingling in the present.¹⁴⁷ This does not mean that the church can be regarded as “another city” in the sense that it is the heavenly city which Augustine talked about (this would be to mistake the Augustinian ontology of peace and the historical expressions of the church, as Milbank apparently does in *Theology and Social Theory*).¹⁴⁸ What this means is that the church more fully possesses the resources that may help realign a nihilistically drifting world to its transcendent *telos*, for its own good.¹⁴⁹ It is in this light that Ward points out that the salvation of the present city does not only need insights from other religions, but also from “secular” social and critical theories. This means that in the meantime, pluralism¹⁵⁰ is not simply a nuisance to the church but a means of navigating diversity. In the end, then, the city of God is not identical with any city of the world. The church, then, is pointer to this heavenly city; it

¹⁴⁷Ward, *Cities of God*, 229.

¹⁴⁸See Breyfogle, “Is There Room for Political Philosophy in Postmodern Critical Augustinianism?” 35-8.

¹⁴⁹See Barry A. Harvey, *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World* (Harrisburg, Penn: Trinity Press International, 1999), 161. For a brief summary of Harvey’s ecclesiology in the work just cited, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Dwoners Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 221-30.

¹⁵⁰For Ward, pluralism is not the recognition of different faiths as one generic religion or even different worldviews ultimately grounded in one existential reality but rather a recognition that our views of reality are necessarily partial and ideological, thus needing other views. See Ward, *Cities of God*, 237.

insists that it is only when the material realm is aligned towards this heavenly city that it finds its salvation.¹⁵¹

The Augustinian notion of rightly ordering the desire of the city as seen in Ward will be used in our attempt to remedy the turn towards the present characteristic of African theology and NC. As we shall see in the next chapter, both are characterized by most of the tendencies of the postmodern cities of endless aspirations and endless desires so that its salvation rests on the redirection of these aspirations and desires towards God.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the views that some representatives of RO hold of the material realm in their salvific discourse. It has been shown that central to RO is the participatory ontology in which the material realm finds its meaning only as it is situated (suspended) in the transcendent. It is within this context that we presented Milbank's view of the gift of salvation as tied to radical reciprocity, Blond's perceptual faith which intermingles the supernatural and the natural, and Ward's understanding of salvation in our postmodern cities. As we shall see in the next chapter, all three representatives can, in their own way, contribute to helping African theology and NC see the transcendent in the material realm, thus expanding their vision to include the eternal rather than simply the ephemeral. All of this is couched in the Augustinian context in which the material realm is itself not the ultimate because it is created reality. Much of African theology, as we saw in chapter two, has been suspicious of this relativising of the material realm because it may give the impression that this world is only a training ground for the hereafter. But in this chapter we have seen that relativising the material realm does not

¹⁵¹See Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 233-4.

have to lead to escapism. Rather than devaluing the material realm because it is contingent, the transcendent enticement enables us to use the material world as means to the enjoyment of God.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: A Future for Africa?¹

Introduction

This project has been concerned with how the material realm should be construed in salvific discourse and how such construal could help foster the overall well-being of the African peoples. It has argued that present construal of the material realm represented by African theology in general and intensified in NC is aberrant because it tends to treat the material realm as an end in itself. It was claimed that RO will be appropriated in order to remedy this shortcoming. This chapter will be dedicated to two tasks: 1) critically appropriating RO's understanding of the material realm as described in chapter five in order to attempt to overcome this shortcoming, showing that it is only when this shortcoming is overcome that the African church may help Africa begin to imagine a worthwhile future. 2.) suggesting areas for further research which this dissertation has opened up. In discussing how RO may be appropriated in the attempt to overcome the understanding of the material realm in African theology and NC, we shall first address the issue of the fundamental ontology that undergirds African theology and NC before going on to look at how and to what extent Milbank's understanding of salvation as gift situated within the context of radical reciprocity, Blond's vision of the supernatural as intertwined with the natural, and Ward's notion of rightly ordering the

¹The subtitle of this chapter is inspired by Emmanuel Katongole's *A Future for Africa: Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2004).

desire of the city, may be mined to remedy the anthropocentric and immanent vision of the material realm espoused by African theology and NC.

Problematizing an Ontology

The first move towards the Augustinian theocentric vision which this project proposes is to address the ontology that informs African theology in general and NC in particular. As we already saw in chapters two and three, the basic ontology characteristic of the African worldview is what has been described as dynamic or power ontology.² This ontology is characterized by a hierarchy of forces with God as the highest force or power. Because persons and communities need power in order to be, their relationship to spiritual beings and to God is designed to ensure that they acquire the power needed to flourish. In this context, as Kingsley Larbi sees it, human relationship with the spiritual is an attempt to negotiate the “balance of power” or to tilt cosmic power in one’s favor.³ Allan Anderson therefore proposes that the understanding of salvation relevant in this context is a dynamic or power view of salvation in which the Holy Spirit is seen as the ultimate power who enables persons and communities to flourish.⁴ Thus, we see that both Larbi and Anderson, like other representatives of NC, do not interrogate this worldview but rather offer what they see as the best solution to it: the power of the Holy Spirit as the power that overcomes all other powers and promote human flourishing.

²See Jean-Marie Makang, “Of the Good Use of Tradition: Keeping the Critical Perspective in African Philosophy,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 333.

³E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra, Ghana: Center for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001), 7.

⁴Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 215-19, 120.

There is nothing wrong with understanding the Holy Spirit as powerful or in understanding salvation as empowerment, as Asamoah-Gyadu does.⁵ But it becomes problematic when salvation is seen mainly as an attempt at balancing power or appropriating power for human flourishing. Apart from being anthropocentric as this project has earlier charged, this understanding of salvation bears an uncanny connection to the new liberal, secular science of politics which is characterized by an ontology of violence because it privileges power in the management of human communities. This, as Milbank points out, is because secular politics conceives of humans as naturally motivated by “the necessity of for every creature to ensure its own self-preservation.” Where humans are naturally driven by the desire for self-preservation, reality appears to be inherently conflictual and power, sometimes understood as violence, is necessary to hold these conflicting parties together.⁶

Saying this requires that the notion of power be clarified.⁷ Power, it should be noted, does not only mean physical force or violence but also the ability to do things that one intends to do (which may sometimes, but not always, require the use of physical force). For example, persons in position of authority may use the power of persuasion (not violence) to achieve specific goals at specific times. But it is also the case that physical force or violence is sometimes used to achieve specific goals or to promote one’s ideal, so that the road from power as persuasion to power as the use of physical

⁵J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 149-62.

⁶See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 10; James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 195.

⁷For the multifaceted and ideological nature of definitions of power see Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), xv-xvi.

force is not a long one. Power is also related to empowerment in which case people are enabled to do certain things which they were previously unable to do. Those who are thus empowered may be able, for example, to provide for themselves and their families when in the past they could not do so. They may be empowered to make significant contributions to their communities when in the past they could not do so. But their empowerment may also pass over to the use of physical force or violence, such as when a private citizen is empowered to declare war on another country when they are elected president. That is why the word “power” is ambivalent. Those who are empowered may use physical force to impose their ideals. This is the case with the understanding of power in secular political science which usually uses violence to bring apparently opposing segments in communities to submission or order. In fact, in modern times, the secular state has arrogated to itself the prerogative of such use of violence.

Although within the African traditional ontology having power is the prerequisite for viable existence, the understanding of power in this ontology is not unconnected to violence as used in secular politics. Just as people appeal to spiritual forces for daily bread so too do they appeal to these forces for protection in war. In fact, it is not unusual for those in position of power to appeal to spiritual forces to keep them in power for as long as possible, even when this means the use of violence.⁸ Thus, by privileging power, the dynamic ontology of the African traditional worldview plays into the framework of the secular and liberal ontology of violence which Milbank identifies as prioritizing force and reading the world in order to tell “how this force is best managed and confined by

⁸This is the subject of the excellent book by Stephen Ellis and Gerri ter Haar entitled *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

counterforce.”⁹ In the above quotation one cannot help but hear an echo of Larbi’s notion of the African’s religious motivation as the desire to maintain a “balance of power” and the “tilting of cosmic power” to one’s advantage and the advantage of one’s community. Thus, the understanding of power in secular politics and African cosmology is not unconnected to violence and so to prioritize power as this ontology does is to be guilty of operating within the ontology of violence. In this respect, Africa suffers not just from the violence that undergirds the very existence of the secular state (the liberal state is constructed on the use of power, especially in the African context), but also by the violence embedded in the dynamic ontology which many African theologians are uncritically promoting. Being thus burdened by this double provenance of violence, we may therefore not be surprised if our lives are wracked by violence. For this double ontology of violence to be overcome, we need an ontology, and an understanding of power, that does not promote violence.

One would expect that Milbank’s notion of the ontology of peace, characterized by harmonic difference, can be mined to alleviate this double ontology of violence. Milbank’s ontology of peaceful difference, as manifested in the life of the Trinity, which as the *arche*, is original peace, is one in which difference is not regarded as antagonistic but rather as mutually enriching and manifesting harmonic unity. Here difference does not lead to competition as is the case with secular modernity where the conatus of self-preservation is the driving force. This ontology of peace is also manifested in the life of creation which manifests diversity but is declared “good.” All this means that Christians should be guided by this ontology of original peace rather than the ontology of violence.

⁹Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 4.

Thus, rather than taking the story of secular politics, or in this case, the African worldview for granted, it should be interrogated with the aid of this Augustinian ontology of peace. This means that reality should be understood as originally not inscribed by violence and opposition; violence and opposition should be understood as having befallen creation in the fall. Because for Christians the beginning and end is peace (God), violence should be regarded as “an absolute intrusion, an anomaly” rather than given ontological priority.¹⁰

The church’s embrace of the ontology of peace in the African context may help change the ontological framework in which African theology and NC operate so that the will to power may not be a dominant emphasis in their salvific discourse. In fact, stressing the ontology of peace reveals that the inordinate quest for power is in itself an anomaly that needs to be corrected. The ontology of peace implies that within the divine economy God has pronounced what God makes “good” and given the possibility in which life can be lived not in competition but in peaceful cooperation. Within the framework of the ontology of peace, violence would be made so strange that whenever it rears its ugly head, it would be noted for what it is: an aberration. Such a perspective on violence is not possible if the framework in which theology is done is one that is embedded in the ontology of violence. In Africa where violence has in some cases become a way of life, Christians, and perhaps, Christian theologians, have the obligation to show that there is an alternative way to look at reality, a way that puts peace at the beginning and end of reality, thus checking our anxieties at their source. In fact, this peaceful ontology does not only put God at the beginning and the end, but also in the

¹⁰Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5, 294; Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 195-7.

meantime, the *saeculum*, in the life of Christ and the Church. Through the Spirit of Christ and the Church we are enabled to attempt to imagine what it is like to live in this peace which is actual in the life of the triune God. The church, then, should be made up of communities of people who practice peace so that they may be witnesses to the Way of Peace to the world. But African theology and NC, by assuming an ontology of violence, unwittingly perpetrate competition rather than cooperation and where competition, especially for resources, is the *modus vivendi*, it is not hard for the simmering conflict to come out in the open. That this has contributed to the sorry situation in most African countries can hardly be doubted.

Milbank's proposal that Christians embrace the ontology of peace would have however been unproblematic had he not, like Augustine, brought in the necessity of violence. Like Augustine, he thinks that violence takes place in both the church and the *imperium* but the one thing that distinguishes the violence of the *imperium* from that of the church is the end served in both cases. While the violence of the earthly city (the *imperium*, the state) seeks only to mediate between conflicting wills and is thus arbitrary, the violence of the church is oriented towards seeking the final goal of peace. Milbank writes:

Augustine admits, correctly in my view, the need for some measures of coercion, in some circumstances, because freedom of the will in itself is not the goal, and sometimes people can be temporarily blind and will only be prevented from permanent self-damage when they are forced into some course of action, or prevented from another. Such coercive action remains in itself dangerous, as it risks promoting resentment, but this risk is offset by the possibility that the recipient can later come to understand and retrospectively consent to the means taken. Such action may not be 'peaceable', yet can still 'redeem' by retrospective acceptance, and so contribute to the final goal of peace.¹¹

¹¹Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 418.

But in this case it would appear that although Milbank embraces an ontology of peace, his practice, in the meantime, is one that does not appear to be substantially different from that of those who do not embrace such an ontology. This is because in the meantime both those who embrace the ontology of peace and those who do not employ the same means to arrive at their goals, even if these goals are different. For Milbank, secular politics practices violence for its own sake while, if the church practices violence, it is for the purpose of arriving at the goal of peace. But if in the *saeculum*, violence is manifested in the midst of those whose ultimate vision is peace, they can hardly be distinguished from those who also practice violence but lack this peaceful vision. The witness of the church to peace is jeopardized by the church's embrace of violence. Of course, for Milbank, violence should only be employed as a last resort and even then, not enthusiastically. But even this does not attenuate the situation because whether violence is embraced as a last resort or not, such embrace does not differentiate the church from the world and, as Milbank rightly sees, jeopardizes the witness of the church. This risk can hardly be attenuated. For example, five hundred years after the church's collision with colonialism in their attempt to "civilize" African and South American people, neither the West nor the church has been forgiven for it. It has rather bred mistrust, in some cases, between Western and non-Western Christianities.¹²

¹²This is the stuff out of which some forms of Latin American, Asian, and African liberation theologies are made. In fact, the rise of postcolonial biblical studies, situated within the recent discourse of postcolonial studies, is not unconnected to such mistrust. For more on this see Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View From the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000); Gerald O. West and Musa Dube, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2000).

Considering that the world in general and Africa in particular are already awash in violence, the church's support of violence even as a last resort or for purposes of defending an ideal, as Milbank holds, does not promote an alternative vision. We cannot "counterpose Augustine's counter-empire, the City of God," as alternative to "globalization and the new American empire," if the violence characteristic of globalization and the new American empire still has a role to play in the city of God.¹³ By seeing violence as legitimate in some circumstances Milbank does not sufficiently appreciate the history of violence that has characterized Christianity in particular and the West in general, especially as this is related to South American, Asian, and African peoples. The story of modern Western Christianity and Africa is one that was mired in the violence perpetrated in some cases by colonial Christianity. It could well be that Western Christians who perpetrated this violence were following the Augustinian/Milbankian principle that violence may be used to redirect the people's will to the right direction. But colonial violence has not so much redirected the wills of many Africans as it has orchestrated Western patronizing of African peoples which continues to this day. It is by tacitly endorsing such violence that Milbank could be rightly charged for having taken the side of the powerful against the powerless of the world (it being the case that the powerful are more likely to use violence against the powerless).¹⁴ It is in this light that Milbank can be said to be promoting imperialistic tendencies by failing to sufficiently critique the past because he believes that doing so results in the patronization

¹³Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 210.

¹⁴For the justifiable claim that (some segments of) RO has made a "'class option' for those who benefit from the global system of wealth and power," see Marcella Mari Althaus-Reid, "'A Saint and a Church for Twenty Dollars': Sending Radical Orthodoxy to Ayacucho," in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 107-118.

of the past.¹⁵ By failing to sufficiently critique a violent past, Milbank thus fails to envision a present and a future in which violence can be eradicated, at least in so far as Christians are concerned.¹⁶

It is for this reason that an ontology of peace can only be imitated through the complete renunciation of violence.¹⁷ In this case, the church, as communities of those who live within the framework of the ontology of peace, would be made up of people who are trained, as Stanley Hauerwas correctly saw, in naming the violence in which they participate so that they can renounce them.¹⁸ Renouncing violence means that the church learns from its head, Jesus Christ, whose crucifixion implies that even though we believe our cause to be a just one, we would rather be killed than kill for it; we would rather accept harm than harm others. In the end, the justness of our cause can only be validated by God as seen in the resurrection.

However, by renouncing violence, the church does not renounce power but redefines it. It sees power not as manifested in violent coercion as has been the case in the past but by forms of power rooted in the crucifixion and resurrection. In the crucifixion we see that in Jesus Christ God does not respond to violence with violence but overcomes even the violence that leads to death with the peaceful power of the

¹⁵John Milbank, "Violence: Double Passivity," in *Must Christianity be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology*, ed. Kenneth R. Chase and Allan Jacobs (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 194-5.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁷There are of course various forms of violence from which one cannot be completely rid such as that involved in the process of education and some forms of the parental training of children. In these activities some minimal forms of coercion that do not deal with the use of physical force are permissible. The forms of violence rejected here as part of Christian praxis is that which humiliates, undermine the dignity of, or kills, other human beings.

¹⁸Stanley Hauerwas, "Explaining Christian Nonviolence: Notes for a Conversation with John Milbank," in *Must Christianity be Violent?*, 176, 180-1.

resurrection. And if it is correct that the resurrection provides the possibility for the regeneration of a fallen creation, then it means that like the initial act of creation, in salvation God recreates not by violent, but by peaceful, power. Rowan Williams describes this pattern of power as the power that creates by expending itself. In this case, like God in Jesus Christ who creates by giving away power even in the face of betrayal, the church should be a place where there is “no place for reprisal, for violent response to betrayal and breakage, or for preemptive action to secure against betrayal,”¹⁹ but a place where power is given away for the building up of Christ-like persons.²⁰ In fact, for Williams, the church should be properly understood as defenseless “because it does not need defending and cannot be defended by means that deny its basic assurances.”²¹ If the church is made up of people who see the ontology of peace as central to their lives, it must therefore be concluded that the church cannot use violence to promote its vision without diminishing its basic assurances. If violence is related to a fallen creation, Christians should be seeking to overcome this (sin) rather than leaving room for it.

Attempting to overcome this ontology of violence by drawing from the vision of the ontology of peace, African theology in general and NC in particular may help overcome some tendencies that undermine the well being of Africans. This means that Milbank’s espousal of the ontology of peace may be fruitfully appropriated in overcoming the double ontology of violence espoused by African theology and NC. But

¹⁹Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 217.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 233.

²¹*Ibid.*, 217.

in appropriating the Augustinian/Milbankian ontology of peace, their tendency to see violence as unavoidable in the *saeculum* must be rejected.

Radical Unilateralism and the Gift

As we saw in chapter three, a certain conception of reciprocal gift-giving as indispensable to the salvific process is not lost on adherents of NC, especially when it comes to how material blessings are to be secured. In fact, one of the laws of prosperity has to do with giving to God and to God's ministry, also understood as "sowing a seed" or "giving in anticipation."²² This means that people give to God in expectation that God will give back to them and what is given back to them is usually understood as material blessings, expected to be received within one's lifetime. But this understanding of the gift-giving situation is one that will benefit from Milbank's understanding of the nature of reciprocity in the gift-giving relation between God and creation, on the one hand, and within creation on the other.

First, NC's understanding of gift will benefit from appropriating Milbank's notion of delay and non-identical repetition of the counter-gift. We have already seen that adherents of NC usually expect that God will reciprocate to their gifts within their lifetime so that those who die without receiving what they expected from God are perceived as not having satisfactorily actualized their salvation. That is why those who die young or without satisfactorily actualizing what is perceived as their divine destiny are seen as having died in an "untimely" manner. A normal and timely death occurs only when one is born, grows up to have a family of their own, take care of their extended family, and die peacefully at old age. While this is an admirable vision and seems to be

²²See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatic*, 212-3.

supported by the Old Testament and African traditional religious culture, perhaps in light of the incarnation, it fails to see that life lived in God and as a journey towards God does not necessarily have to be lived in that way and that God uses people in various ways to effect divine purposes. They fail to see a venerable tradition of the faith where our ancestors in the faith died without receiving what was promised to them (Hebrews 11:39). This, of course, does not mean that their lives were unrelieved pain (or that life lived in unrelieved pain is acceptable) but rather that they focused on the One in whom they lived and moved and had their beings in the midst of their tribulations. Focusing on receiving a counter material gift from God within one's lifetime does not only limit one from seeing other areas where God might be giving in their lives and the quality of life lived in God, it may also lead to despair if one does not receive the gift expected.

Even more, it also limits one's vision of what is possible in the future because one does not look further than one's lifetime. It gives the impression that what does not happen during one's lifetime is lost forever. This non-eschatological expectation of personal fulfillment within one's lifetime, embedded in the ontology of African traditional religious culture and espoused by African theology and NC may account for the inability to make sacrifices for the future which is partly characteristic of our present African context. Thus, just like some non-Christians, the lives of most Christians have come to be characterized by what has been referred to as *la politique du ventre* (politics of the belly), where the immediate concern is to feed one's self and their families and not to look for a future that is greater than that.²³

²³This is especially the case in sub-Saharan Africa. See Jean-François Bayart, "The State," in *Readings in African Politics*, ed. Tom Young (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 42.

According to Milbank, however, reciprocity in the gift-giving relationship has to be interspersed with delay and non-identical repetition. Theologically, this means that even if God were to reciprocate to gifts given to God (which is a wrong way to understand the gift-giving relationship between God and humans, as we shall see), God may not give back exactly the same kind of gift that was given to God and not immediately – it may not happen within one’s life time! In fact, the notion of delay and non-identical repetition of the counter-gift entails a waiting, “by a necessary *delay*, the answering repetition of the other that will fold temporal linearity back into the eternal cycle of the triune life.”²⁴ This means that the gift-giving process must not be limited to temporality, as is the case with adherents of NC, but must extend to eternity. This means that in salvation God gives gifts that extend from the temporal to eternal. In fact, in salvation God gives God’s self, a gift that can never be exhausted, let alone in temporal life. Through embracing the notion of delay and non-identical repetition of the counter gift, adherents of NC may be enabled to see a future in which temporality is enfolded in eternity so that their gaze may not be limited to temporal material things. This may enable Africans to see a future that stretches far more than one’s lifetime, a future that includes generations yet to come and in fact stretches into eternal divine life itself.

Secondly, the understanding of reciprocity between humans and God which we just addressed above is itself limited because it appears to portray God as being on the same ontological plane as human beings, as a patron who is just a little above the client. In this case gifts given to the patron by the client is given with the understanding that the patron will reciprocate. But, as we saw in the previous chapter, for Milbank, this is not

²⁴John Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” 150.

the nature of the gift-giving relation between humans and God. Milbank's notion of radical unilateralism suggests that God is the single unilateral giver who in turn receives nothing from creation. Seen from this perspective, the idea that people have to give to God in order to receive from God is not only manipulative as Asamoah-Gyadu has pointed out,²⁵ it is theologically problematic. It is theologically problematic because it fails to see that creation and salvation are both gifts from God in which humans are expected to participate. These gifts have already been given by God so that even the human ability to reciprocate is also a gift from God. This means that properly understood, what creatures give God (praise, worship and other "gifts") are not gifts because God does not receive from human beings like human beings do from each other.

As Milbank correctly spells out, there is reciprocity within the Trinity and reciprocity within creation but not between creation and God. Although there is "exchange" between creation and God this exchange is located within the framework of unilateralism because even what creatures apparently give back to God comes from God. This means that although it is important to "give" to God, it is not this giving that indebts God to us as is supposed to be the case in NC; God is already indebted to creation through the very acts of creation and salvation, which are unilateral acts. Although there is no reciprocity between creation and God it does not mean that giving, especially among humans, should be discouraged. This is because it is both by "giving" praise and worship to God and exchanging gifts within creation that creation participates in the life of God. Thus, stressing Milbank's unilateralism (which is another way of reading the claim in Ephesians that salvation is a gift of God [2:8]), may help adherents of NC come

²⁵Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 218.

to see that although gift-giving is important, it is not what indebts God to creation in general and Christians in particular.

This may in turn help eliminate those brands of NC promoted by unscrupulous persons who squeeze money from ill-informed individuals by promising that those who give to God shall in turn receive from God. Rather than simply dismiss those who prey on Christians as charlatans, it may be important to train Christians on the theological nature of the gift, a central tenet in some segments of NC, so that they may guard against those whose primary purpose is to make money off of them.

Re-imagining the Supernatural

We saw in chapter five that Blond intends to supernaturalize the world by advocating a vision that sees the material realm as intertwined with the supernatural. This vision of the world, as we indicated, is one that is similar to the vision of the world espoused by African traditional religious culture, African theology, and NC. This is because these three espouse a vision of the world, as we already saw, that does not separate the natural from the supernatural, the material from the spiritual. But it will be argued here that the understanding of the intertwining of the natural and the supernatural espoused by the African theology and NC is one that maintains an immanent vision of the world rather than a transcendent one.

As we saw in chapter two, the African worldview is one that is spiritually charged so that the distinction between matter and spirit is not clear. This does not mean that every material thing (even dead matter) is spiritually charged, but rather that spiritual causation is taken seriously in this cosmology. By “spiritual” we do not mean that which is not material and we do not mean mind. By spiritual we mean “super-human beings

and forces” that are “quasi-physical” and act like human beings.²⁶ This is the case with ancestors and other spiritual beings that do the bidding of God in the world, or those that perform evil acts such as witches. This is what is normally called the supernatural African cosmology. Care must be taken when we talk of supernatural here because it is not to be understood over against a natural order. They intertwine.

RO (and Blond especially) also wants to imagine a worldview in which the natural and the supernatural intertwine but its view of the supernatural is different from that espoused by NC. For RO’s patristic and scholastic understanding of the supernatural, although the natural and the supernatural intertwine, the supernatural is also above and beyond creation and relates to the activities of the triune God or grace.²⁷ What is described as supernatural in the African cosmology which NC espouses falls within the ambit of creation and as such is not the understanding of the supernatural espoused by RO. When RO talks of the supernatural, indicating that it wants to supernaturalize the world by introducing the idea of participation, it means that it wants the world to be linked to God alone as its transcendent source and goal. Even if for the African cosmology “God is not apart from the universe,” but “constitutes the spatio-temporal ‘totality’ of existence,” as Wiredu insists the relation between God and the world is understood among the Akan of Ghana, this still does not arrive at the understanding of the supernatural espoused by RO. It is radically immanent because it appears to make

²⁶See Kwasi Wiredu, “On Decolonizing African Religions,” in *African Philosophy Reader*, ed. P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 191.

²⁷See Stephen Wang, “Aquinas on Human Happiness and the Natural Desire for God,” *New Blackfriars* 88 no. 1015 (May 2007), 332 n. 42.

God to be co-extensive with the universe.²⁸ The African cosmology is usually espoused by African theologians and adherents of NC because, according to them, it is biblical. But this biblical support, which is usually taken from Ephesians 6:12, does not deal with the supernatural in the patristic and scholastic sense since the “cosmic powers” and “spiritual forces” mentioned in the text still appear to fall within creation. In patristic and scholastic terms, it is God alone who supernaturalizes creation and according to RO, it is only when the material (creation) is linked to the transcendent God that it is supernaturalized.²⁹ Thus while the African cosmology’s conception of the supernatural can be seen as promoting the reciprocal gift-giving within creation, that of RO remains true to the unilateral divine gift of creation and grace. This does not, however, mean that the understanding of the supernatural in the African worldview, as espoused by NC, is wrong, but only that it is different and must not be confused with what supernatural means in RO. The difference is that while RO understands the supernatural as tied to transcendent divine life, that of the African cosmology seems to be largely related to the activities of creatures. How this disparity in the understanding of the supernatural developed needs to be further investigated. For now, however, suffice it to say that while RO’s understanding of the supernatural directly relates to God that espoused by NC seems to deal largely with the creaturely, thus perpetrating the reciprocal understanding of gift-giving that obtains within creation rather than the radical unilateralism advocated above.

²⁸Wiredu, “On Decolonizing African Religions,” 187.

²⁹Ephesians 6:12 reads: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (NRSV).”

The second difference between NC and RO's understanding of the supernatural has to do with their emphases: while the cosmology espoused by NC seems to point downward (towards creation), that of RO seems to point upward (towards God). This means that NC appears to emphasize that the goal of human relationship with God is deliverance from those spiritual forces that are impediments to human well being on earth while RO emphasizes deliverance from impediments to human well being as pointing one to God instead (even though it does not sufficiently develop an eschatology). This can be captured in the Augustinian notion of things as signs that point beyond themselves. In this case, things point towards God so that material well being is not an end in itself but a means that help us move towards God. RO's understanding of the supernatural can thus be used as a remedy for NC's gaze which has apparently been enthralled by the creaturely.

As seen above, when RO says that the world must be understood from a supernatural perspective or that the visible is bound with the invisible, it does not mean that the material world is charged with spiritual beings as is the case with the African cosmology or with powers and principalities, as is the case with Ephesians. For RO, the supernatural is the presence of God in the world. It is God who sustains the world and not these spiritual forces or beings, for these spiritual forces are themselves in the order of creation. Thus, it appears that Blond's embrace of a perceptual faith may help African Christians in general and adherents of NC to see that the world is not chiefly in the hands of malevolent spiritual forces from which they need to be delivered but rather in the hands of God whose presence permeates and enlivens the world. Advocating, as some do, that African Christians must be trained in the habit of seeing these spiritual forces

because this makes it easy for the Christian view of salvation from these forces to be preached, appears limited.³⁰ This is because preaching that Christian salvation is essentially being rescued from these forces, foster the vision that this project attempts to overcome, namely the limiting of salvation to material well being. It is therefore imperative that adherents of NC be enabled to see the supernatural as the presence and activity of God in the world. This will redirect their vision to the God whose presence sustains the world rather than to malevolent spirits who constantly connive to undo the world.

Also, it will enable them to see God not as a Super-Spirit whose salvific work is to defeat malevolent spirits so that humans may enjoy material well being (as Anderson suggests) but rather as one who is infinitely other than the material realm itself and who constantly draws creation into the divine life which is its *telos* or, as Blond puts it, its highest possibility. This may help adherents of NC see that God is not a God who comes to creation in order to give creation that which is less than God (material well being) but the God who fulfills this well being by drawing it into the divine life itself. This vision will also enable adherents of NC see items such as rivers and forests not as populated by spiritual beings but rather by the God of creation who is in creation and yet surpasses it. This may in turn reduce the preoccupation with malevolent spirits which is dominant in some segments of NC. As is the case with Blond, what is called for here is a different perception of the world, not from the secular to the theological as Blond does, but from an immanent theological vision to a sacramental one. This sacramental vision, it is hoped,

³⁰See David Tonghou Ngong, "In Quest of Wholeness: African Christians in the New Christianity," *Review and Expositor* 103 no. 3 (Summer 2006): 524-8.

would train African Christians, and especially adherents of NC in perceiving the divine in the creaturely without collapsing the divine in the creaturely.

Blond's theological perception, however, does not take seriously the presence of the Holy Spirit in the material realm. For him, it is the incarnation that brings together the material and the spiritual realms but he fails to see that it is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit, that enlivens the material realm. It therefore has to be emphasized that it is the Spirit of the Father and the Son that animates the world and not the created spirits as seems to be the case in tNC. When African Christians look at the world, what they should be able to see is not the predominance of malevolent spirits but the Spirit of God who is other than, but yet animates the world. This Spirit of God is not simply the Spirit that overcomes all lesser malevolent spiritual beings, as Anderson sees it, and which implies an ontology of violence, but is the Spirit that enables Christians to perceive the presence of God in the world and entices them into the transcendent divine life itself. Although Blond does not emphasize the place of the Holy Spirit in his understanding of the intertwining of the material and the spiritual realms, his theological perception can still be appropriated to remedy the shortcoming in NC by enabling its adherents to develop a different vision of how God is related to the world.

Rightly Ordering Desire in the City

As we saw in the previous chapter, Ward is interested in rightly ordering human love or desire so that they may not mistake the material realm for the ultimate good. In order to do this Ward uses the Augustinian theology of signification to suggest that the material realm is a sign that does not simply point to itself but to God who is its source and goal. This theology of signification may help African theology and tNC perceive the

penultimate character of the material realm in relation to God thus making the material realm do more than it presently does when it is seen as an end in itself: point to the source and goal of ultimate well being, who is God. Where the material realm has lost its character as sign it has come to be seen largely as something to be accumulated and consumed so that the preoccupation of many people is to accumulate as much as possible. Added to the fact that many Christians see such accumulation as blessing from God which they expect to receive within their lifetime, this desire to accumulate and consume has sometimes reached obscene proportions. Stressing a theology of signification may therefore help Christians better understand the nature of the material realm as itself not the end but only a means to the end of enjoying God eternally. If the material realm is regarded as means to the end of enjoying God it may come to be seen that treating it as an end in itself limits its potential rather than enhance it. This means that the material realm is supposed to do more than only provide for our well being; it is supposed to lead us to God who is our common good.

Also, drawing from Augustine's theology of the two cities, as we saw in the previous chapter, Ward argues that loving the material realm for its own sake is a characteristic of those in the earthly city who construct idols of the creaturely by giving it the regard due only to God. If God is the end of creation but creatures tend to treat creation itself as an end, creation is thus idolized. This idolization of creation tends to breed other idols who crave the regards due only to God. This is perhaps more so especially in recent African political history where barbarous dictators have tended to have life and death power over those whose well being they were supposed to promote.

In this context, the *libido dominandi* which is characteristic of the earthly city³¹ seems to be the *modus operandi* of both the church (especially as seen in the “big man” syndrome in NC) and the state. Stressing that human desire be properly ordered so that things are used only as a means to enjoying the eternal divine life may help African Christians appropriately utilize the material realm by subordinating it to God. If God is to be desired above all else it means that the material realm must be loved in a measured manner. This may enable Christians to organize the various temporal goods in ways that will be to the benefit of all, thus fostering the well being of those who are presently being marginalized through greed.

It is for this reason that when we talk of rightly ordering human desire, the onus must first be placed on those who are in leadership position, especially in the church. It is in fact the case that people follow their leaders so that when their leaders clearly demonstrated misplaced desires, as is presently seen in NC, the people follow suit. Leaders in the church should therefore be people whose desires are being rightly ordered so that they may in turn influence those to whom they minister. Because people follow their leaders and in fact become like them (*ceteris paribus*), what the people become is largely a function of their leaders. That is why Jesus Christ is reported to have stressed the importance of leadership, especially in the church, when he warns the leaders against leading “one of these little ones” astray.³² Thus, where leaders in the church insinuate

³¹*Ibid.*, 251.

³²Jesus is reported as saying in Matthew 18:6-7: “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes.” (NRSV)

that amassing material wealth is crucial for the Christian life, members of the church tend to embrace the view. Where some church leaders connive with the state in order to enhance their own status in society, as is the case with many leaders of both mainline churches and NC, members of the church can hardly be expected to act differently.

Rightly ordering the desire of leaders in the church may help church communities be better equipped to interact with others not only in the church but also in the communities in which they find themselves. This is because these leaders would be in a better position to contribute in forming members of the church to be people who do not desire the ephemeral more than the eternal. In communities where the ephemeral is loved more than the eternal, Christians would be distinct because their interaction with others will testify to their eternal vision. In this case, whether Christians are leaders in Christian or non-Christian communities, they will be guided by this vision.

Guided by this eternal vision, Christians may participate in the village, the city or the state, although the church is distinct from all these communities. But how Christians participate in these communities would depend on the extent to which the various communities enhance this eternal vision. Where secularism has tended to idolize the ephemeral, material realm, Christian community leaders should be those who help the people to value these things properly. According to Augustine, leaders who lead their people into this eternal vision are those who do not see longevity of rule and oppression of their own people as their highest good (quintessential traits of most African leaders, if not all politicians), but rather those who subordinate their life and rule to God.³³

³³Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bk. V.24. Also see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1990), 407.

The above view does not see the problem with Africa as residing only in the nation-state but also in what Christians have, or Christianity has, become in Africa. The claim here is that the churches in Africa have not trained Christians, especially those Christians who have become leaders both in the church and other communities, to properly order their love. Like NC that preaches material well being as ultimate good, the churches in Africa have trained people to value the material realm more than God, thus promoting all sorts of greed. Thus, the solution to the problem lies both in creating concrete Christian communities that exemplify the Christian life and training people in these communities so that their love could be properly ordered. This properly ordered love will therefore be evident in their engagement with the various communities in which they find themselves. The failure we now have in Africa, in a sense, is a failure of Christianity itself because Christian leaders in the various communities in Africa (most prominent leaders in post-independence Africa were trained by missionaries!) have been such bad examples. What Christianity has given Africa is influential leaders with wrongly ordered loves and this wrong order of their love has been passed over to the people. This project challenges this aberrant trend which is presently suffocating Africa.

Even more, the notion common to Ward and Augustine that we are pilgrims in this world can also be put to good effect in African theology to help order warped desires. That we are pilgrims in this world means that we do not last here forever. That we do not last here for ever may actually lead some to think that we need to make the best use of it by accumulating as much as possible, in order to make ourselves as comfortable as possible during our short time here. Doing this will be to mistake the meaning of our pilgrimage. It may suggest that this is the only life that we have and after this we can

expect nothing. This appears to be the belief not only of advocates of the secular but also of those forms of Christianity that coincide with NC. But it is this view of reality that RO and this project reject. It is this view of reality that appears to be behind the tendency to grab as much wealth as possible without regard to what effect that has on other human beings and creation in general. According to this despairing view of reality, it is most important to enjoy everything in time since there is nothing outside it. On the other hand, the claim that we are pilgrims in this world may lead to renunciation of this world, failing to take it seriously because it is only a training ground to heaven. This would be to fail to see that we cannot love God as the goal of creation without in turn loving creation in a measure that edifies it.

Against the tendencies to covet or renounce the material realm, Milbank's notion of the politics of time which we saw in the previous chapter can enable Christians to helpfully appropriate it. The idea of the politics of time acknowledges that because life is a passage, we need to do our best to leave the places we pass through better than we met them. With the conception of the material realm within the framework of participation and deification, we understand that our time in this world is part of the deification process which is fully experienced after we leave this form of life and especially after our bodies have been transformed into resurrection bodies. In fact, the material world itself participates in this deification process so that our use of it should be in some ways a sign of that (Rm. 8:18-23). This theocentric understanding of salvation has the potential of enabling Christians not to busy themselves in amassing treasures here on earth where there is no permanence but to fasten their vision onto the eternal towards which they

move (Lk. 12:22-34; Mt. 6:19-34). This may in turn curb the widespread corruption that is largely responsible for ruining most African peoples.³⁴

However, some may argue that insisting that Christians who participate in larger communities such as the state should be guided by a theological vision undermines the importance of state structures. Paul Gifford pointed out, as we saw in chapter three, that some adherents of NC dwell on moralizing the state so much that they lose sight of the fact that states are not meant to moralize citizens but rather to provide them with goods and services necessary for their well being. But Gifford's argument appears to be oblivious of the fact that communities can hardly survive without moral values and that the state as an institution is structured in ways that do not adequately instill these moral values in people. It is in this light that although the church continues to live within the framework of the state it has to attempt to develop other forms of community that adequately forms person's character, thus enabling their overall well being. That is why secular politics which funds the existence of the state is questioned in this project.

Others may further argue that this vision abolishes the secular realm, other faiths, and even other expressions of Christianity that do not subscribe to it. Clearly the theological vision espoused here insists that for Christians the material realm should be understood theologically. This, of course, means that for Christians there is no secular realm. But insisting that there is no secular realm does not mean three things: 1.) it does not mean that other communities should be subordinated to the church,³⁵ 2.) it does not

³⁴See Kempe Ronald Hope, Sr. *African Political Economy: Contemporary Issues in Development* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 88-102. Kempe describes corruption in Africa as a "pandemic."

³⁵See Aidan Nichols, "'Non tali auxilio': John Milbank's Suasion to Orthodoxy," *New Blackfriars* 73 no. 861 (June 1992): 331.

mean that only the church has been graced and the non-church damned, or 3.) that the church is everywhere because the material realm has already been graced. In the first case, as matters stand, other communities cannot be subordinated to the church in the African context, considering that this would be the dictatorship of one religion. The intermingling of people of many faiths (and those of no faith) in the African and global contexts today means that we have to look for means to live together. Barring the conversion of everyone to one faith, it appears that living in communities that are not made up only of the church is presently the only way for us to live together. We may, on the other hand, choose to live in communities where our membership depends on our faith. This may lead to our fragmentation into so many separate communities that it may be hard to see how we can work together.

In the second place, the continued existence of different faiths means that, to an extent, Christians must confess some level of “unavoidable ignorance” when it comes to their understanding of God’s salvific work in the world.³⁶ Like Augustine, as Ward rightly sees, Christians must come to see that the two cities (the earthly and the heavenly) are not clearly distinguished in this life.³⁷ This means that God may work through those who do not appear to be explicitly Christians to foster the deification process while there are those in the church who even attempt to hinder this process. This should not undermine the importance of being in the church since for Christians it is in the church,

³⁶Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 229.

³⁷See R. W. Dyson, “Introduction,” xx-xxi, in Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*. Also see Bk. XVIII. 47. Ward, *Cities of God*, 257-60.

and especially through the sacraments, that a foretaste of divine peace is experienced.³⁸

This means that for Christians whatever foretaste of peace is experienced in the secular city, it is incomplete without participation in the church where the movement toward ultimate divine peace takes place.

Within this framework, in the third place, the church is not collapsed into the state or any other community in which it finds itself because the church remains distinct from the state or society in general (it being the case that the church is not everywhere).

Rowan Williams is essentially right when he claims that the church should “at least possess certain features of a ‘sect’” for it to be “an agent of transformation.”³⁹ This does not suggest that the church should remove itself from other communities and kinship or associate with them only if they become part of the church, but rather that it is necessary for the church to be distinct and separate from other communities and kinship. For example, the church is not the natural family but it is not averse to the natural family (although it can be against it in some cases.) In the same way, the church is not the state but it is not averse to the state (although it can be against it in some cases).⁴⁰

Rather, the church is made up of people who are being formed in the vision espoused in this project so that they can live redemptive lives in the world. The church is the community of people who have been captured by the eschatological vision of full participation in the divine life so that their life here on earth reflects that reality. When other institutions such as the family and state are open to this vision, they can be

³⁸John Milbank, “Enclaves, or Where is the Church?” *New Blackfriars* 73 no. 861 (June 1992): 342.

³⁹Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 233.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

enthusiastically embraced. The church should be made up of people who are aware of the penultimate character of the material realm so that they do not render it ultimate honor. Thus, the church seeks to engage every community in which it finds itself in order to ascertain whether the vision of the community is consonant with that of the church or not. Such engagement may be carried out in the way Christians are formed to live in the world and in the church's acknowledgement of what appears to be salvific tendencies both in and out of the church and its prophetic denunciation of non-salvific tendencies. It constantly seeks to envision the kind of community that is possible for those who embrace the theological vision embraced in this project even as it participates in communities that is not limited to itself.

Suggesting that God is not confined to the church stays true to the notion of participation central to RO and also gives the church a much needed critical vision as it attempts to discern what it means to participate in God both in time and eternity. For Christians, however, both Christians and non-Christians are to be evaluated through the Christian theological vision. This does not mean that other perspectives are simply to be dismissed in apparent claim to know everything that there is to know about the relation of God to the world. It rather attempts to reclaim the despised virtue of humility which does not claim to know more than is possible to know through a glass darkly (it being the case that as creatures we cannot comprehend God). In the RO project, this humility is manifested more by Graham Ward than by Milbank. It is this Wardian sentiment that this author favors, for it appears to be the better way to maintain the Christian theological vision advocated here without antagonizing the other. It is only in this context that the

limited (unavoidable) violence of persuasion can better take place.⁴¹ The theological vision advocated here, therefore, denies the existence of the secular sphere (Milbank) and affirms plurality (Ward).

Areas for Further Investigation

Some areas for further research that this dissertation has engendered include African theology's serious engagement with RO in general, its construction of theological aesthetics (the beauty of God in the world as enticement toward God), investigation of systematic theological themes such as creation, sin, humanity, etc, from the theological perspective presented in this project, and the reclaiming of the Augustinian vision in African theology in particular and African studies in general.

The first area for further research opened up by this project is that of African theology's continued engagement with RO in general. RO, unlike most of the western theological discourse which African theology has appropriated, appears remarkably close to the African traditional worldview that has so far influenced African Christianity. RO's understanding of the supernatural has led to the development of a theology that does justice to both the immanent and transcendent visions of salvation. This means that in their salvific discourse both the material realm and the transcendent divine life have been given proper recognition. By engaging RO, African theology may be enabled to overcome its stress on immanence that result only in a limited theological vision. On the other hand, by engaging with African theology, RO may find that it places insufficient stress on the working of the Holy Spirit, especially as evidenced in the work of Philip

⁴¹See Graham Ward, "John Milbank's *Divina Comedia*," *New Blackfriar* 73 no. 861 (June 1992): 316-8.

Blond, which lays much stress on the incarnation, resulting in a binity rather than the Trinity. Even more, the idea of the supernatural has to be sufficiently probed in order to understand how it came to refer to creaturely as well as divine activities as seems to be the case in the African understanding of the term. What the supernatural means has to be clarified if for no other reason than that both African theology and RO seem to place much importance on the terminology.

A second area for further research, somehow related to the first, is that of theological aesthetics in African theology. One's understanding of the supernatural appears to be directly linked to their theological aesthetics. It appears that where the material realm is under the sway of other spiritual beings than God, one arrives at a different theological aesthetics than when it is under the sway of God. African theology will need to come up with a theological aesthetics that demonstrates that the material world is under the sway of God rather than spiritual beings. Also, because theology deals with the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, African theology cannot avoid explaining what it considers to be ultimately Good, Beautiful and True. Such investigation may help to further question the usefulness of uncritically appropriating the African worldview in Christian theological discourse.

Third, the understanding of the material realm in salvific discourse proposed in this project suggests that systematic theological themes such as creation, Christology, salvation, sin, God, the church, eschatology, et cetera, have to be treated differently in African theology than has hitherto been the case. Christology, for example, has been central to African Christian theology but this has been addressed largely from the inculturation or liberation perspectives. By understanding salvation as deification as this

project suggests, Christology will have to be approached differently. How Jesus Christ enables the deification process in the church will have to be the focus of Christology. Also, if it is true that the material realm has been graced and the distinction between the natural and supernatural cancelled, especially through the incarnation, the implication of such a view to the centrality of the church as locus of salvation deserves further investigation. Even more, a theological theme such as sin may have to also deal with failure to be part of divine making⁴² in the salvific process. Part of the problem that leads to various forms of retrogression in Africa is that those who are in positions of leadership have more destructive, than constructive, impulses. In effect, many of those in leadership positions in Africa are oblivious of the fact that making can also be perceived as part of salvation since through our participation in the divine mind, we are inspired to make things that evidence divine beauty in the world. This tendency to unmake or destroy things endemic in African leadership implies opposition to the divine gift of salvation. It seems to have spilled over to other levels of society so that many people are now part of the great unmaking machine evidenced in the civil strifes and bureaucratic corruption on the continent. Sin in this context may therefore be construed as failure to participate in the salvific process of making. This needs to be worked out in theological reflections on sin. But all the systematic theological themes will have to be engaged within the context of life as a journey into the triune God, our greatest good.

⁴²I use “making” rather than “creating” here because I am in agreement with the theological view that humans do not create. This means that humans are not co-creators with God because God is the only creator. God is the only creator because it is only God who brought forth everything out of nothing. Humans cannot create out of nothing so they use what God has already brought forth out of nothing to make other things. By making, then, humans participate in God because the idea of what to make and how to make proceeds from the mind of God to the human mind. In this view, then, to create means to bring something out of nothing while to make means to bring some other things out of things that were created.

The fourth area for further research is that of the appropriation of the Augustinian tradition in African theology. African theologians and philosophers claim early North African Christian theologians/philosophers such as Origen, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, as ancestors of African theology and philosophy.⁴³ They do so not because they think that these early North African theologians were black (some Western theologians are quick to point out that they were not⁴⁴) but because they see these early North Africans as also influenced by the African backgrounds from which they emerged. Apart from Bediako who has treated some of these early African theologians as forerunners from whom modern African theologians have something to learn with regard to constructing a Christian identity in our present context, others have mostly been content simply with pointing out that these early North African theologians were “ancestors of African theology.” Sometimes these early theologians are simply castigated as those who succumbed to colonial machination (Oduyoye) or as those who bought into Neoplatonic philosophy, a philosophy which is not only un-African but also inimical to human material well being (Éla). The effect this has had on African theology is that it has been limited only to dialoguing with contemporary philosophy and theology, forgetting its ancient Christian background in the process. This has not only limited the repertoire of African theology but it has also not done much to alleviate the unfortunate

⁴³See, for example, Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992); Josiah U. Young III, *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 7-8; D. A. Masolo, “African Philosophers in the Greco-Roman Era,” in *A Companion to African Philosophy* ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 50-65.

⁴⁴See, for example, Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1, who is anxious to point out that although Augustine “lived on the continent of Africa, he was not a black sub-Saharan African.” One could not help but wonder what prompted this comment.

understanding of Christianity as a Western religion. Masolo has rightly pointed out that because these early African theologians are largely responsible for the formulation of the basic tenets of Christianity, “[i]t is ironical that Christianity in its return to Africa after centuries of absence . . . looks so foreign and so implicated in the colonial conquest of the continent.”⁴⁵ That Christianity is implicated in colonial machinations is not an unwarranted accusation but to limit our gaze only to this colonial Christianity may undermine the fact that Christianity was on the African continent long before modern Western colonialism. That is why Bediako has gone back to this early African Christianity in his attempt to help construct African Christian identity in the present.⁴⁶

This project attempts to reclaim Augustine for African theology but through the lens of RO. Because African theology has generally cast Augustine in a negative light, the RO reading of him presented here appropriates that which this author considers worth appropriating in African theology. And what is worth appropriating is not the disparaging of the material realm which Augustine appears to condone, as some African and other theologians claim, but a proper location of the material realm within the divine life. The understanding of Augustine appropriated here is one that sees the pursuit of material well being as ordered by the pursuit of participation in eternal divine life. Part of this participation in divine life is the appropriate love of the material realm and is therefore not averse to promoting excellence in this life. In fact, it is only within this context that excellence in this life can be pursued. This understanding of Augustine can

⁴⁵D. A. Masolo, “African Philosophers in the Greco-Roman Era,” 62.

⁴⁶But he appears to have abandoned this focus in his recent attempt to make the case that Christianity is a non-Western religion. See, Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

be of much help in the present African context awash in the pursuit of superficiality in all areas of life, promoted especially by the ruling elites. The Augustine appropriated here is urgently needed in the present Africa which is under the throes of NC that has limited the gaze of many to the pursuit of the ephemeral, ignoring the things that last.

An Augustinian vision is not only urgently needed in African theology but also in the field of African studies, at least for those who pursue this discipline from a Christian perspective. Inasmuch as African studies is concerned with figuring out a future for Africa, it needs a vision within which this should be pursued. Because African studies is located within disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, disciplines which, in the main are secularized, the Augustinian Christian vision espoused by RO and appropriated in this project provides a worldview in which the search for a viable future for Africa can be imagined. Even where some of these disciplines deal with issues of Africa's development within a Christian perspective, this development appears to be the goal which is sought.⁴⁷ And where economic development is the goal, even that goal becomes elusive for most people because it is usually hijacked by the elites, especially in the African context. It is only when the goal is more than development, only when the telos is full deification that the goals of development, when attained, will make sense.

This means that a further area for research will have to be the kinds of economic activity that is consonant with the vision of participation advocated here. African studies appear to assume that the best economic activity for Africa should be located within democratic capitalism. That is why economists such as George Ayittey simply promote

⁴⁷See, for example, Erica Bornstein, *The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGOs, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005).

various investment projects as the best way for Africa to be “unchained” from the various impediments that hold Africa back.⁴⁸ After the devastation that came of African socialism in Julius Nyerere’s Tanzania and Nkrumah’s Ghana, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, capitalism appears to be the only viable option not only in Africa but throughout the world.⁴⁹

However, capitalism has come under attack from proponents of RO⁵⁰ and the call is now loud and clear for an alternative to the present global capitalist order.⁵¹ Capitalism as it exists, they argue, fosters the obsession with the superficial, the promotion of self-interest, rabid individualism and materialism. As Milbank correctly sees it, capitalism promotes contractual relationships that treat people basically as strangers to each other, thereby precluding community. Against this capitalistic tendency that jeopardizes community, Milbank proposes what he calls “socialism by grace” or Christian socialism, which “enshrines community in exchange itself” and renders production and exchange aneconomic because they are situated within the context of gift.⁵² But then, the form of community in which such exchange takes place is not based on universal reason (or

⁴⁸See George B. N. Ayittey, *African Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa’s Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁴⁹The Panegyrics to liberal democracy, within which capitalism is located has been sung by people such as Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* (Summer 1989); Also see Fukuyama, *The end of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), Introduction; Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, rev. ed. (Madison Books, 2000).

⁵⁰See, for example, D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 162-86.

⁵¹See Clive Beed and Cara Beed, *Alternatives to Economics: Christian Socio-Economic Perspectives* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2006).

⁵²Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 163-6.

humanism) but arises by grace from a transcendent source. That is why liturgy, such as the Catholic Mass, is important to the life of such community or communities; it is collective participation in such liturgy that ensures “solidarity and the just redistribution” of the goods in society.⁵³

Rather than completely rejecting capitalism as Milbank does, it appears that the church must continue to critique the phenomenon, attempting to see whether it is open to the vision articulated here. The church must reject the “remorseless-self-interest” that capitalism breeds in individuals and groups,⁵⁴ but it should also attempt to see if it possesses any positive aspect that can be appropriated. The best economic system that may be adopted, especially in the African context, may be forged through a creative intermingling of elements drawn from socialism, capitalism, and African communitarianism.⁵⁵ What this will look like is a matter for further investigation. What should not be in doubt, however, is that any economic system developed through an intermingling of socialism, capitalism and African communitarianism, should be located within the vision of life as a journey towards God, the goal of created reality. The goal should be worship of God in whom we live and move and have our beings because the future for Africa is participation in the triune God.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁵See Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35-75; D. A. Masolo, “Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison,” in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, 483-498.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how RO can be appropriated in remedying the shortcomings in the conception of the material realm in the salvific discourse in African theology in general and NC in particular. It has been argued that by critically appropriating RO the ontological framework in which African theology and NC operate can be challenged, a proper understanding of the nature of the reciprocity involved in the divine gift of salvation can be ascertained, a different view of the supernatural can be imagined, and desire can be properly ordered towards God in whom we live and move and have our being.

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