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**THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE  
AS A NEW CONTEXT FOR  
AFRICAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY**

***James Owino Kombo***

*These days we are hearing much of the African Renaissance. This article wrestles with the implications of an African Renaissance for African Evangelical Theology. Rev. James Kombo read a paper in June 1999 at the International Reformed Theological Institute (IRTI) entitled, "Creativity and Critical Thinking: Some Suggestions for African Theology." That paper will be published as part of a book. The following article is a significant revision of that paper, greatly reworked and changed, in order to be published in AJET. The author challenges African evangelicals to engage the intelligentsia in the public arena instead of remaining in the confines of theological institutions.*

**THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE –  
WHAT IS IT ABOUT?**

Renaissance as a concept is not new. The concept of the Renaissance is historically linked to the new direction that the European heritage took in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and which became the basis for the general civilisation of the modern Western world. Essentially, the European Renaissance was a cultural issue. Those who made the Renaissance happen were committed to a search for what was authentically European. Thus as Erwin Panofsky says: "The Renaissance was linked to the middle ages by a thousand ties; that the heritage of the antiquity, even though the thread had

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#### 4 Kombo *The African Renaissance*

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become very thin at times, had never been lost beyond recuperation".<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the Europeans rediscovered their own art (poetry, literature, music, painting) as well as distinct areas of knowledge that were hitherto covered in rubbles of history. These rediscoveries provided the necessary resources for advances in science and technology. As these areas developed, there arose the need for expansion and dissemination of information. The needs brought about voyages of discoveries across oceans as well as revolution in printing.

The African Renaissance, however, is a new concept. The African Renaissance has not happened yet. Nevertheless, the African intelligentsia have in the past few years mooted it as a theoretical framework for dealing with the question of the African heritage, the multi-faceted problems crippling Africa as well as the challenges of globalisation. Because of the influence of Thabo Mbeki, the man generally credited with the founding and formulation of the concept of the African Renaissance in Africa and beyond, the African Renaissance is set to acquire a formidable status in the context of Africa in the near future. In a way, the concept takes its motivation from the European Renaissance. Thabo Mbeki indicates this line of thinking in the following words:

How do we hope to emulate the great human achievements of the Earlier Renaissance of the Europe of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries?

One of our answers to this question is that, as Africans, we recall the fact that as the European Renaissance burst into history in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, there was a royal court in the African city of Timbuktu which, in the same centuries, was as learned as its European counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Panofsky, E. *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art*. London: Granada Publishing Ltd, 1960, 6

<sup>2</sup> Mbeki, T. *Africa: The Time Has Come*. Johannesburg: Tafelberg Publishers, 1998, 241.

In addition to taking its motivation from the European Renaissance, Mbeki makes it clear also that the historical situation of Africa as well as her achievements long before the encounter of the continent with the West has a lot to do with the African Renaissance:

I speak of the African work of art in South Africa that are a thousand years old. I speak of the continuum of the fine arts that encompasses the various artistic creations of the Nubians and the Egyptians, the Benin Bronzes of Nigeria and the intricate sculptures of the Makonde of Tanzania and Mozambique.

I speak of the centuries-old contributions to the evolution of religious thought made by the Christians of Ethiopia and the Moslems of Nigeria.

I refer also to the architectural monuments represented by the giant sculptured stones of Aksum in Ethiopia, the Egyptian sphinxes and pyramids, the Tunisian city of Carthage and the Zimbabwe Ruins, as well as the lagacy of the ancient universities of Alexandria of Egypt, Fez of Morroco and once more, Timbuktu of Mali<sup>3</sup>

Why does Mbeki offer us such a long catalogue of the achievements of Africa long before her encounter with the West? Again Mbeki's own answer is appropriate here: "When I survey these and much more besides, I find nothing to sustain the long-held dogma of African exceptionalism, according to which the colour black becomes a symbol of fear, evil, and death."<sup>4</sup> The sons and daughters of Africa who were behind these achievements are as human beings as the Europeans, the Americans and the Asians. They have not lost the creative power and mental strength necessary for undertakings such as these. Today they are great architects, engineers, geographers, political leaders, financiers and artists – they do it all the time!

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 241,242

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 242.

Since the Europeans were involved in their own Renaissance, the Africans too are being challenged to make use of their strengths as they address their own problems and the challenges of globalisation. The areas where the African Renaissance is calling the Africans to urgently address include poverty, hunger, backwardness, good governance, disease, racial-tribal-national tensions and the need for a firm establishment of the humane existence of all that is human. A book published in 1997 powerfully depicts the seriousness of these problems:

I am an American, but a black man, a descendant of slaves brought from Africa. . . . If things had been different, I might have been one of them . . . -or might have met some. . . . anonymous fate in one of the countless on-going civil wars or tribal clashes on this brutal continent. And so I thank God my ancestors survived the voyage. . . . Talk to me about Africa and my black roots and my kinship with my African brothers and I'll throw it back into your face, and then I'll rub your nose in the images of the rotting flesh. . . . Sorry, but I've been there. I've had an AK-47...rammed up my nose, I've talked to matchet wielding Hutu militiamen with the blood of their latest victims splattered across their T-shirts. I've seen a cholera epidamic in Zaire, a famine in Somali, a civil war in Liberia. I've seen cities bombed to near rubble, and other cities reduced to rubble, because their leaders let them rot and decay while they spirited away billions of dollars - yes, billions - inot overseas bank accounts. . . . Thank God my ancestors got out, because, now, I am not one of of them.<sup>5</sup>

The African Renaissance emphasises that Africa must as a matter of urgency clear this mess. We should not wait for foreign intervention.

It is understandable that Mbeki in his book, *Africa: The Time Has Come* (1998), should link the African Renaissance with globalisation. Globalisation assumes that the local situation has something to contribute to the global context. The Africa that shall participate as

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<sup>5</sup> Richbug, KB. *Out of Africa: A Black man Confronts Africa*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

an equal partner in the global situation is that Africa that will bring something, something tangible to the global context. The researchers of the African Renaissance are already indicating that there are countries on this continent where the spirit of self reliance is clearly evident. The child soldiers of Mozambique have been absorbed back into the society, Eritrea carries little debt and accepts virtually no foreign assistance, new life in Mali is beginning to show the power of *ubuntu* – everyone works for the community, and the Ashanti Goldfields of Ghana, the only black-African-operated mining company on the New York and London stock exchanges, is up and mimicking the fortunes of Ghana itself<sup>6</sup>

### THEOLOGY AND THE AFRICA OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

The question that must face the evangelical Christian thinkers is: How is Evangelical Theology to proceed in a situation like this? What does hope for Evangelical Theology mean in a context where the engineers, architects, financiers, and so on are being asked to take their seats around the table and formulate the future of Africa? Somehow Evangelical Theology has to cope with this new mood if it has to contribute to the building of Africa and to the global stage. It can not simply resign.

Traditionally, most of Africa does not regard theology as a discipline that can in its own right contribute to the solution of the problems of Africa. This disregard has a history to it. One of the problems was theological and cultural. Christianity presented the gospel as a message to be believed and not to be reflected upon, as in some way, belief was thought to guarantee liberation and civilisation

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed explanation of the seed of political peace that is now germinating everywhere in Africa, see J McGeary and M Michaels, 'Africa Rising' in: *Time*, vol. 151 No. 13, 30 March 1998. In this article they have analyzed what they see as new spirit of self-reliance that is taking root in the new Africa. The countries they studied are Mozambique, Mali, Eritrea, and Ghana.

that the African soul badly needed<sup>7</sup>. According to this line of thought, the African was viewed as a clear model of the fallen person<sup>8</sup>. One of the tasks of the missionary was, therefore, to 'covert the Africans to Christianity' and besides, the missionary also needed to 'make them give up and forget their past entirely and live up to their new dignity'<sup>9</sup>. Another problem was the rise of extreme nationalism. The nationalists have generally seen no good at all in the church and they have generally grouped the church with the other forces of domination. To the nationalists and the doyens of African literature, the gospel and with it, theology is a figment of Western domination incapable of addressing the fundamental contextual questions, and has a place only within the boundaries of the church which in any case is a legacy from the colonial past<sup>10</sup>.

These problems have made theological reflection for the African context such a daunting task. We do not expect the situation to be any better in the context of the African Renaissance. Theology as a whole is still not part of the mainstream disciplines in the African universities, it is in theological colleges and universities of the church. The Christian theologian, whether evangelical or liberal, is still regarded to be an expert within the boundaries of the church and

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<sup>7</sup> The missionary enterprise of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries viewed Africa as the dark continent and saw evangelisation in its traditional form as something to be done with absolute urgency as it was one of the ways by which the Africans could be elevated to '... assume their place among civilized and Christian nations' (see TF Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy*, London, 1840, 458; cf. the observations of A Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, London, 1967, 60. On the inseparability of Christianity and true civilization, see the statement of the then secretary of LMS, the Reverend William Ellis quoted in Buxton, 507).

<sup>8</sup> R. Oliver, *The Missionary factor in East Africa*, London, 1952, 9.

<sup>9</sup> B Idowu, 'The Predicament of the Church in Africa', in: CG Baeta (ed.), *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, London, 1968, 426.

<sup>10</sup> African nationalists and novelists normally portray Christianity as the flip side of the colonial project. The works of Okot p'Bitek and the novels of Ngugi Wathiongo are particularly clear on this.

may have nothing whatsoever to say to the wider society<sup>11</sup>. Of course the marginalisation of theology is not unique to Africa. It is experienced elsewhere as well<sup>12</sup>.

The irony of this situation in the African scene is that Christianity is in fact a major influence here and it clearly is a part of the heritage of contemporary Africa<sup>13</sup>. The statistics of David Barrett indicate that at the turn of the century, Africa will become largely Christian<sup>14</sup>. Barrett is not alone in this observation. Roland Oliver had in 1956 noted the geometric progression of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1912. In his conclusion, Oliver stated that 'If things were to go at the same rate, there would be no pagans left in Africa after the year 1992'.<sup>15</sup> Of course with observations such as these,

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<sup>11</sup> Whenever the church attempts to challenge political, social and economic decisions affecting the well being of the wider public, the response everywhere is quite predictable: leave politics to the politicians.

<sup>12</sup> In the United States, theology is entirely separate from the established universities and is supported only by churches. In Germany, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries, the Mediterranean countries as well as South Africa have theology in the Universities.

<sup>13</sup> See JS Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, 1969, 262. Whereas Prof. Mbiti recognizes Christianity, Islam and the Traditional Religions as the three religious systems that continue to be dominant in Africa, it is AA Mazrui *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, Boston, Mass., 1986 which sees all the three religions as a significant part of what properly constitutes the contemporary African heritage. One may think that to include the African Religions in the heritage of the modern Africa is to be anachronistic. This it must be said is not the case. There is vast literature that indicates that many Africans actually live at 'two levels'. The most prominent Christian sources on this problem are SG Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, Accra, 1965, 82, 145; KA Busia, *Report on a Social Survey – Sekondi-Takoradi*, London, 1950, 79 & 117; KA Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy*, London 1967, 14; K Little, 'The Mende in Sierra Leone' in: *African Worlds*, edit. D Forde, London, 1963, 134-7; and GM Satiloane, 'How the Traditional World-View Persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana' in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. E Fashole-Luke, Bloomington, Ind. : Indiana University, 1978.

<sup>14</sup> DB Barrett, 'AD 200: 350 million Christians in Africa' in: *International Review of Mission*, 59(1970), 39-54.

<sup>15</sup> R Oliver, *How Christian is Africa?* London, 1965, 8.



one easily believes Walls when he says that in our own time there is a complete change in the center of gravity of Christianity from Europe and North America to Africa.<sup>16</sup> This change is not a mere statistical reality, it has far reaching consequences for the entire Christian faith. The African Christians, as Barrett wrote in 1970, might as well 'transform Christianity permanently into a primarily non-Western religion'<sup>17</sup> Consequently, as Walls argues

... what happens within the African Churches in the next generation will determine the whole shape of church history for centuries to come. Whether and, in what way, world evangelization is carried on may well be determined by what goes on in Africa; what sort of theology is most characteristic of the Christianity of the twenty-first century may well depend on what has happened in the minds of African Christians in the interim.<sup>18</sup>

The basis of Prof. Walls' argument is his conviction that theology worth talking about is that which has '... some noticeable effect in the lives and minds of a significant number of people'<sup>19</sup>. The population of the evangelicals in the context of Africa must be significant. Consequently, how the African evangelical thinkers respond to the rise of the African Renaissance as the new identity of Africa may as well give the African evangelicals a new agenda in the global theological situation.

#### **ISSUES WHICH EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY NEEDS TO CONSIDER**

There are in the meantime at least four issues that theology in the context of the Africa of the African Renaissance will urgently need to

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<sup>16</sup> AF Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History' in: *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, Leiden, 1976, 180.

<sup>17</sup> D Barrett, 'AD 2000: 350 million Christians in Africa', 39-54.

<sup>18</sup> AF Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History', 183.

<sup>19</sup> AF Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History', 183.

address. There is *first of all* the issue of African Christianity having to generate its own point of view. Since the 1970s theologians have consistently written about the significance of contextualization. However, there is little evidence that contextualization has been taken seriously by African Christian thought. But today more than ever before, we have to go to work and from there bring both to the new Africa and to the global context tangible content.<sup>20</sup> Historically, theology in the African context has focused so much on methodology<sup>21</sup>. Today, the situation on the ground needs content – what can theology, Evangelical Theology for that matter, offer? Professor George Kinoti has powerfully described the current situation of African Christianity and with it the African Christian thought in the following words:

there is a sense in which Christianity in Africa is the White man's religion. The denominations we belong to, the liturgies we use, the hymns we sing, the theologies that govern our beliefs and conduct, be they liberal or evangelical, are all made in the West. Most of the Christian books we read originate from the West and usually written for the Western readers. This is not to blame the Western church: it time to say to the African Christians to begin to think and do things for themselves<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> John Mbiti on 26 May 1985, over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, stated that, 'the Christians in Africa have a faith but not a theology'.

<sup>21</sup> Recent literature on the methodology of African theology is immense. The following is a very small sample of some works in this regard: JS Pobee, *Toward African Theology*. Nashville, 1979; A Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* New York, 1977; A Shorter, *Towards a theology of Inculturation*. New York, 1988; C Nyamiti, *African Christian Theology: Its Nature, Problems and Methods*. Kampala, 1969; C Nyamiti, *The way to Christian Theology for Africa*. Eldoret, 1975; JS Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*. Eldoret, 1984; R. Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology*. Nairobi, 1987.

<sup>22</sup> G Kinoti, *Vision for a Bright Africa*. Kampala, 1997, 74,75.

Kinoti's observation is obviously an embarrassment to the 351 million of Christians in Africa today<sup>23</sup> because he has said it as it is. Dick France clearly agrees with Kinoti when he suggests that the African Church ' . . . needs more teaching and direction from within, not from without. It needs theology, its own African Christian theology. Until this is achieved, . . . it will not grow in influence on the new Africa, and it will be increasingly dismissed as a legacy from the colonial past'<sup>24</sup>. The Africa of the African Renaissance is first of all about self-reliance and contribution to the global stage. How can theology in Africa urge for self-reliance in other areas of existence and make tangible theological contribution to the global situation when it clearly has not learnt how to think?

*The second problem* touches on what David Tracy calls the 'publics' of theology. Tracy argues that there are at least three publics of theology-- the university, the believing community and the public arena<sup>25</sup>. The task of theology in each of these publics differ significantly. If theology has not understood its own public, there is likely going to be 'internal confusion and external chaos'<sup>26</sup>. Individual African theologians such as Mbiti, Fashole-Luke, Tshibangu, Pobee, to name but a few have one foot in the academy and the other in the church and sometimes it is not clear which public they really are addressing. This is true also of the evangelical

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<sup>23</sup> D Barrett, 'AD 2000: 350 million Christians in Africa' is of the conviction that the Christian population in the African context has previously been underestimated. Consequently in 1970, Barrett estimated the growth of Christian adhesion in Africa at twice the rate of population increase; this allowed him to give 351 million as the number of Christians in Africa by the year 2000 (see his 'AD 2000:350 million Christians in Africa', 1970). This concern that the Christian population has previously been underestimated had earlier on been expressed by CG Baeta who in 1968 wrote that the "figures, derived from official Church sources, represent far less than the actual numbers of professing Christians" (*Christianity in Tropical Africa*, London, 1968, xii).

<sup>24</sup> Dick France quoted in T Adeyemo, *Reflections on the State of Christianity in Africa*, Potchefstroom, 1995, 5.

<sup>25</sup> D Tracey, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York, 1981,5.

<sup>26</sup> D Tracey, *The Analogical Imagination*, 3.

theologians. Tite Tienou confesses that his own works and those of Byang Kato in actual fact belong to the academy.<sup>27</sup> The Bible schools and theological colleges focus on the community of faith.

It seems clear therefore that neither the African theologians nor the Bible schools and theological colleges have noticed the public arena where laws and policies are formulated and their implementation enforced as the third constituency of theology. This neglect has meant that theology in the African situation is understood to be a preserve of the seminary, the church related university, and the pastoral setting and is therefore completely disengaged from the affairs of the wider society. Can this mentality persist into the era of the African Renaissance without dire consequences for theology? I believe that the evangelicals have an opportunity to make significant contributions to the wider public of the African society. In any case, as Tienou once asked, 'who in Africa is more interested in applying biblical truths to emergency situations than the local evangelical pastor!'<sup>28</sup>

*The third issue* is a direct result of the first problem and the second one. It is the question of the nature of preparation taking place in our theological institutions. How ready are our theological institutions for the Africa that is being born in our midst? Talk about poverty, disease, peace, racial-tribal tensions and so on – what is the evangelical faith saying about these issues? Of course there is a lot that the church, the evangelicals included, is doing in the rather delicate process of rebuilding Africa. The services and the actions themselves testify to mastery of intricate and specialised skills seasoned with focused vision for humanity and the larger society. Where do the evangelical Christians involved in such problem-solving situations get such skills from? Do the African evangelical theological institutions prepare their students with such creativity and critical thinking skills as fluency, problem-solving and problem-finding and evaluation desperately needed in the process of engaging with other disciplines in the construction of the new Africa? We worry that this is not happening as the African institutions of

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<sup>27</sup> T Tienou. *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa*. Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1982, 49.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 50.

theological formation, whether evangelical or liberal, have neither seized control of their destiny nor have they given serious thought to tangible contributions they can make to the reconstruction of Africa.

Then there is *the problem of paradigm*. Justin Ukpong has identified at least three major theological paradigms operational in the African context. They are African Inculturation Theology (focusing on theology and the problem of cultural identity), Black Theology (dealing with the question of colour), and the Liberation Theology (addressing the problem of poverty and injustice in Africa)<sup>29</sup>. To these three we could also add the African women theology (handling the issue of gender in Africa).<sup>30</sup> Evangelical Theology in the context of Africa has not had a unique paradigm as it sees itself as standing in the line of traditional theology. However the theological paradigms mentioned arose in various sociopolitical and religio-cultural contexts.

The question that we must ask now is whether any one of these paradigms has the structural capacity to address the Africa of the African Renaissance. Does South Africa for example still need Black Theology five years after the formal death of apartheid? How can the traditionally anti-political oppression Liberation Theology bring healing to Nigeria, Eritrea, and Mozambique while the governments in these countries are clearly committed to moral high grounds and are genuinely pursuing avenues that will make the respective countries work? Could one give prominence to the identity problem while only an insignificant population in the West still regard Africa as unworthy of participating in the global stage? What will the African Evangelical Theology do to ensure that its own pattern of theological reflection is adequate for the demands of the new situation? An examination of these questions reveal that the Africa of the African Renaissance is clearly confronting theology with an emergency situation, a situation where the issue is construction and

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<sup>29</sup> JS Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*. Eldoret, 1984.

<sup>30</sup> MA Oduyoye, 'The Roots of African Christian Feminism' in: *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, Nairobi, 1986, 36.

not race, culture, gender or poverty. A situation as this should help produce a different and a good theology<sup>31</sup>.

These conditions need some sort of remedy. The Africa of the African Renaissance expects theology to participate along with other academic disciplines in locating solutions to the African problems. While there is this pressure urging theology to be involved, there is also the contradictory feeling within the world of academia which views theology as a prodigal discipline. Of course theology from the very outset knows that its claim to truth as well as its methodology finds no recognition outside the community of faith. But regardless of this initial setback, theology has to put its house in order and to do everything in its power to ensure that she is not justly ridiculed and that she finds some sort of acceptance within her cultural environment.

#### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE CONTEXT OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

Already the new Africa has put theology in its self defense. The response of theology to this challenge should not be that of pessimism even though there could be reasons for that; neither should the response be mere optimism as if theology is so complete that it can no longer incorporate any constructive criticism. With or without a situation like this, theology as Adeyemo advises, should always take a realistic point of view<sup>32</sup>. No one can undo the fact that the gospel brought light to Africa, neither can anyone deny that Christianity is the religion of the majority of the Africans.

The African Christians however need to understand and be able to express their faith in light of the questions raised by their ever changing situation. Even if the African Renaissance never came into existence, what the Christian faith means in our ever changing world would still require rigorous reflection. Saint Anselm underscored the

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<sup>31</sup> David Bosch in the article 'Missionary theology in Africa' in: *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 49 (1984) 15 explains that good theology always arises out of emergency situations.

<sup>32</sup> T Adeyemo, *Reflections on the State of Christianity in Africa*, 4,5.

significance of understanding what one believes in his famous *fides quarens intellectum*. Professor Daniel Migliore resuscitated this line of thought in his recent book *Faith Seeking Understanding* (1991). It is not possible to adequately understand the meaning of faith<sup>33</sup> without engaging problem-finding and problem-solving mechanisms. In order for me to understand what 'my' faith means to me, I must be willing to have and exercise certain attitudes and sets of skills that problem-finding and problem-solving researchers have summarized in the twin phenomena of creativity and critical thinking.

Creativity and critical thinking are related. In order to be creative one has to have the skill of critical thinking<sup>34</sup>. Both creativity and critical thinking require the application of the right attitude as well as such largely accepted cognitive skills as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation. Creativity researchers have found out that these skills are applied through at least five steps; none of which is adequate in and of itself and all of them are necessary. The steps are: (1) recognising or selecting the problem, (2) clarifying and representing the elements of the problem as an extended effort to solving it, (3) proposing solutions to the problem, (4) testing and evaluating or restructuring the solutions, and (5) revising, restating, and re-evaluation or simply verification and elaboration<sup>35</sup>.

The African theologians should begin to take seriously the Africa being born by the African Renaissance. This is the field where questions for African theology at the beginning of the twenty first century are being raised. We should be able to identify what the central questions in this context are. Theology should recognise in the situation of reception everything that is mean, ugly, brutish and degrading. The purpose of recognising these aspects of the context is

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<sup>33</sup> Faith at the end of the day, as Cantwell Smith has well explained is truly personal: 'My faith is an act that I make, myself, naked before God' (C Smith, *The Meaning and end of Religion*, London, 1978, 191)

<sup>34</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 98

<sup>35</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 96-99; see also RT Brown, 'Creativity: What are we to measure,' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*, New York 1989, 5&6.

so that they may be explained and their nature thoroughly understood. Theology needs for example to understand and explain Africa's perennial famine, unemployment, crime, disease, racial and tribal tensions, corruption, and so on as they are, if it is to explain the Good News in this situation. These explanations should make sense to the other experts taking part in the problem-solving mission.

But theology must be fluent with the universal Christian story – the gospel. The gospel according to Lamin D Sanneh can be expressed in the conceptual forms of every culture<sup>36</sup>. Kwame Bediako also argues strongly for the significance of the capacity to transpose the Christian message from its biblical matrix into the categories of understanding available in the indigenous cultures<sup>37</sup>. But as would be expected, the process of rethinking the Gospel message for another intellectual culture involves a functioning within and a good grasp of the universal Christian story. To function within the universal Christian story or as Vincent of Lerins emphasised, 'what has been believed everywhere, always by all' (*Commonitorium* II, 1-3), is not to fall into a Eurocentric formation<sup>38</sup>. The African church is a part of the universal church, it does not have another story. It is this same universal story that the African theology must identify, listen to, and clarify for the Africa of the African Renaissance.

The gospel will sure disturb the solutions other disciplines are offering within the African Renaissance debate. Our attitude when

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<sup>36</sup> LD Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, New York, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> K Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, Oxford, 1992. 426-441; see also his other book *Christianity in Africa*, Edinburgh, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> As we search for the 'kernel of the universal Christian story', it is important that we note that Western theology as would be expected has reformulated what we have received in Africa as 'the universal Christian story' to conform to their own situation. Western theologians for example define the modern person in terms of the modern industrial affluence where time and space rule supreme. Some Western theologians deny the reality of the spirit world, and apply the gospel to a non pluralistic society. In Africa, I am not because of time and space, but because I am a member of my community; the spirit world is real, and the gospel is applied to a religiously plural context. Knowing shifts in meaning in areas such as this motivates us to a serious search for 'the kernel of the universal story'.



this happens should be that we let the gospel be the judge, and not the other way. When the gospel disturbs the solutions offered by other disciplines, theology must be ready to explain the nature of what has taken place since a problem properly understood is half solved. The skill needed for this kind of task is the capacity to clarify a problem. Annis suggests the relevant questions that could help here: 'What are the elements of the problem? What are the relevant issues involving it? How is the problem to be represented so that it can be explored and solved?'<sup>39</sup>. The theologian should be in a position to offer a greater elaboration of the problem. Creativity researchers believe that when problems are properly defined then it is easier to see how they relate with other experiences<sup>40</sup>.

Once the theologian has clarified the problem, he/she should be in a position to propose theological solutions. At this stage the theologian should be in a position to propose many alternative solutions. This brings flexibility into theology. He/she must however be able to narrow down to the one proposal that is most plausible. Weisburg believes that new solutions should keep in mind the solutions of old themes<sup>41</sup>. 'Keeping in mind the old themes' referred to here is in theology what Professor Brummer calls the test of "consonance with tradition"<sup>42</sup>. In other words, is the solution offered consonant with clear teaching of the Christian faith?

The solutions suggested must be tested, evaluated and restructured. This is the domain of critical thinking. According to Annis the skills required here are interpretation (the ability to

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<sup>39</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 97.

<sup>40</sup> B Stein, 'Memory and Creativity' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*. New York 1989, 163-176.

<sup>41</sup> RW Weisberg, 'Problem solving and Creativity' in: RJ Sternberg (ed.), *The Nature of Creativity*. Cambridge, 1988, 148-176.

<sup>42</sup> Professor V Brummer in his paper 'Metaphorical Thinking and Systematic Theology' read in 1998 at the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, argues that there are at least two significances of 'consonance with tradition'. First, it confines the solution(s) within the boundaries of cumulative tradition thereby allowing the solution(s) to be recognisable for the community of believers, and in the second place it helps the theologian to learn from the mistakes of the predecessors.

comprehend and express the meaning or significance of data), analysis (the capacity to define terms, compare ideas, identify problems and analyze arguments), evaluation (assessing the logic of a proposal), inference (drawing justified conclusions), explanation and self-regulation<sup>43</sup>. These steps ensure that the solutions suggested are relevant, adequate, intelligible, and credible<sup>44</sup>. The resultant proposal should be original but it should also have the capacity to stand both internal investigation and external scrutiny. If any of these standards is not met, the theologian must go back to work.

Even after the solutions have been tested in light of the criteria suggested, it must be emphasised that they in a sense still remain tentative. They are not the final word. They may still have to be revised, restated, and re-evaluated in light of new discoveries, new questions and new contexts. Perhaps this factor would help the African theologians not to despair in their search for truth in a context where theological suggestions will increasingly be challenged by the other disciplines participating in offering solutions for the construction of the new Africa.

#### **FOSTERING CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING**

If creativity and critical thinking are the skills that theology needs in order for it to participate along with other academic disciplines in search for the solutions of the African problems, then we have to think through how these skills may be fostered. The suggestions we have made here apply particularly to the institutions of theological formation. We have here given three distinct suggestions.

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<sup>43</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 98.

<sup>44</sup> V Brummer, 'The Identity of the Christian tradition', a paper read at the faculty of theology, University of Stellenbosch, 1998, 1-5. In this paper he develops a criterion of judging theological adequacy.

**Focus on Elaborative Learning.**

Let the student think about the information in question, let them ask questions. The Luo of Kenya have the saying: *penjo e ng'eyo* (asking is knowing). Create an atmosphere that allows for questions and prompts the memory to go back to its own bank. Research indicates that elaborative rehearsal is the way information enters long term memory (LTM)<sup>45</sup>. When dealing theologically with a problem like poverty for example, the student needs to ask questions about poverty, to think through the meaning and significance of poverty, to relate the information he/she has on poverty with what he/she already knows. This means that the student has to participate, and to formulate his/ her own argument. Such participation enables the students to locate within their own experiences relevant evidence that might either buttress or attack the new information.

Two problems traditionally inhibit elaborative learning; the problems are the tendency of the mentor to do it all for the student, this tendency has also been called 'spoon feeding'. The lecture method commonly used in the African theological institutions for various reasons is largely responsible for this problem. The other problem is the tendency to present too many details about a problem. Theology courses taught in the African theological institutions tend to focus on the informational content and the result of such a focus is that the knowledge base is never given time to be fluent. Theology faculties should work on removing these problems in order to allow the students to develop their own solutions.

**Help the Theology Student to be Better  
Problem Finders and Problem Solvers**

The Africa of the African Renaissance is now talking of solving her own problems. The theology students need to address and therefore have opinion on a number of uniquely African issues especially given the urgent demands of the new Africa. This however is feasible if the students are trained to be better problem-finders and better problem-solvers. There are at least four issues here.

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<sup>45</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 100.

*First of all* the theology lecturers might have to be more self-conscious about their own problem-finding and problem-solving techniques and to share them with their students. *Secondly*, the theological institutions might have to introduce courses about problem solving. Such courses would then deal with such issues as seeking adequate explanation and justification, looking for inconsistencies, tracing out the consequences of positions, identifying coherence and mutual support, and considering the question of comprehensiveness<sup>46</sup>. Research indicates that a student's capacity to think creatively and critically is vastly improved if he/she takes courses that deal directly with creativity and critical thinking<sup>47</sup>.

*Thirdly*, there is the question of evaluation. The way the theology mentors evaluate students at the end of the courses for example should genuinely indicate that they want the students to develop creativity and critical thinking skills. This empowers the students and enables them to be independent thinkers. Then *lastly*, there is the need for practice. In order for one to be creative they need lots of practice. The opportunities to practice are numerous in Africa. They need, as they practice, to formulate problems and ask numerous questions related to the problems and the appropriateness of the suggested methods. Brainstorming has been found to be a helpful activity where one is in the process of both formulating a problem and proposing solutions<sup>48</sup>.

#### **Attend to the Students' Attitude Towards Theology**

The attitude towards theology here as has been stated elsewhere has generally been negatively affected by the history of African Christianity and the rise of extreme nationalism in the newly independent African countries. An attitude like this is bad for theology as a discipline and for its inner development. Our students should be encouraged to know that some of the best contemporary African theologians such as JS Mbiti, K Bediako, JS Pobee, B Kato,

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<sup>46</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 102.

<sup>47</sup> DB Annis & L Annis, 'Does Philosophy Improve Critical Thinking?' in: *Teaching Philosophy* 3 (1979), 145-152.

<sup>48</sup> An elaborate discussion on this is available in JS Dacey, *Fundamentals of Creative Thinking*, Lexington, 1989.

do not just see Christian scholarship as a luxury but to the contrary they view it as a necessity in the rough terrain of scholarship. Their works reveal that there are African theologians who have taken theology as a discipline that is no less demanding, no less strenuous and no less academically rigorous. Creativity research has revealed that creative individuals tend to be motivated by the challenge of work<sup>49</sup>. Let the students sweat their way through. Let them use the best of logic to come to their own positions but let them also see examples of Christian thinkers from their own context who have strived to remain true to the Christian tradition, indicated high drive to produce and displayed great heights of perseverance. This is a way of offering the students incite into how to be intrinsically motivated for the tough task ahead. Let the students do these not only because ready made solutions reduces the students' capacity to be creative<sup>50</sup>, but more so because at the end of the day theology deals with faith, 'my own subjective' faith. I should have the capacity to generate questions to help me to better understand the place in which I am before my God.

### CONCLUSION

The new spirit of self-reliance that is taking root in Africa as the continent seizes control of her destiny and seeks a place in the global stage is a reality that can not be denied. But equally true is that the destiny of Africa can not just be left in the hands of the engineers, the doctors, the financiers and other experts. Placide Tempels stated that the African live more by being than by following their own ideas<sup>51</sup>. Mbiti in a way corroborated Tempels on this point when he declared that the African is incurably religious. Religion, Mbiti explains,

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<sup>49</sup> The readings that are useful in this regard are C Martindale, 'Personality, Situation, and Creativity' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*, New York 1989, 211-232; and RW Woodman & LF Schoenfeldt, 'Individual Differences in Creativity' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*, New York 1989, 77-91.

<sup>50</sup> T Amabile, *The Social Psychology of Creativity*, New York, 1983.

<sup>51</sup> P Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris, 1959, 23.

'permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it'<sup>52</sup>. The other theological thinkers who believe that in African traditional societies, nothing falls outside religion are JB Danquah and Bolaji Idowu<sup>53</sup>. These thinkers could have overstated themselves. Kudadjie has helped us to recognise that besides religion, the African society has other morality determiners such as language, education, social and geographical environments, tradition and custom, conscience and intuition<sup>54</sup>. But overstated as the point may be, one message has been passed across; namely that the part played by religion in the existence of the African is significant. Africa's major religions – Christianity, Islam, and the African traditional religions – must be recognised as formidable players in displaying the nature of modern Africa.

How Islam and the African traditional religions are to participate in the direction the new Africa is taking is their decision. Christianity however has the biblical obligation to plant the seed of the Kingdom of God wherever it is at all times. In the middle of war, famine, pestilence, poverty, corruption, and chronic political instability, the rule of God is being felt everywhere in Africa. The African church knows that God is at work in that context because of its function as a sign of the Kingdom of God. Since theology is about *fides quarens intellectum*, it is imperative that Christianity should use all the resources available to tell the new Africa how it understands God's rule here and now. Such a statement should not just be directed to the African audience, it has to find space also in the global theological situation since Africa is today recognized as the center of

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<sup>52</sup> JS Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1, 262.

<sup>53</sup> JB Danquah contribution in this regard is his *Akan Doctrine of God*, (1968). In this book, Danquah argues that religion and particularly the concept of God influences significantly the moral attitude of the African (ibid.: 2, 3, 16). Whereas Danquah tends to be ambiguous, Bolaji Idowu is forthright. In his *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief* (1963), he makes it clear that the African does not make an attempt to separate morality and religion, ' . . . and it is impossible for them to do so without disastrous consequences' (*Ibid.* :145, 146).

<sup>54</sup> JN Kudadjie, 'Does Religion determine morality in African societies?' in: JS Pobee(ed.), *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, Leiden, 1976. 75.

gravity of the world's Christianity. The task is obviously daunting but since it is done to the glory of God and since the Gospel is the light of our path at all times, we believe that theology will not get lost in the thick of search for the meaning of the rule of God in the new Africa and in its determination to contribute to the global theological situation.