

# Theology and religion: the rise of an african hermeneutics essay

[History](#)



Introduction            Theology, being a discipline of religious thought, literally, the study of God, does not remain confined in transcendent statements and to an esoteric and sacred realm. Rather it encompasses all worldly dimensions, and has always had essential significance for cultural evolution and general intellectual life. 1            The modern day Africa is a land comprised of emancipated states that have explosively arose from a “collapsing colonial society”. It was once a primitive civilization that was governed by European colonialism. So to say, the new nation must face the problems that go hand in hand with their independence while attaining a political, economic, and social stability. 2 There are many traditional religious systems among African people. Christianity has been introduced in Africa, south of Sahara by European and American missionaries, who then were responsible for the establishment of schools and churches.

3 Africa’s search for their own identity has affected its social, political, economic, and spiritual aspect. Upon considering the status quo of political component of the African community, it had come to a realization that it must disaffiliate from the white man’s theology. 4 Then on, many have been converted Christians and the biblical teachings have been a part of their daily lives. \_\_\_\_\_1 “ Theology”, (1982), The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia Knowledge in Depth, vol. 18, USA: Grolier Incorporated, pp. 274-275. 2 “ Africa” (1964), Encyclopedia International, USA: Grolier Incorporated, pp.

128, 144.    3 Ibid., p. 144. 4 L. Krog, ‘ African Hermeneutics: the current state’, November 11, 2005, retrieved 2August 2008,

pdf>. Theology and Religion: The Rise of an African HermeneuticsOppression and racism had been apart of African History. For years, they have been colonized and have been subjected upon submission to the authority of people estranged to their land. Many instances have been reported about mass killings, women being raped, people being buried alive, and people being burned to death.

Not to mention, some people are being beheaded, and some other parts are being amputated if they don't admit the blame they never did. The Sandinistas were the oppressors who took hold of all these inhuman persecutions. 5 After all the grievances, all the regrets for the lives that were lost, Africa was left to embrace the independence that waits together with the challenges it withholds. One of which is its hermeneutics. It is quite inappropriate to say that the standard biblical hermeneutics, being Western in origin would be the universal perspective, if I may say.

Though it can be considered as being drawn towards universal, but the mere existence of structural bounds delimits human thoughts and beliefs. 6

Borrowing J. D. Roberts Sr.'s words in his " Contextual Theology: Liberation and Indigenization", the study of religion is the key to a deeper understanding of a particular religion. 7The African Continent is both the origin and the receiver of a large number of cultures.

The western colonialists tend to neglect the African history, which was perhaps, one of the longest among many great continents. The only problem is that there were relatively few written records of their history brought about by the African's illiteracy. They were governed by oral tradition, which

then cannot be purely reliable. In the religious stand point; Africa is a mixture of aboriginal Sub-Saharan cults, Christianity and Islam. It was governed by the Western rule in the late nineteenth century, which determined the Africa we know today. Religious differences can be traced to ideological and cultural differences, individualism, civil religion, liberalism, Puritan influence and other factors.

In light of this Western ambiguity, and given the context of European origins and implications in Western imperial projects, it should not be surprising that modern conception of religion has suffered quite varied fate among non-Westerners over the last two centuries. 8 It was during the eighteenth century where the Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason took place. It was built on the achievements of the Scientific Revolution.

It emphasized that rational thought, political rights, and personal freedom would bring great changes in politics and society. 9 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 E. W. Robb & J.

Robb, “ The Betrayal of the Church: Apostasy & Renewal in the Mainline Denominations” retrieved 2 October 2008 from [http://www. cmpage. org/betrayal/#table](http://www.cmpage.org/betrayal/#table). 6 J. D. Roberts, Sr., (n.

d), “ Contextual Theology: Liberation and Indigenization” retrieved 10 October 2008 from <http://www. religion-online. org/showarticle. asp? title=1843>. 7 Ibid. 8 A.

L. Greil & D. G. Bromley, *Defining Religion: investigating the boundaries between the sacred and secular*, Elsevier Science Ltd, Netherlands, 2003, p. 170.

. 9 M. Perry, et. al.

, (1988), “ A History of the World Revised Ed.” USA: Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 414. People in the West then started to question the Bible. Lorenzo Valla, in 1440 had proved that the “ Donation of Constantine” was false made.

Biblical scriptures were then viewed as secular. They were further interpreted in the light of historical or social forces. However, Africa was not influenced by the Enlightenment period. African people have interpreted the bible in a way that it is associated with the “ real-life community and concrete situations”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it was interpreted in the context of their own, and in terms of their experience of being oppressed, being the one to suffer, and the feeling of insecurity.

<sup>11</sup> The concept of the Holy Spirit became a vital part of the beliefs of African Pentecostals. For them, the Holy Spirit is responsible in making the people understand the Bible. <sup>12</sup> The representation of Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism makes up African religions, hence, making it holistic in terms of religious experience. The theology being developed is a theology of Liberation. <sup>13</sup> Liberalism is the culmination of a development that goes back to Hebrew prophets, the teachings of the pre Socratic philosophers, and the Sermon on the Mount, from all of which there emerged a sense of human

individuality, a liberation of the individual from complete subservience to the group, and a relaxation of the tight hold of custom, law and authority. 14 North American reality is different from that of Latin American. Comparing their contextual theology, it is nothing but two varying ones. Oppression often takes the form of classicism in Latin America while racism is most evident in the United States.

15 Bible is considered as source of central teachings of Christianity, but when we consider the African Theology, it should speak of their experience with their God. 16 Both context can enrich one another. Being open to each other's culture can enhance the teachings of both. Faith is not being concentrated on your own beliefs. 17 " The question of how one maintains sanity in a society bent on inhuman oppression based on a race is a matter that must be faced before one can find health and wholeness as a person within a community of persons". 18 \_\_\_\_\_ 10 A.

Anderson, (1996), " The Hermeneutical Processes of Pentecostal- Type African Initiated Churches in South Africa" retrieved 10 October 2008 from <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/anderson/Publications/hermeneutic.htm> 11 Ibid 12 C.

L. Smith (2008), " Revolutionaries and Revivalists: Pentecostal Eschatology, Politics and the Nicaraguan Revolution" retrieved 10 October 2008 from <http://www.brill.nl/pneu>. pp. 55-82. 13 J.

D. Roberts, Sr., (n.

d), "Contextual Theology: Liberation and Indigenization" retrieved 10 October 2008 from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=184314> "Liberalism", (1982), The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia Knowledge in Depth, vol. 10, USA: Grolier Incorporated.

P. 846. 15 Ibid 16 Roberts, Op.

Cit 17 B. H. Kato, 'Theological Issues in Africa', (n.

d), retrieved September 29, 2008 from ATLAS serials Journals. Pp. 143-152.

18 Roberts, Op. Cit. Bibliography A. Anderson, (1996), "The Hermeneutical Processes of Pentecostal-Type African Initiated Churches in South Africa" retrieved 10 October 2008 from [http://artsweb.bham.](http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/anderson/Publications/hermeneutic.htm)

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