On Being Evangelical and African: Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo, and Tite Tiénou and the Contextualization Debate

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ON BEING EVANGELICAL AND AFRICAN: BYANG KATO, TOKUNBOH ADEYEMO, AND TITE TIÉNOU AND THE CONTEXTUALIZATION DEBATE

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door

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(15 mei 1982, Rotterdam)

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There are some people who contributed to this study without knowing it. When I was conducting empirical research in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, in 2005, I stayed in a guesthouse run by a Catholic monastic community. While doing some reading in the evening sun—Tharcisse Tshibangu's *La Théologie Africaine*—the abbot of the monastery (whose name I do not recall) passed by. We had a nice discussion about the book, and I admitted that I had trouble understanding Tshibangu's rather technical expositions. He encouraged me to persevere and continue to study African theology and discover the fascinating world of African Christianity.

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CHAPTER 1.

Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo, and Tite Tiénou and the Contextualization Debate

Introduction

My first encounter with Africa was in the summer of 2005 during a two-month internship in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC; formerly Zaire). For my master's thesis at Utrecht University, I interviewed pastors from different denominations about their use of the Bible in pastoral ministry. Their responses were fascinating. The women and men whom I encountered lived in a world unlike anything that I had been used to as a young, white, and male student who had grown up in secularized Western Europe.[1] Their approach to the Bible was characterized by great expectation—they believed that God spoke directly to them through Scripture. As I conducted my research, I was confronted by my own feelings of frustration while reading the Bible. At the Faculty of Theology, I had learned that the Bible was primarily historical literature and that the distance between the biblical world and the present day could not be easily bridged. The expectant, flexible, and direct use of Bible texts by these Congolese church leaders filled me with amazement (and, I admit, some jealousy). At the same time, some of them shared examples of Bible exegesis that differed from the hermeneutical standards that I had been taught at the Faculty; it seemed to me that their understanding of Scripture was more determined by subjectivism than by exegetical study. It all puzzled me.

Since then, I have regularly returned to Africa.[2] When I started my pastoral ministry in 2010, I was asked to lead the mission board of Reformed churches in the province of Utrecht, the Netherlands. This gave me the opportunity to regularly travel to Africa; I returned to the DRC and discovered new countries: Cameroon, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Benin. During these working visits to mostly evangelical churches and projects, I always felt a deep spiritual connection with African Christians, as God is not limited by geographic, cultural, or racial boundaries. However, I cannot deny that I often simultaneously experienced the sense of alienation that I felt during my internship in Lubumbashi. The African evangelicals[3] whom I met were making different choices in terms of theology, liturgy, ethics, church governance, and so on. While the similarities were many, the differences seemed to be even more

[1] The "Western world" or "the West" refers to nations and states in the regions of Australasia, Europe, and the Americas. In this study, however, I primarily use this term to indicate a particular type of theology that originated in Western Europe and is deeply shaped by Greek philosophical thought. For a long time, Western theology was considered to be universally valid and applicable. In recent years, the Western domination of theology and missions has been critically interrogated. See, among many others, Sanneh and Carpenter 2005; Vähäkangas 2020.

[2] In this study, following African theologians, I use "Africa" or "African" to refer to sub-Saharan Africa. I realize that this is a simplification and that the African continent is not a monolithic entity but characterized by an endless variety of cultures and contexts.

[3] I realize that the term "evangelical" is used in multiple ways. In this dissertation, I only use this term for those who self-identify as evangelicals. For a more detailed discussion of worldwide evangelicalism, see Larsen and Treier 2007: 1–14.

numerous. I came to understand from firsthand observation that Christianity and context are deeply intertwined. As astutely observed by the late Lamin Sanneh, by embracing the Christian faith, African Christians shaped it according to their own contexts (Sanneh 1989). These expressions of Christianity were at times different from what I was used to but no less meaningful; they reminded me of the multifaceted nature of God.

While doing some reading on evangelicals in Africa, I discovered that, in the academic literature, African evangelical theologians have been (and continue to be) criticized for ignoring the importance of contextualization—the need to express the Christian message within a specific milieu. As outlined below, practitioners and observers of African theology often accuse evangelicals in Africa of uncritically reproducing a Westernized form of Christianity and thus promoting a Christianity that is alien to African settings. This intrigued me, as I had encountered various African evangelical churches and projects that, from my perspective, seemed to be deeply rooted within their own context. Therefore, the following questions arose: What is the background of this scholarly criticism of African evangelicalism, and to what extent does it do justice to the work of evangelical theologians? The present study was born from these questions and considerations and explores these issues by analyzing the works of three leading African evangelical theologians: Byang Kato (1936–1975), Tokunboh Adeyemo (1944–2010), and Tite Tiénou (1949–).

The following sections are dedicated to outlining this study in more detail. First, I situate this study by discussing the emergence and background of the evangelical movement in Africa and the theological critique of African evangelical theology. Then, I introduce the central research question, the theoretical framework, and the relevant analytical concepts. Lastly, I discuss the delineation, methodology, aim and relevance of the study and provide a chapter outline.

Situating the Study

The academic critique of African evangelicalism mainly centers on the theological output of representatives of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), an umbrella organization that represents national evangelical fellowships across Africa. Founded in 1966 by North American missionary societies, the AEA's website states that its aim is to unite, mobilize, and empower evangelical churches for the transformation of Africa.[4] The AEA is one of the regional organizations within the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), which promotes, among other things, theological education, leadership training, and discipleship throughout Africa. Spurred by the leadership of AEA's first African director, Byang Henry Kato, the organization developed as a catalyst for evangelical reflection and education in Africa, founding

[4] See www.aeafrica.org. For the origins and development of the AEA, see Breman 1996.

institutions such as the Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui (FATEB) and the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST; now known as Africa International University), as well as the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA; now known as the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa) and the Christian Learning Materials Centre (CLMC). Although the AEA does not claim to be the sole embodiment of African evangelicalism, it presents itself as one of its main voices (Breman 1998: 3, Nkansah-Obrempong 2010: 293–4) and encompasses national evangelical fellowships in 40 African countries. Because the AEA is an important (if not *the* most important) voice of African evangelical theology, this study focuses on evangelical theology as expressed by theologians of the AEA. More specifically, it focuses on three renowned evangelical scholars—Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou—who have all held leadership positions within the AEA and profoundly co-shaped its theology and each represent different moments in the history of the AEA.

When the AEA was created in the mid-1960s, most African countries had only recently gained independence. Concomitant with the wave of independence (roughly between the 1960s and 1970s), African political thinkers such as Léopold Senghor (1906–2001), Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), Julius Nyerere (1922–1999), and Ali Mazrui (1933–2014) sought to formulate a pan-African cultural identity as a foundation for Africa's new decolonized nations (Mbiti 1969: 262–77). In parallel, some African Catholic and Protestant theologians launched a quest for ecclesiological and theological independence (Parratt 1995: 1–24). They endeavored to answer the following question: Is it possible to develop Christian theology based on an African cultural foundation that is distinct from the kind of theology brought by Western missions? This question was not new. Already, African and Haitian Catholic priests headed by the Congolese Vincent Mulago had issued a theological manifesto in 1956 titled *Des Prêtres Noirs s'Interrogent* (Abble 1956), in which they questioned the adaptation method propagated by Catholic missions and advocated for a deep "inculturation" of the Christian message within the African milieu. This manifesto, which also had a considerable impact outside of the Catholic world, is widely considered to be the birth of African inculturation theology (Kanyandago 2020).

The enthusiasm generated by independence accelerated the search for what would soon be called an "African theology."[5] African Christian theologians,

[5] In the Roman Catholic world, there was a series of theological debates between the Congolese theological student (and later archbishop) Tharcisse Tshibangu and the Belgian professor Alfred Vanneste, dean of the theological faculty at Lovanium University in Kinshasa (formerly Zaire) between 1960 and 1968. These famous debates centered on the possibility of an African way of theologizing. Pope Paul VI's address to Ugandan bishops in 1969, in which he insisted on the legitimacy of constructing a *theologia Africana*, is also considered a pivotal event both within and outside Roman Catholic circles. See Molyneux 1992.

mainly those who were active within churches established during the Western missionary movement,[6] saw it as their task to radically rethink the Christian message within the African milieu. While proposals varied, it seemed that, at the time, Christianity as such was not seen as a problematic colonial legacy[7] but rather the specific interpretation of the Christian religion that had been introduced (and sometimes imposed) during colonial rule.[8] In view of this search for a new theological expression, theologians such as John K. Agbeti, Kwesi A. Dickson (1929–2005), E. Bolaji Idowu (1913–1993), John S. Mbiti (1931–2019), and Harry Sawyerr (1909–1986)[9] emphasized the need to study Africa's pre-Christian religions and cultures as a possible bedrock for Christian theology in Africa (Bediako 1989, Parratt 1987).

The Anglican theologian John Mbiti, who is commonly seen as the nestor of African inculturation theology, summarized the quest for an African theology as follows:

> A Christianity which is heavily intertwined with an imported culture may indeed be very impressive but it cannot be a sufficient substitute for this kind of Christianity that should grow out of the spontaneous free impregnation of the Gospel in the fertile womb of African culture […] Until we can cultivate a genuine Christianity which is truly MADE IN AFRICA, we will be building on a shallow foundation and living on borrowed time. Let it be said once and for all […] that IMPORTED CHRISTIANITY WILL NEVER, NEVER QUENCH THE SPIRITUAL THIRST OF AFRICAN PEOPLES. (Mbiti 1977: 30; capitals in the original)

In her dissertation on the AEA's history, Christina Breman explained that North American evangelicals were deeply concerned about the implications of the contemporary search for an Africanized theology (and the renewed interest

[6] The systematic reflection on inculturation primarily took place within Catholic and Protestant churches instituted by foreign missions. Among many others, the Nigerian-born scholar Ogbu Kalu highlighted that, long before these theological inculturation debates, African Independent Churches (AICs) emerged, which also intimately connected Christianity and Christian theology with local African contexts (Kalu 2008). The pr-esent study distinguishes between AICs and inculturated practices as grassroots expressions of inculturation and African theology as the systematic reflection on theologizing in African contexts, although it is evident that lived practice and academic reflection are closely intertwined.

[7] From the 1970s onward, scholars such as Okot p'Bitek (1971), Ali Mazrui (1986), and Tinyiko Maluleke (1998) critically interrogated what they viewed as the retention of postcolonial systems and structures in Christianity in Africa, suggesting that imported Christianity is essentially alien to the African soul.

[8] The report of the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians held in Accra, Ghana in 1977 summarized this widespread feeling: "The African situation requires a new methodology that is different from the approaches of the dominant theologies of the West. African theology must reject, therefore, the prefabricated ideas of North-Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggle of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination" (Appiah-Kubi and Torres 1979: 193).

[9] Musimbi Kanyoro highlighted that the inculturation enterprise has been dominated by men. She and other African female theologians have expressed doubts about whether the attention to Africa's pre-Christian traditions and values as a context to express the gospel would be liberating for African women, as most African societies were traditionally patriarchal (Kanyoro 1999).

in African religions and cultures that this generated), which was deemed to be a potential threat to the uniqueness of the salvation proclaimed in the gospel. Two American missionary organizations—the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association (IFMA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA)—founded the AEA in 1966, led by the American missionary Kenneth L. Downing (1908–1989).[10] Breman indicated that the AEA was founded because of two primary concerns: the perceived threats of the inculturation enterprise, as propagated by scholars such as Mbiti and Idowu, and the isolated position of the various evangelical churches throughout Africa.[11] The AEA's objective was to "provide a spiritual fellowship among evangelical Christians that profess the same faith, as a means of united action" and to "alert Christians to trends and spiritual dangers which would undermine the Scriptural foundation of the Gospel testimony" (Breman 1996: 20).

In this regard, Breman argued, the AEA's birth cannot be seen in isolation from the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which had been founded in 1963 and endorsed the priorities of African inculturation theologians.[12] The AEA saw itself as a counterforce against "liberal" tendencies in African theological and ecumenical circles. Much was at stake; evangelicals both inside and outside the continent feared that, despite the growth of Christianity in recent decades, African Christianity would relapse into a form of neo-paganism, whereby its lifesaving message would be lost (Breman 1996: 14–20; see also Ferdinando 2004).[13]

With Kato's appointment as general secretary (he directed the AEA from 1973 to 1975), tensions came to a head.[14] In his book *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975), Kato openly and vehemently attacked proponents of African theology, particularly Mbiti and Idowu, as well as the ecumenical movement in Africa embodied

[10] Initially, the name of the organization was the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar. However, its name was changed in 1993 to the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (Breman 1996: 2). Throughout this study, the abbreviation AEA is used.

[11] In a 1998 article, Breman added a third reason. In the 1960s, numerous African leaders received funds from the ecumenical movement to study in North America or Western Europe. Evangelicals feared that, upon returning to their African homelands, these students would introduce the "liberal" thinking taught at Western theological institutions. Breman 1998: 5.

[12] One of the AACC's first projects was the Pan-African Theological Conference held in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1966, where an attempt was made to outline the contours and priorities of an African theology. The publication of contributions to this conference, *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (1969), caused much concern among African evangelicals (Breman 1996: 414, Kapteina 2006: 64–5).

[13] Coined by Kato, the term "Christo-paganism" became a winged expression among evangelicals to indicate the danger of a syncretistic Christianity, a mingling of Christian and pre-Christian elements (Kapteina 2006: 62).

[14] One factor in the heightened tensions was the call for a moratorium on Western missions and missionaries issued by Kenyan theologian John Gatu at the AACC's general assembly in Lusaka, 1974. Kato attended this conference as an observer and was startled by the anti-Western tone of its presenters (Kato 1975: 159–69).

by the AACC.[15] According to Kato, African inculturation theologians, in their criticism of the Western cultural imperialism imposed by colonial powers and missions, risked losing the very essence of the Christian message, which was salvation through Christ alone. He maintained that, with their attention to African worldviews and traditional religiosity, they deliberately promoted a syncretistic form of Christianity. Sounding the alarm against the "liberal" tendencies that he perceived within the inculturation project, he called upon African evangelicals to safeguard "Biblical Christianity in Africa." Although Kato stressed that theology should be expressed "in terms of the African situation," its foundation lies elsewhere: in the Bible, as the only source for theologizing. Otherwise, the universal message of the gospel—eternal salvation through Jesus Christ alone—would be jeopardized (Kato 1975: 181–4). Sadly, while still in the middle of his discussion with Mbiti, Kato drowned off the Kenyan coast in 1975.[16]

As outlined by Breman (1996), Han (2013), and Kapteina (2006), Kato's successors at the AEA, such as Adeyemo (who succeeded Kato as general secretary), adopted a more open attitude toward African religions and cultures without denying their commitment to the final authority of the Bible. Moreover, in his introduction to African evangelical theology, Matthew Michael emphasized that a shift occurred after Kato. Rather than Kato's "radical discontinuity" vis-à-vis Africa's pre-Christian past, thinkers such as Adeyemo, Tiénou, and Yusufu Turaki (1946–) embraced an approach of "critical continuity" and sought ways to creatively integrate the biblical and African worlds.[17] However, Michael underscored that these post-Katonian theologians have not yet been able to move beyond him, stating that "the reactive tone in terms of Katonian polemic has continually marked out these African evangelicals" (Michael 2007: 153). This accords with Tiénou's observation that a theologian such as the late Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) reinforced the idea that post-Katonian theologians "are biblicists who see no value in African religions

[15] At the World Mission Conference organized by the World Council of Churches in Bangkok at the turn of the years 1972–1973, a contextual and holistic approach to salvation was promoted: salvation touches primarily on concrete life in the here and now. This more comprehensive approach to salvation was adopted by the AACC (in which Idowu played a pioneering role) in search of ways to connect the gospel to the experiences of African people (Ferdinando 2004, Kapteina 2006). See also my article on Kato in this study (Chapter 2).

[16] In an article on the biblical basis of African theology, John Mbiti recalls meeting Kato just ten days before his tragic death. According to Mbiti, Kato apologized for his "passionate attack on fellow theologians" and promised to revise his book (Mbiti 1980: 119).

[17] This was attested by a 1983 editorial of the *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, which stated that the heart of African Christians is torn: they love Christ as well as their own culture. At its core, the editorial argued, the issue of contextualization is an existential one: Can one be simultaneously genuinely African and genuinely Christian without being torn apart? (Simbiri 1983)

and cultures" through his critical assessment of Kato's reactionary position (Tiénou 2007: 219).[18]

Bediako was not alone in his critique of Kato; other scholars have also criticized Katonian theology for being opposed to contextualization. Academic criticism of the non-contextual character of Katonian theology tends to follow two lines of reasoning. First, some scholars, such as Ezigbo (2010), Kanyoro (1999), Oduyoye (1986), and Parratt (1995), considered the Katonian position to be a form of neocolonialism.[19] They accused Kato and other AEA representatives of promoting a Western form of Christianity that was foreign to African contexts. According to John Parratt, "Kato does not make any specifically African contribution to theology, but is content to reiterate the position of a particular brand of western Christendom" (Parratt 1995: 63). Despite the fact that, for example, Adeyemo, Kato's successor at the AEA, has approached African traditional religiosity in a more nuanced way, he is included in the critique. More recently, the Nigerian theologian Victor Ezigbo qualified Adeyemo's position as a "destructionist presupposition." In Ezigbo's analysis, by principally upholding a supra-contextual concept of Jesus, Adeyemo espouses a "neo-missionary Christology"—a colonial theology in disguise. Ezigbo argued that, because of Adeyemo's insistence on the discontinuity between Africa's religious and cultural heritage and Christianity, he created a false opposition between Christ and culture. As under colonial rule, this can only lead to the destruction of African values (Ezigbo 2010: 35–42, 56–64).

Similarly, others have indicated the hermeneutical flaws of the theology espoused by Kato and other AEA representatives (Bediako 1992, Mbiti 1980, Ngong 2007). According to the Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako, Kato ignored important hermeneutical questions in the encounter between the Bible and African contexts and failed to make Christian theology relevant for African experiences. Bediako asserted that Kato, with his insistence on "Biblical theology," did not understand that theology is never absolute but that there is always a synthesis of gospel and culture; therefore, theology continuously develops. While Bediako stressed that Kato rightly made a case for a Bible-based theology, he argued that Kato was afraid to let anything new spring from the encounter between the Bible and African cultures; therefore, Kato's theology fails to provide a hermeneutical space for African Christians to interpret the biblical message from their own perspectives (Bediako 1994). In this regard, the Cameroon theologian David Ngong,

[18] Tiénou relied on the following statement by Bediako: "Basing himself on a radical Biblicism, Kato stressed the distinctiveness of the experience of the Christian Gospel to such an extent that he rejected the positive evaluation of any pre-Christian religious tradition as a distraction from the necessary 'emphasis on Bible truth'" (Bediako 2004: 55; capitals in the original).

[19] Kato seems to have been well aware of this accusation when he wrote, "It is not neo-colonialism to plead the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ. It is not arrogance to herald the fact that all who are not 'in Christ' are lost. It is merely articulating what the Scriptures say" (Kato 1975: 16).

in his discussion of the works of Kato and Adeyemo, spoke of "Kato's biblical naiveté." Ngong questioned Kato's assumption that the Bible's authority would be undermined by taking human experiences seriously. He wondered why Kato did not understand that his own theological position was deeply influenced by American evangelical conservatism. Ngong's conclusion was that both Kato and Adeyemo promoted biblicism; they failed "to realize that theology does not only draw from the Bible but also from the human experiences in various contexts" (Ngong 2007: 131).

The notion that Kato and other theologians have ignored the issue of contextualization has also been flagged by scholars who self-identify as evangelicals. In a 1995 article published in the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Augustine Musopole commented that Kato and Adeyemo failed to address the questions and struggles of grassroots Christians by highlighting "theological pitfalls" in African theology and underscoring the finality of Scripture. He called upon African evangelicals to move beyond inherited (e.g., Western) doctrines and debates and to radically reformulate the gospel in view of African experiences of life, because "American evangelicalism […] can never be transferred to Africa, lock, stock and barrel, and be totally adequate for the African context" (Musopole 1995: 18, see also Kunhiyop 1997). In discussing what he described as "the underdevelopment of African evangelical theology," Mark Shaw came to the same conclusion: "Profound interaction with current African issues has also been lacking in the monographs thus far produced" (Shaw 1996: 279).[20] The critique has continued in more recent publications. For example, the American missiologist Paul Bowers, who engaged with the AEA throughout his missionary career, wrote that African evangelical thinkers affiliated with the AEA have not yet sufficiently addressed the agenda set by Kato to develop a theology that is both "profoundly committed to biblical foundations, and at the same time tuned to and engaged with the dynamic realities of its present context" (Bowers 2007: 149; see also Nkansah-Obrempong 2007: 148–9).

It should be noted that Tiénou, who played a pivotal role at the AEA in the early years of his career, was not included in the critique.[21] This is consistent with observations by some scholars (Breman 1996, Michael 2017, Palmer 2004, Turaki 2001) that Kato's successors in the orbit of the AEA creatively moved beyond his radicalism while building on his theological legacy. Thus, the general representation of African evangelicals as Biblicists who oppose contextualization seems to have

[20] Shaw explicitly exempted the Burkinabé theologian Tite Tiénou, whose works are investigated in this study, from this critique.

[21] In his survey of African evangelicalism, Matthew Michael suggested that Tiénou has been criticized in another way, namely by Western (particularly North American) theologians, because of his critical statements on Western hegemony in theology (Michael 2017: 155). See also Chapter 6.

been particularly evoked in the early decades of the movement. However, is this perception justified? How do Kato and his successors relate to the topic of contextualization? How can Katonian theology be seen in relation to the discussions of his time? In what ways have others built on Kato's theological program? In other words, on what grounds can it be stated that Kato and his successors at the AEA failed to take seriously the issue of contextualization by insisting on the supremacy of the Bible and the uniqueness of Christ?

Research Question

Following these considerations, this dissertation aimed to answer the following research question: *Do African evangelical theologians associated with the AEA, particularly Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo, and Tite Tiénou, practice contextualization as a theological method and, if so, in what ways?*

The Contextualization Debate

From the foregoing it has become clear that the term "contextualization" is a central analytical concept in this study. Sources indicate that the term "contextualization" was coined in 1972 by Shoki Coe, the director of the Theological Education Fund at the World Council of Churches (WCC; Pardue 2023: 40, Parratt 2004: 8). It was intended to express a profound change taking place in the reflection on theology and how it is formulated. Given the concomitant developments of the independence movement (both political and ecclesial), the growing secularization in Western Europe after World War II, a turn to the subjective in Western philosophy and theology, and the growth of Christianity in other parts of the world during the 20th century, Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians felt that, for Christianity to truly become a world religion, Western theology should abandon its normative claim to universality (Bevans 1985: 185–6, Bosch 2011: 192–4, 430–33). According to the Roman Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter, Christian theology was entering a new phase in which new questions emerged (from the varying contexts of non-Western churches) and old answers were increasingly seen as inadequate. This called for a new theological method that was sensitive to the multiplicity of contexts in which Christianity was experienced (Schreiter 1985: 1–6). Eventually, the neologism "contextualization" replaced kindred terms such as "indigenization," "inculturation," and "incarnation" and became a common denominator in underscoring the need for and recognition of local expressions of Christianity and Christian theology within the worldwide Christian community (Coe 1973).[22]

[22] Reflecting on his involvement in the Theological Education Fund, Shoki Coe explained why "contextualization" was chosen rather than the then-familiar term "indigenization." He indicated that "contextualization" has a more dynamic connotation; it aims less to transmit a timeless message but more to reformulate the Christian faith in everchanging contexts (Coe 1973: 240–1).

While the idea of contextualization as a theological necessity for preserving the catholicity of Christianity gained widespread acceptance from the 1970s onward, a definition is difficult to provide. In a 1985 article, the Roman Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans argued that, as a theological concept, contextualization is the growing awareness that all theology is contextual: "Contextualization is not a luxury, a notion about theology that can be left at its fringes, to be dealt with in missiology courses. It is at the heart of what it means to do theology, and the theologian who does not take the process seriously only contextualizes unconsciously" (Bevans 1985: 200). In his seminal book *Models of Contextual Theology*, he thus discussed contextualization as "a theological imperative," outlining five (later six) different approaches to it (Bevans 1992, second edition in 2002).[23] The South African missiologist David Bosch also emphasized what he called the "contingent nature of all theology." In his view, contextualization is the understanding that theology is not developed once and for all (as has sometimes been suggested by traditional theologies) but instead consists of an open and ongoing dialogue between text and context—as the gospel message is to be interpreted and appropriated by concrete human beings living in specific contexts. Therefore, rather than aiming to develop timeless and universal truths, theologians should accept (and embrace) the idea that their theologizing "remains provisional and hypothetical" (Bosch 2011: 437). John Parratt provided perhaps the clearest definition of contextualization: "All theology is ultimately 'contextual', that is it arises from a specific historical context and it addresses that context. The questions which it asks, and the answers it seeks to give, are determined by its specific historical situation" (Parratt 2004: 2–3).

The recognition that no theology is absolute but that all theology is contextual has important methodological implications. Bevans explained that contextual theologies take both the experiences of the past (Bible and/or tradition) and the experiences of the present (context) seriously (Bevans 2002: xvi). In this respect, Bosch argued, the concept of contextualization constitutes "an epistemological break when compared with traditional theologies," as the local context (in addition to Scripture and/or tradition) is considered an indispensable source for doing theology. Contextual theologies, Bosch wrote, are therefore developed "from below"—in close connection with the daily questions and struggles of local Christians. Bosch explicitly identified the poor and marginalized as the main interlocutors for developing contextual theologies; otherwise, the gospel message risks becoming meaningless to ordinary Christians (Bosch 2011: 433–42). Therefore, knowledge and study of context are equally as important for theology as knowledge

[23] The six models that Bevans distinguished are the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcendental model, and the countercultural model.

of the Bible and Christian tradition. As Parratt argued, "[t]he context is both the framework and part of the source material for doing theology" (Parratt 2004: 9).

It is precisely this emphasis on the theological value of the local context that troubled many evangelicals from the 1970s onward. They feared that, by acknowledging that context was as important as Scripture, the biblical foundation of the Christian faith would be undermined, leading to relativism or even syncretism (Pardue 2023: 13–33). Yet, the first International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974 (Lausanne I) recognized that, to fulfill the task of world evangelization as expressed at the famous 1910 World Missionary Conference, a sensitivity to the world's many cultures was required. Although the term "contextualization" was carefully avoided, the Lausanne Covenant issued at the end of the conference clearly stated that the communication of the gospel cannot be isolated from the culture from which it came, nor from the culture in which the message is shared. Thus, the idea of contextualization was adopted as a *missionary strategy*: to reach the non-Christian world (a task that had been neglected by the ecumenical movement in the eyes of evangelicals), the gospel message had to be cross-culturally expressed (Lausanne 1974).[24]

However, in the aftermath of Lausanne I, the relationship between gospel and culture caused much controversy (evangelicals were still reluctant to use the broader term "context"). Is there a core of the gospel that transcends culture? To what extent may culture influence the gospel message? Above all, how was it possible to prevent a focus on cultures from leading to syncretism? To settle the debate, a consultation on gospel and culture was organized in Willowbank, Bermuda in 1978. While one of the fruits of the consultation was undoubtedly the acceptance of the term "contextualization" (at least as a missionary strategy), the meeting mainly revealed that approaches to contextualization widely varied. Two sides emerged, represented by the missiologists Charles Kraft from the United States and Bruce Nicholls from New Zealand. Using the term "dynamic equivalence" developed in translation theory, Kraft emphasized the process nature of contextualization; in other words, theologians should continually search for words and images to convey the Christian message in a constantly changing world. Consequently, while the core message of the gospel remains intact (based on biblical revelation and what Kraft called a "common humanity"), there may be differences in focus and expression from place to place (Kraft 2001). In response, Nicholls emphasized the unchangeable

[24] Already during the gathering, a group of "radical evangelicals" largely composed of participants from outside the West, openly questioned what they viewed as an overly narrow approach to evangelization as the verbal proclamation of the gospel. In the aftermath of Lausanne I, this group, which was led by, among others, René Padilla and Orlando Costas, developed into a critical voice within the evangelical world and emphasized that contextualization was more than a missionary strategy. They considered it to be a theological method (Padilla 1985, Samuel and Sugden 1983; see further Tizon 2008). See also my article on Adeyemo's involvement in the evangelical mission debate (Chapter 4).

nature of the gospel message, regardless of time or place. Rather than starting with human experiences of life (which he called "existential contextualization"), he advocated for a dogma-oriented contextualization and insisted on a supra-cultural core of the Christian message (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989).

Despite seemingly contrasting approaches to contextualization within the evangelical world, Bevans showed in his presentation of models of contextualization that evangelicals mainly seem to operate within what he described as "the translational model."[25] The translation model presupposes that, despite a growing diversification in world Christianity, the heart of revelation is propositional (rather than existential); therefore, there is a supra-contextual essence in the beliefs of Christianity. Using the image of a kernel (the core message) and husk (its expression), the translation model considers contextualization to be the process of "translating" or "repackaging" the quintessence of the Christian faith to enable it to become comprehensible and meaningful in a multitude of cultures and contexts. According to this model, the process of contextualization consists of deeply engaging with a specific context to be able to adequately formulate the Christian faith within it, without changing the central evangelical convictions. Although context is acknowledged as indispensable for theologizing, the "kernel" of the gospel is considered to be decisive and non-negotiable in the theological process (Bevans 2002: 37–53). Thus considered, the evangelical debate on contextualization focused less on the models of contextualization and more on the question of what constitutes the core of the evangelical faith from the outset.

These *theological* debates on contextualization were soon overshadowed by the *missiological* debate on how to reach the world's "unreached" before the turn of the century, which was launched by the AD 2000 movement led by Argentinian-born missionary Luis Bush (1946–). In 1989 (fifteen years after Lausanne I), the Second International Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne II) gathered in Manila, Philippines. Dominated by the AD 2000 movement, the agenda of Lausanne II was largely defined by missionary approaches and communication strategies, much to the dismay of some non-Western theologians who felt that there was no room for tabling theological questions from their contexts (Hunt 2011). Although the Manila Manifesto issued at Lausanne II emphasized the need for contextualization, it clearly stated that "[t]he the context must not be allowed to distort the gospel" (Lausanne 1989: para.10), which left many important theological and hermeneutical questions unaddressed. It was not until 1997 that the debate on contextualization was reopened at a Lausanne consultation held in Haslev, Denmark. Participants in the conference concluded that the theological conversation on contextualization

[25] Interestingly, Bevans named Byang Kato as one of the exponents of this model, along with Charles Kraft, Bruce Nicholls, David J. Hesselgrave, and Pope John Paul II (Bevans 2002: 45-53).

had never been properly conducted from fear of losing or truncating the gospel (Lausanne 1997).

This is consistent with Stephen Pardue's observation that the contemporary evangelical debate on contextualization remains dominated by fears of relativism and syncretism. He showed that evangelicals have always been skeptical about the extent to which theology is or should be influenced by the local context (Pardue 2023: 13–33). However, Pardue seemed to share this concern since he described doing theology with a sensitivity to the local context as preserving a "delicate balance" (Pardue 2023: 170). Moreover, Al Tizon indicated that, despite growing awareness among evangelicals that contextualization is part of the theological process, the relationship between evangelical commitments and contextualized expressions of the Christian faith has mostly been seen as a complicated one rather than a source of theological creativity (Tizon 2008: 219–24). As Scott Moreau demonstrated, because of evangelical commitment to Scripture as God's universal message for humanity, the translation model has become predominant within the evangelical movement. Although this model consists of a wide variety of approaches that revolve around the question of how large the kernel of Christian faith is or should be, its central idea is that, between the two poles of Scripture and setting (context), Scripture always has the final say (Moreau 2006).

In this study, I use the translation model as a lens through which to analyze the works of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou for two reasons. First, as previously established, the concept of translation (transmitting a message within a specific context) has become the dominant paradigm of contextualization within the international evangelical movement and is interpreted by some as a missionary strategy and by others as a theological method. I consider the translation paradigm as a spectrum of perspectives and approaches that in some way make a distinction between the "kernel" and the "husk" of the Christian faith, upholding a propositional (rather than existential) notion of the heart of revelation. Second, while African theologians such as Bediako (1945–2008), Jean-Marc Ela (1936–2008), Laurenti Magesa (1946–2022), John Pobee (1937–2020), and Lamin Sanneh (1942–2019) all made important contributions to intellectual reflections on contextualization (e.g., Bediako 1992, Ela 2003, Magesa 2004, Pobee 1979, Sanneh 1989), Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou primarily (but certainly not exclusively) wrote in view of their evangelical constituencies both in Africa and elsewhere. As shown in this study, Kato, Tiénou, and Adeyemo were regularly asked to represent the African continent at international meetings because of their leadership positions at the AEA; in particular, they engaged with the issues addressed at Lausanne I and subsequent gatherings and consultations. In turn, the theological concerns shared by evangelicals worldwide provide reason to examine the works of contemporary African theologians and thinkers. Thus, the following question has preoccupied African evangelicals: How

should the gospel be translated in the African milieu while upholding the basic theological commitments of the international evangelical movement?[26]

Delineation of the Research Scope

This study does not aim to offer a comprehensive outline of contextualization in African evangelical thought but focuses on the theological approach of three first-generation African evangelical theologians—Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou—as three leading theologians in AEA circles. There are three reasons for prioritizing the study of these three evangelical scholars.

First, all three figures have played leadership roles within the AEA and reflected on its theological direction in the future, albeit at different moments in time. As highlighted in the previous section, the criticism of African evangelical theology as not being contextually relevant often centers on AEA's intellectual output. Therefore, affiliation with the AEA was an important criterion for selecting the theologians discussed in this study.[27] All three theologians meet this criteria: The Nigerian theologian Kato was the AEA's first African general secretary from 1973 until his untimely death in 1975 and is regarded as the initiator of African evangelical theology. Aiah Dorkuh Foday-Khabenje called Kato "Africa's pioneer evangelical theologian" (Foday-Khabenje 2023). Kato was succeeded by Adeyemo, who also hailed from Nigeria and served as the AEA's general secretary between 1978 and 2002. Under Adeyemo's leadership, many AEA institutions emerged, and the network expanded rapidly. Tiénou, who is from Burkina Faso, also played a prominent role within the AEA. He succeeded Kato as the executive secretary of its theological commission between 1977 and 1980 and served as chairman of ACTEA in the 1980s (Breman 1996, Kapteina 2001 and 2006).[28]

Second, as asserted by many scholars, including Bowers (2009), Breman (1996), Kapteina (2006), Michael (2007), and Turaki (2001), Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou have been widely recognized as three important voices in African evangelicalism in recent decades. As three first-generation AEA theologians, they profoundly shaped the course of African evangelical theology; Kato and Adeyemo are repeatedly mentioned in relation to criticism that evangelicals have ignored the issue of contextualization.

[26] Byang Kato's rallying cry "Let African Christians be Christian Africans" became a well-known expression among African evangelicals. It emphasizes that they should distinguish themselves within African Christianity by upholding a universal understanding of the gospel (while expressing it in African thought forms). See Bowers 1980, Ferdinando 2004.

[27] On the issue of defining African evangelicalism, see Balcomb 2016, Michael 2017.

[28] Of these three prominent figures associated with the AEA, only Tiénou remains alive. He currently lives in the United States but still travels regularly to Africa. I tried to contact him but was unsuccessful.

Third, Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou engaged in the continuing debate on contextualization, albeit from different perspectives: Kato criticized Mbiti and Idowu and the ecumenical movement, Adeyemo discussed African religiosity and the vocation of the church, and Tiénou addressed hermeneutical and postcolonial issues.

While Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou are widely recognized as three important voices in African evangelicalism, they cannot be seen as the only representatives of African evangelical thought.[29] In his outline of African evangelical theology, Tiénou emphasized that evangelicalism in Africa should not be considered a homogeneous movement. Rather, like many other movements on the continent, it is characterized by great diversity (Tiénou 2007: 219). Although it would have been enriching to include a female theologian in this study, the fact is that AEA's leadership has largely been (and continues to be) comprised of men. The younger generation of African evangelical scholars, such as Mabiala Justin-Robert Kenzo, Nelson Makanda, Elizabeth Mburu, Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, and David Tarus, is also excluded from the discussion because this study focuses on the AEA's first generation of theologians. The purpose of this research is to examine the works of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou as leading figures within the AEA against the backdrop of the academic criticism that the AEA promotes a non-contextual, Western form of Christianity.[30]

A further delineation of this study is that it does not aim to provide a comprehensive discussion of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou's entire theological oeuvre but is limited to works that address issues and questions related to contextualization, although these are understood and interpreted in the wider context of their life and work. In this respect, this research is also limited to their literary output and does not include the reception of their ideas.

Methodological Considerations

Method and Resources

The main method applied in this research is a literature study. In this dissertation, I primarily investigate the written theological output (i.e., monographs, articles, and meditations) of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou in relation to the issue of contextualizing the gospel message in the African milieu by using contextualization as translation (see previous paragraph) as the analytical lens through which to study the material. Through close reading, their contributions to the debate on contextualization are

[29] Obviously, many others have shaped African evangelical thought. Among them are Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, Conrad Mbewe, Elizabeth Mburu, and Yusufu Turaki, all of whom have made significant contributions to evangelical theological reflection in Africa (e.g., Kunhiyop 2012, Mbewe 2020, Mburu 2019, Turaki 2020).

[30] Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou are all from West Africa (Kato and Adeyemo were from Nigeria and Tiénou is from Burkina Faso). Furthermore, they all studied at Western theological institutions. Thus, their (cultural and theological) background necessarily limits the scope of this study.

outlined and analyzed. Although I managed to collect the main written works of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou, some brochures and articles were unavailable in Western universities and/or on the Internet. In particular, works published in Africa (e.g., conference reports) are difficult to obtain outside the continent.

Although Kato only led the AEA for a very short time and did not write any monographs beyond *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975), he produced an impressive number of articles, Bible studies, and meditations, most of which were posthumously collected and made available by ACTEA. The majority of his contributions addressed his (African) evangelical constituency (to warn against contemporary theological trends) rather than academia. Adeyemo, who was more involved in international evangelical debates than Kato and did so over the course of several decades, published materials for academic audiences and works such as lectures and editorials specifically targeted at the AEA network. His academic work includes several books (e.g., *Salvation in African Tradition* from 1979 and *Is Africa Cursed?* from 1997) and a number of articles in academic journals. Of the three theologians, only Tiénou has pursued an academic career outside the African continent. While maintaining his ties with the AEA, he held academic positions at theological institutions in Africa and the United States, (co-)authored several books (*The Theological Task for the Church in Africa* from 1982 and *Understanding Folk Religion* from 1999) and published numerous academic articles. Because of his international career (and, of course, the digital revolution in the 1990s), his contributions were more easily accessible than those of Kato and Adeyemo.

For the sake of comparability, I chose to compare these three theologians based on their written academic output only. Nevertheless, in addition to their academic work and popular publications, I also consulted several videos and audio recordings featuring the aforementioned scholars to gain a deeper understanding of their lives and works. This type of material was especially available for Tiénou (who remains active in international missiological circles) and included some online interviews, lectures, and sermons. By contrast, audio-visual material featuring Kato and Adeyemo is scarce.

In addition to primary sources, I also consulted secondary sources to obtain a deeper understanding of African religions and cultures, as well as theological debates within African Christianity and the ecumenical and evangelical worlds.

Finally, it is important to note that, due his tragic and untimely death, Kato left an unfinished legacy. His biographer, Paul Bowers, emphasized that, at the time of his passing, Kato was in the process of revising his book *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*. Bowers wrote, "*Pitfalls* is to taken not as a final word but as a first word, a promise of what might have come had Kato been spared" (Bowers 1980: 85). The fact that Kato was not even 40 years old at the time of his death is a reminder that

his work offers a snapshot of an ongoing thought process rather than a finalized stance after a lifetime of theological reflection.

Positionality

In the introductory chapter *to African Christianity: An African Story*, editor Ogbu U. Kalu argued that, "in every enterprise, the historian must ask afresh, why do I write, for whom and for what purpose?" (Kalu 2007: 1). He explained that, like theology, historiography is never conducted in a vacuum. All history—and, I would add, theology—is written from a particular perspective and is therefore biased in some sense. Kalu indicated that it makes quite a difference whether the history of Christianity in Africa is written through the eyes of Christian foreign missions or by those who question the very idea of mission as such. The biased perspective is not in itself problematic, Kalu argued, provided that the researcher accounts for their own position, prejudices, analytical concepts, and methodology. Therefore, the primary task of any historian (or theologian) is to engage with "deep questions of fundamental intellectual clarity and methodological identity" (Kalu 2007: 10; see also Bosch 2011: 366–9).

Toward the end of the introductory chapter, Kalu presented what he believed to be a fruitful way of studying African Christianity: "the ecumenical perspective." Using the Greek word *oikoumenè* in its theological sense (i.e., the whole inhabited world as God's creation), Kalu formulated that the "bias" of the ecumenical perspective is the premise that there is a Creator-God who continues to reveal himself in human history, human life, and nature. The aim of the ecumenical perspective, then, is to describe "the story of God's presence in human communities and the responses to divine love in time perspective." In this way, it provides "a new understanding of what God has done in Jesus Christ, who invites us to a new and wider vision, learning, commitment and action" (Kalu 2007: 21). Methodologically, the ecumenical perspective demands a dialogical approach; it considers both Scripture and (African) contexts as sources for doing theology and seeks to clarify how these (African) perceptions of life have shaped the understanding of the gospel message in a specific context or situation. In other words, the ecumenical perspective studies the dynamic interplay between the biblical message and the contexts in which this message is received, understood, expressed, and lived. In this way, it seeks to apply the assumption that God is active in all of his creation by reconstructing "the experiences of men and women in a community and the meaning of Christ in their midst" for a particular context (Kalu 2007: 22).

I find the ecumenical perspective as outlined by Kalu to be helpful for understanding and clarifying my role and position as a Western researcher who studies African evangelical theology. As a Western researcher of African Christianity, I am well aware of the ambiguity of my position. The relationship between the

West and Africa is largely marked by a long history of violence and exploitation that included the slave trade, colonialism, and racism. As a researcher, I am also part of this history, which to some extent continues to the present day. During my travels to Africa, I kept experiencing that I somehow represented the dominance of the West, including in matters of theology, whether I liked it or not. However, the dialogical approach of Kalu's ecumenical perspective enabled me to actively engage in debate with observers and practitioners of African theology while being cognizant of my position as an outsider who is consciously or unconsciously perceived as representative of the dominant West.

In this regard, the South African scholar Gerald West highlighted the value of an outsider (etic) perspective when discussing approaches and methods for studying African forms of Christianity. Because of their position as outsiders, West explained, foreign observers of African Christianity are necessarily limited to a descriptive function. However, he emphasized that, despite its obvious limitations, an etic perspective can sometimes be very enlightening since an etic analysis can reveal the blind spots unknown to insiders (emic perspective). Therefore, West encouraged both emic and etic researchers to engage and interact with each other for a deeper understanding of Christianity in Africa (West 2016).

Methodologically speaking, I therefore tried to address these conscious and unconscious expressions of hegemony and my position as an outsider by choosing to refrain from theologically evaluating African expressions of Christianity. Instead, I simply aim to describe and analyze how African evangelical Christians, specifically three evangelical leaders, articulated the Christian message in their own, specific contexts. This in turn helped me to become more aware of my own theological contextuality and the plurality of the Christian tradition.

Aims and Relevance

The first and primary aim of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of African evangelical thought. Compared to other Christian movements in Africa, African evangelicalism has not yet received extensive scholarly attention. While much research in the field of African studies, anthropology, and World Christianity has been conducted on African independent churches (AICs) and, in recent decades, African Pentecostalism, evangelicalism in Africa has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Beyond some introductions to African evangelicalism written by evangelicals themselves (Balcomb 2016, Bowers 1980, Ferdinando 2004, Michael 2017, Tiénou 2007, Turaki 2001), only Breman (1996) and Kapteina (2001) offered in-depth studies of theological positions and developments within AEA circles; however, both studies were published more than 20 years ago.

Moreover, some African evangelical scholars such as Foday-Khabenje (2021), Kame (2022), and Nkansah-Obrempong (2010) have recently called for

a reassessment of Kato's theological stance. Foday-Khabenje, the AEA's general secretary from 2009 to 2022 and author of a PhD dissertation on Kato, asserted that "the controversy Kato sparked in African theological circles has not gone away" (Foday-Khabenje 2021: 204). Foday-Khabenje underscored what he perceived as the syncretism pervasive in many African churches, which Kato also flagged with apprehension. Kato's ultimate concern was that the Christian faith was in danger of losing its unique character; according to Foday-Khabenje, this is still conceivable in many places in Africa. He added, "The fact is that not everything relevant about Kato has yet been adequately surfaced or sufficiently pursued. There is still room for further fruitful inquiry, rich opportunity for further professional research and exposition" (Foday-Khabenje 2021: 204). Moreover, the American missiologist Paul Bowers called for a re-evaluation of Katonian thought. According to Bowers, Kato's legacy has much to offer evangelical reflection in Africa and beyond (Bowers 2009).

In light of this renewed interest in Kato's ideas, this study aims to make a modest contribution to the discussion on the role of Katonian theology—and the theology of other first-generation African evangelical theologians—within African Christianity. The research findings question the stereotype that African evangelicalism is merely a copy of Western Christianity with little or no relevance to the African continent. The study argues that the AEA movement must be assessed on its own terms and valued for its own contributions rather than as a foster child of Western theology.

A second aim of this study is to show that, even while Kato and others who hold similar theological convictions critically address the subject of contextualization and may not share the methodological approach of contextual theology, their work is deeply contextual. After all, their contributions can only be understood in relation to the contemporary theological trends and currents to which they react. Therefore, paradoxically, even positions that claim to preserve universal Christian values against erroneous interpretations can only be properly understood in relation to the time and context in which they are expressed.

Overview of Chapters

This study comprises five articles that have been (or will be) published in peer-reviewed journals on intercultural theology, world Christianity, and missiology. Within the oeuvre of the theologian under discussion, each article examines how the topic of contextualization is addressed. Since Kato left an unfinished legacy due to his untimely death, only one article is devoted to his thinking on contextualization. Adeyemo and Tiénou's contributions are each discussed in a diptych. In this way, a mosaic of voices emerges and provides an impression of how three influential leaders within the AEA have engaged with contextualization in their works.

The first article, which was published in *Exchange* Volume 50, Issue 1 (2021), investigates Kato's contribution to the salvation debate in the early 1970s. Because of his radical standpoint and at times uncompromising tone, his soteriological proposals have been characterized as a reproduction of Western theology. This article demonstrates that, rather than reiterating a specific North American or Western concept of theology, Kato's soteriology should be read as a contextual evangelical response to the ongoing theological debates of his time.

The second article, which was published in *Exchange* Volume 50, Issue 2 (2021), analyzes Adeyemo's assessment of African traditional religions. In the 1970 and 1980s, Adeyemo was also involved in the so-called salvation debates in evangelical circles. This article argues that, while Adeyemo reiterates the uniqueness of salvation in Christ, as underscored by Kato and attested to within the international evangelical movement, his assessment of pre-Christian religiosity is more nuanced than Kato's. Navigating between the two positions of rejection and revitalization, he proposed the concept of "cosmological balance" as a framework for developing an authentic evangelical theology grounded in the African context.

The third article, which was published in *Mission Studies* Volume 40, Issue 1 (2023), builds on the second. It analyzes Adeyemo's contribution to the evangelical debates on mission after Lausanne I. The article contends that, while Adeyemo was undoubtedly influenced by North American dualism, he increasingly distanced himself from Western theological concepts and advocated for a broad, holistic, contextual and transformational understanding of mission. Thus, this article shows that categories commonly used to describe African evangelicalism, such as "biblicist," "conservative," "dogmatic," do not do justice to the complexity, heterogeneity, and contextuality of African evangelicalism as formulated by Adeyemo.

The fourth article, which has been accepted for publication by *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* (forthcoming), investigates Tiénou's hermeneutical contributions to African evangelical theology. I argue that, in his hermeneutical works, Tiénou developed what he called a "third way" between academic and popular theologies. This third way honors Kato's theological priorities but moves beyond them by addressing the concerns raised by African inculturation theologians. A characteristic of Tiénou's contribution is that he foregrounded the local Christian community as both the source and addressee of theology, thus underscoring the need for a grounded contextual theology.

The fifth article, which was accepted for publication in *Studies in World Christianity* (forthcoming), studies Tiénou's engagement with Ali Mazrui's advocacy for a synthesis of religions. Mazrui, one of the most important African thinkers of the 20th century, maintained that the form of Christianity introduced by Western missionaries during the 19th and 20th centuries is ultimately alien to African culture. The article argues that Tiénou simultaneously embraces Mazrui's postcolonial

perspective and claims that African Christians have every right to be different, both from Western Christianity and Africa's pre-colonial past, maintaining that there is space for distinct expressions of Christianity in postcolonial Africa.

Finally, the concluding chapter is a synthesis of the study. It brings together findings from the five articles and argues that Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou each sought new ways to relate their faith and theology to African realities, without denying their allegiance to the global evangelical tradition. The chapter concludes that authors who state that the AEA's evangelicalism is merely a copy of Western Christianity do not do justice to the profound contextuality of the rise of African evangelical theology in general and to Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou's contributions in particular. Rather, this study on the works of three leading figures within the AEA demonstrates that African evangelical theology has developed into a full-fledged theological interlocutor within African Christianity and continually seeks to express the Christian faith in rapidly changing African contexts.

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CHAPTER 2.

"No other name!" The Contribution of Byang H. Kato to the Salvation Debate

Introduction

Recently, there has been renewed interest in the work of the late Byang Kato (1936–1975). Kato, who was president of the *Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar* (AEAM, now the *Association of Evangelicals in Africa* [AEA]) from 1973 until his untimely death in 1975, is considered the founding father of African evangelical theology and still deemed to be one of the most influential evangelical theologians in Africa.

A considerable body of research exists on Kato and on what he perceived as the theological "pitfalls" jeopardizing Christianity on the continent.[1] One of Kato's key concerns was soteriology; amidst changing ideas on salvation due to ecumenical debates and the rise of inculturation and liberation theology, Kato defended both the uniqueness and personal nature of salvation through Christ. In his works, Kato consistently reproached leading African theologians, such as John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu, for developing what he called "a syncretistic form of Christianity."[2] According to Kato, salvation is found in the death of Jesus Christ alone. Due to this theological position, Kato's legacy has sometimes been characterized as merely reiterating "a particular brand of Western Christendom."[3]

This article aims to demonstrate that, rather than a reproduction of Western theology, Kato's soteriology should be read as a contextual evangelical response to the ongoing theological debates of his time. In the following sections, I first provide an introduction to Kato's life and work to situate him within the early 1970s (1). Then, I reconstruct Kato's contribution to the theological discussions regarding salvation (2). Next, I evaluate some reactions to Kato's understanding of salvation (3). Finally, the conclusion recapitulates the main argument of this article—that Kato's soteriology should be read as a contextual response (4).

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[1] Paul Bowers, "Byang Kato and Beyond," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 28/1 (2009), 3-21; Keith Ferdinando, "The Legacy of Byang Kato," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28/4 (2004), 169-174; Scott Douglas Macdonald, *A Critical Analysis of Byang Kato's Demonology and its Theological Relevance for an Evangelical Demonology* (PhD Thesis; University of South Africa, 2017); Timothy Palmer, "Byang Kato: a Theological Reappraisal," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 23/1 (2004), 3-20; Sochanngam Shirik, "African Christians or Christian Africans: Byang H. Kato and his Contextual Theology," *The Asbury Journal* 74/1 (2019), 131-156; Philip Tachin, "The Exclusive Authority of Scripture and African Anti-Foundationalism: the Byang Kato Legacy," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 4/1 (2018), 28-40.

[2] Byang Kato, "Written Theology. Lecture Delivered at Ibadan University Jos Campus, Nigeria, 1974," in *Perspectives of an African Theologian: The Writings of Byang H. Kato, Th.D.*, ed. Byang Kato (Data CD without page numbers; Nairobi: ACTEA, 2007).

[3] John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 63.

1. Byang Kato and the salvation debate

1.1 Byang Henry Kato (1936–1975)

The Nigerian theologian and church leader Byang Henry Kato was born in 1936 into a family who were adherents of African traditional religion (ATR) in Kwoi, Kaduna State, Northern Nigeria. In an autobiographical article titled "The Devil's Baby," Kato relates that a few months after his birth, he was dedicated to what he calls "a juju priest."[4] Kato further adds that shortly after passing through initiation ceremonies of the Hahm (or Jaba) people at the age of 10, he heard the gospel preached by Mary Haas, a missionary with the *Sudan Interior Mission*. Kato was baptized at the age of twelve. He also recalls that, while his parents initially strongly opposed his conversion, they converted a few years later and became devout Christians.[5]

At the age of nineteen, Kato enrolled at *Igbaja Bible College* (now *Igbaja Theological Seminary*), graduating in 1957. In 1963, he pursued his studies at *London Bible College*, earning his Bachelor's degree in 1967. After returning to Nigeria, he served as the general secretary of the *Evangelical Church of West Africa* from 1967 to 1970. He then enrolled at *Dallas Theological Seminary*, earning his master's degree in theology in 1971 and his Doctorate of Ministry degree in 1974. His ThD thesis[6] was later published under the title *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*.[7] Having completed his doctoral studies, Kato was unanimously chosen as the first African general secretary of the AEA (founded in 1966), a post he held for two years, until he tragically drowned off the Kenyan coast in 1975.[8]

During the two years of his AEA secretariat, Kato traveled extensively, enlarging the AEA network throughout the continent and initiating the *Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa* (ACTEA) and two evangelical theological institutions, namely the *Bangui Evangelical School of Theology* in the Central African Republic and *Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology* (now *Africa International University*) in Kenya.[9] Kato only published one major work, but many of his articles, Bible meditations, and lectures (both published and unpublished)

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[4] Byang Kato, "The Devil's Baby," *Africa Now* (January-March 1962), 10-11.

[5] Kato, "The Devil's Baby."

[6] Byang Kato, *A Critique of Incipient Universalism* (PhD Thesis; Dallas Theological Seminary, US, 1974).

[7] Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1975); in the following abbreviated as *Pitfalls*.

[8] Christina Breman, *The Association of Evangelicals in Africa: its History, Organization, Members, Projects, External Relations and Message* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1996), 40-53; Sophie De la Haye, *Byang Kato: Ambassador for Christ* (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1986); Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, eds., *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 100-127.

[9] Detlef Kapteina, "The Formation of African Evangelical Theology," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 25/1 (2006), 62, 72; Tite Tiénou, "The Theological Task of the Church in Africa: Where Are We Now and Where Should We Be Going?" *East Africa Journal of African Theology* 6/1 (1987), 3-4.

were circulated posthumously by the AEA and in recent years collected on a data CD by ACTEA.[10]

Kato is often portrayed as a theologian and church leader who wanted to caution the African churches against what he perceived as 'heretical' teachings, aiming to preserve what he called "Biblical Christianity."[11] Moreover, he is still remembered as the founding father of African evangelicalism.[12]

1.2 Some methodological remarks

Before examining Kato's involvement in the theological debates of the early 1970s, I will give a short note on the challenges of interpreting his works. Kato's main period of theological activity comprises the early 1970s, especially the two years he served as the general secretary of the AEA. As several studies[13] have indicated, at the time of Kato's tragic drowning in 1975, his thinking was still in development. In light of this, Paul Bowers, an American missionary who has been involved with ACTEA, categorizes *Pitfalls* as a "maiden effort." He maintains that *Pitfalls* is to be taken "not as a final word but as a first word, a promise of what might have come had Kato been spared."[14]

Kato left an unfinished legacy, which was never envisioned as a comprehensive systematic theology, and therefore, it should not be considered as such. Scholars would be advised to avoid drawing hasty conclusions on the basis of the scarce material available. Moreover, besides *Pitfalls* and several articles, Kato did not publish much. Most of the available material collected by ACTEA consists of lecture notes, addresses, and papers that were not intended for publication. To negotiate these challenges methodologically, I have chosen to assign more weight to his published works—such as *Pitfalls* and *Biblical Christianity in Africa*—than to unpublished lecture notes, articles, and meditations.

Having said this, this paper attempts to understand Kato's contribution to the debates within African theological circles. The biographical details, sociocultural developments, and political factors that feature in the unpublished materials signal events and circumstances that were important to Kato and may have been influenced his theology. Hence, I have used the unpublished materials to understand the wider context against which his published work is to be interpreted.

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[10] Kato, *Perspectives*.

[11] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 27, 55, 181; Byang Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa: A Collection of Papers and Addressees* (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1985).

[12] Christina Breman, "A portrait of Byang H. Kato," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 15/2 (1996), 144; Ferdinando, "The Legacy," 169.

[13] Paul Bowers, "Evangelical Theology in Africa: Byang Kato's Legacy," *Trinity Journal* 1/1 (1980), 84-87; Ferdinando, "The Legacy"; Kapteina, "The Formation."

[14] Bowers, "Evangelical Theology," 85.

1.3 Historical settings

Upon his appointment as the general secretary of the AEA in 1973, Kato found himself in a complex and changing theological landscape. The German missiologist Detlef Kapteina identifies at least three factors that shaped the historical background of Kato's theological activity. First, Kapteina asserts that the AEA, initiated by the *Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association* and the *Evangelical Foreign Mission Agencies*,[15] was a reactionary movement, formed to respond to what was perceived as the development of a "syncretism and universalistic soteriology" within contemporary African theological currents.[16] American evangelicals were increasingly concerned about their isolated position in Africa and the lack of cooperation between African evangelical churches. They decided to join hands in view of "defining and defending the church's doctrinal position."[17] In fact, as the Dutch missiologist Christina Breman states, one of the initial objectives of the AEA was "[t]o alert Christians to trends and spiritual dangers that would undermine the Scriptural foundation of the Gospel testimony."[18] Thus, Kapteina maintains, the atmosphere within AEA circles was largely antithetical toward other theological traditions.[19]

A second and more specific factor, according to Kapteina, was the rise of African inculturation theologies from the 1960s onwards and their revaluation of African traditional religiosity. In the aftermath of decolonization, leading African theologians, such as John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu, launched a quest for an indigenous understanding of Christian theology, advocating the integration of the Bible and African traditional religiosities and cultures.[20] In the 1960s and early 1970s, Mbiti and Idowu published their most influential works, which included *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*[21] and *African Religions and Philosophy,*[22] positioning ATR on par with Scripture as a vital source for the theological endeavor.[23] According to Mbiti,

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[15] Breman, *The Association*, 7-19.

[16] Kapteina, "The Formation," 63.

[17] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 13.

[18] Breman, *The Association*, 20.

[19] Kapteina, "The Formation," 61-63; Detlef Kapteina, *Afrikanische Evangelikale Theologie: Plädoyer für das Ganze Evangelium im Kontext Afrikas* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2001), 62-67.

[20] Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 1-24; Tharcisse Tshibangu, *La Théologie Africaine: Manifeste et Programme pour le Développement des Activités Théologiques en Afrique* (Kinshasa: Éditions Saint Paul, 1987), 7-53.

[21] Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962).

[22] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969).

[23] Other works include Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A definition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973); John Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970); John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

the missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa had failed to contextualize the Christian faith within the African milieu. In his opinion, only by reading the New Testament principally within the framework of African religiosity can Christianity take root in African soil.[24] Idowu is renowned for coining the term "implicit monotheism," suggesting that the ATR and Christianity share the same basic tenets and ultimately worship the same God.[25] On the basis of a study of the religious practices of his own Yoruba people, he endorses a radical continuity between the ATR and Christianity.[26]

This reassessment of the salvific value of African religious and cultural experiences, according to Kapteina's analysis, led African evangelicals to oppose the inculturation venture to maintain the primacy of the Bible.[27] Timothy Palmer, former lecturer at the *Theological College of Northern Nigeria*, argues that the search for an African concept of theology has been interpreted within AEA circles as a deliberate "anti-Christian" attempt to undermine the 'essence' of Christianity.[28] In an attempt to turn the tide, Kato responded to leading inculturation theologians of his time, such as Mbiti and Idowu, both of whom have been called "the father of African theology."[29]

The third factor identified by Kapteina concerns the growing friction between the ecumenical and evangelical movements worldwide, which are represented on African soil by the *All Africa Council of Churches* (AACC) and the AEA, respectively. Christina Breman has shown that already under the leadership of the first general secretary Kenneth Downing (1966–1970), the AEA was outspokenly critical of the *World Council of Churches* (WCC).[30] However, the relations became increasingly tense in the early 1970s. In 1973, the WCC gathered in Bangkok under the theme "Salvation Today." Palmer establishes that, under the influence of Latin American liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez, the conference proposed, among other things, a redefinition of salvation as the liberation of the oppressed and marginalized.[31] In response, international evangelical leaders, headed by Billy Graham and John Stott, gathered in Lausanne in 1974 to voice an alternative to what they considered the 'liberal' teachings within WCC circles; the Lausanne

[24] Mbiti, *New Testament*, 56-61.

[25] Idowu, *Olodumare*, 30-37, 62.

[26] Idowu, *Olodumare*, 202-215.

[27] Kapteina, "The Formation," 63-67.

[28] Palmer, "Byang Kato," 3-11.

[29] Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1979), 80.

[30] Breman, "A Portrait," 142.

[31] Palmer, "Byang Kato," 6.

gathering insisted on upholding the primacy of evangelization and conversion in Christian mission. Byang Kato participated in the conference as one of the keynote speakers.[32] This gathering eventually resulted in the establishment of the *Lausanne Committee for World Evangelizatio*n in 1976 as a counterpart to the WCC.

Kapteina concludes that Kato, as the newly appointed leader of the AEA, found himself confronted with the challenges of the African inculturation movement on the one hand and the ecumenical movement on the other.[33] According to African evangelical circles, both theological movements ultimately questioned the same doctrine—the "unique Christ for salvation."[34] Consequently, the rather diverse discussions within the emerging African theology and within ecumenical circles, became known within the AEA as "the salvation debate."[35] This—what many evangelicals considered an "alarming" situation—evoked a theological strategy to safeguard what Kato called "Biblical Christianity" in Africa.[36]

In January 1973, shortly after completing his doctoral studies, Kato was asked to present his vision at the Christian Education Strategy Conference in Limuru, Kenya. After his lecture, in which Kato discussed what he called the "theological anemia in Africa,"[37] he was, in the eyes of many, the ideal candidate for the position of AEA general secretary, which had been vacant for three years.[38]

During the two years of his service at the AEA, there were several developments that further exacerbated Kato's wariness of African inculturation theology and the ecumenical movement as embodied by the WCC and AACC. In the next subsection, I discuss three historic circumstances that seem to have deeply affected Kato and motivated him to vehemently critique contemporary theological currents, especially inculturation theology and the ecumenical movement with its emphasis on liberation theology.

1.4 Three 'alarming' developments

In the course of 1974, worrying reports circulated that Chadian Christians were being persecuted by the local authorities. By the order of the Chadian government, evangelical Christians were being forced to undergo ATR initiation rites, and

[32] Breman, *The Association*, 47.

[33] Kapteina, "The Formation," 67-70.

[34] Yusufu Turaki, "The Theological Legacy of the Reverend Doctor Byang Henry Kato," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 20/2 (2001), 143.

[35] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Salvation Debate and Evangelical Response," *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 2/2 (1983), 4-19; see also Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 65-66.

[36] Kapteina, "The Formation," 70-72.

[37] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 11-14.

[38] Breman, "A Portrait," 140-141; Kapteina, "The Formation," 61-63.

accordingly to renounce their faith.[39] Those who refused to participate were said to be persecuted and even killed. Shocked by the news, Kato travelled to Chad in April 1975 for a personal meeting with General Noel Odinga to plead the cause of the evangelicals in the Chadian Republic.[40] What worried Kato most was the "philosophy of authenticity," as he called it, behind this political persecution. Kato saw a parallel between the outlook that produced the persecution of Chadian Christians and the ideas undergirding inculturation theology. In his analysis, the enforcement of the initiation ritual was legitimized by the same rationale as the search for an African concept of theology, albeit on a political level.[41] Also in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Kato discerned the potential dangers of the emphasis on African cultural identity. He reported on the Zairian government propagating the Mobutuan ideology of African authenticity, forcing evangelical Christians to accept all kind of "syncretistic practices," such as Kimbanguism.[42] Observing that tolerance toward evangelical Christians was decreasing in Chad and Zaire, he concludes that, "The days of persecution for the Bible-believing Christian may not be too far away."[43]

A second development that troubled Kato was the call in WCC circles to support the armed struggle against apartheid and other forms of injustice throughout Africa. At the AACC conference in 1974 in Lusaka, Zambia, Canon Burgess Carr, then general secretary of the AACC, called for unconditional support for the armed struggle against injustice and violence.[44] Kato interpreted Carr's address as an outright betrayal of the gospel, retorting that all human violence was overcome by Christ through his death on the cross.[45] Carr's appeal was no incident. One year later, the WCC's fifth general assembly gathered in Nairobi, Kenya. Having attended the assembly on behalf of the AEA, Kato reported a repetition of the same appeal to support liberation groups, which he paraphrased as follows: "If you want to help people, just give them money. Whether they use that money for arms or food is not your concern."[46] Astounded by the political atmosphere

[39] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 34, 170, 173, 177; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 41-42; Byang Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos: Challenge Publication, 2010), 17-18, 24.

[40] Byang Kato, "Promising Future for the Church in Chad," (n.d.) in *Perspectives of an African Theologian: The Writings of Byang H. Kato, Th.D.*, ed. Byang Kato (Data CD without page numbers; Nairobi: ACTEA, 2007).

[41] Ferdinando, "The Legacy," 170.

[42] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 157-158, 160; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 27-28, 41; see further Byang Kato, "Danger: Men at Work," *Africa Now* (March-April 1976), 6-7; see also Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 139-141.

[43] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 31; see also Kato, *Pitfalls*, 173.

[44] Byang Kato, "The Christian Surge in Africa. Interview with Byang Kato," *Christianity Today* (September 26, 1975), 4-7.

[45] Byang Kato, "Lusaka Report," *Perception* 1/2, (1974), n.p.

[46] Byang Kato, "The World Council of Churches: Nairobi Assembly and Africa," *Perception* 3/1 (1976), para.7.

of the conference, and worried about the possible consequences, he concluded the following: "The marriage between political and ecclesiastical systems seems something that is very likely in our own age."[47] Having personally witnessed the horrors of the Nigerian–Biafran War (1967–1970), Kato radically rejected any call for armed resistance.[48]

Lastly, a third historical development that influenced Kato's theology can be found in the growing popularity of "Black theology" in South Africa.[49] Compared with other African theological currents, Black theology was relatively new on the African continent. In the early 1970s, the ideas of American black theologians, such as James Cone, were popularized in South Africa by the Methodist Basil Moore among others.[50] This motivated an intensified struggle against apartheid in South Africa, followed by an immediate ban by the federal government.[51] Although Kato conceded that Black theology should be evaluated on its own grounds, he saw a clear correspondence with contemporary theological currents such as inculturation theology and liberation theology, in that Black theology principally takes human experience as the basis for theology: "Where biblical concepts are used at all, they are used only to support the preconceived notions of the theologian. Therefore, Black theology is a worse danger than Western liberalism."[52] Kato contended that Black theology could potentially lead to a new kind of racism.[53] Fearing that black theology would become mainstream among African intellectuals in other parts of the continent, he distanced himself from the—in his view—overemphasis on blackness and oppression, whereby Christianity would lose its universal message as good news for all people.[54]

Kato considered these three developments as excrescences of the theological trends that were "already taking shape" in Africa.[55] In addition to the historical setting as described by Kapteina, these historical factors seem to have fueled Kato's ideas, explaining his often harsh and uncompressing tone toward

[47] Kato, "The World Council," para.6.

[48] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 32-33; De la Haye, *Byang Kato*, 53-64.

[49] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 47-49; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 46-52.

[50] Basil Moore, *Black Theology: The South African Voice* (London: C. Hurst, 1973).

[51] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 140, 145; see further John Mbiti, "An African Views American Black Theology," in *Black theology: A Documentary History*, eds. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 477-482.

[52] Byang Kato, "Black Theology and African Theology," *Perception* 3/6 (1976), para.1.

[53] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 47-48.

[54] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 50-52; see also Kato, "The Christian Surge."

[55] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 11.

his theological opponents.[56] In his analysis, both inculturation-oriented theologies and liberation-oriented theologies could potentially cause a serious distortion of the gospel message, which he understood as salvation from sins. He argued that both theological movements contain the inherent tendency to radically politicize the Christian faith; this could eventually result in violence against specific groups.[57] Fearing that the gospel would "lose its function as salt in the world, not to say its very soul,"[58] Kato was convinced that "[t]he spiritual battle for Africa during this decade will be fought, therefore, largely on *theological grounds*."[59] Kato resolved to tackle the root of the problem, which he localized in culture-oriented theologies, as propagated by Mbiti and Idowu, and liberation-oriented theologies, as advanced within WCC circles, to defend the 'essence' of Christianity.[60]

In the next section, I offer a reconstruction of the soteriological ideas, that Kato formulated in response to these developments, following his line of thought in *Pitfalls*, which was published in 1975.

2. Kato's defense of "biblical salvation"

2.1 The basis of salvation: Redemptive revelation

In his foreword to *Pitfalls*, the evangelical icon Billy Graham, with a reference to Kato, suggests that "[p]erhaps there has never been an age of such confusion over the meaning of salvation" as the 1960s and 1970s.[61] Therefore, as Kato states in his introduction to *Pitfalls*, his primary purpose is "to sound an alarm and warn Christians on both sides of the argument concerning the dangers of universalism. These dangers are theological pitfalls indeed. To forewarn is to forearm."[62] Nevertheless, one of the objectives of his book is "to make a positive contribution to the discussion."[63]

In the first part of *Pitfalls*, the basic argument is that the classical theological distinction between general and special revelation should be maintained because both serve different purposes. With reference to Acts 14:17, Kato affirms

[56] Ferdinando, "The Legacy," 171-172; Palmer, "Byang Kato," 5-10.

[57] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 164; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 47.

[58] Bowers, "Evangelical Theology," 87.

[59] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 11, emphasis added; see further Byang Kato, "The Problem of Theological Education in Africa. Unpublished conference paper, 1973," in *Perspectives of an African Theologian: The Writings of Byang H. Kato, Th.D.*, ed. Byang Kato (Data CD without page numbers; Nairobi: ACTEA, 2007).

[60] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 11-17; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 39-54.

[61] Forward to *Pitfalls*, para.4; see also Kato, *Pitfalls*, 143.

[62] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 16.

[63] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 16.

that "God did not leave himself without witness"[64]; God reveals himself in nature.[65] However, Kato argues, "[t]he problem lies not so much in the fact of knowledge, but in the type and extent of that knowledge."[66] He maintains that "General Revelation [*sic*] was never meant to give men salvation. It was only meant to point the way to God Himself [*sic*], who has planned the way of salvation through Jesus Christ."[67] Furthermore, Kato contends that this general revelation has been spoiled by "the tragedy of sin."[68] Instead of worshipping the one true God who revealed himself in nature, humankind began worshipping "man-made objects."[69] In Kato's analysis, the inculturation enterprise mistakenly confuses the ATR with general revelation; what Idowu calls 'implicit monotheism' is identified by Kato as idolatry.[70] Thus, while Kato agrees with inculturation theologians that that African peoples are not devoid of some knowledge of the divine and that ATR clearly show men's craving for the truth, as for example Mbiti maintained,[71] Kato asserts that they only "highlight the cry for the human heart, but the solution lies elsewhere."[72]

For Kato, defending the Bible as "God's special revelation" is not a goal in itself. At stake for Kato is the uniqueness of salvation in Christ. Fundamental to his thinking is the message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone, "the Lamb of God to be slain"; knowledge of this revelation is critical for human salvation.[73] He elucidates his standpoint by introducing the term "redemptive revelation," aiming to highlight the Christological content of special revelation: "Since General Revelation [sic] does not save anyone, everyone in any culture needs Christ, specially revealed, to take away sins."[74] Kato further clarifies that he agrees with Mbiti, who indicates that there is "some knowledge of God in traditional Africa."[75] However, the crucial question is "whether there can be salvation in such revelation."[76] While inculturation theologians such as Mbiti include ATR within the salvific plan of God

[64] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 115; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 18, 31.

[65] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 122.

[66] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 110.

[67] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 36.

[68] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 36.

[69] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 22.

[70] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 107-128.

[71] Mbiti, *African Religions*, 29-38.

[72] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 122; see also Kato, *Pitfalls*, 43-44; Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 36-37.

[73] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 123; Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 35-36.

[74] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 36.

[75] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 18.

[76] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 18.

as a *praeperatio evangelica*, a preparation to the gospel,[77] Kato categorically rejects this possibility, arguing that without "redemptive revelation" the way to salvation will remain unknown.[78]

Kato further undergirds his theological position with a case-study of the traditional religious values and practices of his own people, the Hahm of the Kaduna State of Nigeria. He argues that their approach to salvation is limited to societal and materialistic issues; the concept of sin against a supreme being is virtually absent in Hahm religion.[79] He holds that the necessity of "a total deliverance from the original and practical sins of the individual" is a unique characteristic of Christianity.[80]

Becoming personal, he claims that John Mbiti, who was brought up in a Christian home, "is not able to understand the background of African traditional religion as well as one who has been raised in a thoroughly traditional way."[81] Kato maintains that the call for a rehabilitation of ATR "is like telling an ex-cancer patient that it was a mistake that he received a complete cure. The dominating fears and superstitions concerning the spirit world are so dreadful that an instantaneous and complete cure is what Jaba people need."[82]

Kato concludes that "redemptive revelation" is indispensable for knowing God both as creator and savior. To underscore this argument, he points frequently to Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name in heaven that has been give among men, by which we must be saved."[83] In Kato's view, the final goal of Christian theology within the African context should therefore not be to rehabilitate African religiosity and culture, as proposed by Mbiti and Idowu, but "that Jesus Christ might have the foremost place."[84] He summarizes his view as follows:

> We may sum up in this manner. God has revealed Himself in two ways – general non-redemptive revelation on the one hand, and special redemptive revelation on the other. In the context of African traditional religions, the worship is merely

[77] Mbiti, *African Religions*, 277.

[78] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 17-20; Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 36-37.

[79] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 41-43.

[80] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 43.

[81] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 60; see also Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 14; Robert Heaney, *From Historical to Post-Colonial Theology: The Contribution of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N.K. Mugambi* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 181; Palmer, "Byang Kato," 16.

[82] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 38; see also Byang Kato, "The Brave New World (Jer. 8:11-22)," (n.d.) in *Perspectives of an African Theologian: The Writings of Byang H. Kato, Th.D.*, ed. Byang Kato (Data CD without page numbers; Nairobi: ACTEA, 2007).

[83] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 43, 97, 153; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 19; Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 32.

[84] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 38.

> an indication of an honest craving for God, which can be fulfilled only in biblical revelation through the incarnate Christ who died and rose again. This should be the preoccupation of the church in Africa.[85]

2.2 The means of salvation: The death of Christ

Having laid the foundation of his interpretation of the concept of salvation, Kato leaves no doubt as to the means of salvation. Biblical salvation, in Kato's view, is grounded in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Although there is no extensive treatment of the significance of the death of Jesus Christ in Kato's works, it is evident that Kato defends Christ's death on the cross as the only means of salvation. Thus, "the undeserving favor of God had made salvation possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[86] By taking this theological stance, Kato claims to be in line with the universal doctrine of salvation as confessed by the creeds of early Christianity and defended by the evangelicals throughout the world: "Suffice it to indicate that the substitutionary death of Christ for men everywhere at any time is the position held by most evangelical Christians."[87] For Kato, this is the same Christian faith for which the fathers of the early church strived and were willing to give their lives.[88] This universal and evangelical "truth" must be proclaimed in Africa as the only way to redemption and eternal life:

> God has given Himself to be known by man for the purpose of saving man. This Revelation [sic] has been accomplished through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, being God Himself, became a man so that He may show man who God is, and also that he may die in place of man. Jesus Christ, by becoming man, has made it possible for man to be bought from the slave market of sin and placed in the high position of being God's child: That is why Paul says, "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ" (II Corinthians 5:19). Through the incarnation God has made man and the whole world savable.[89]

By endorsing the cross of Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation, Kato's main objective is not so much to align with what he perceived as 'classic' Christianity, but rather to depict the "pitfalls" of both the inculturation venture and the ecumenical movement. Commenting on the work of the Ghanaian theologian John Kofi Agbeti,

[85] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 19-20.

[86] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 181.

[87] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 21.

[88] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 129-130, 176, 184; Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 16-17.

[89] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 37.

who, in Kato's analysis, advocated a return to the ATR[90], he concludes that within the inculturation enterprise, the "unique faith is subjected to scrutiny by the mighty power of African traditional religions."[91] Although he concedes that Mbiti and Idowu do not go as far as Agbeti in their partiality for ATR, they seem to suggest, eventually, that "it is just as possible to be saved through other religions as it is through Christianity, though the latter may bring salvation faster."[92]

Furthermore, Kato rebuffs the conviction prevalent in WCC circles, that "as long as a person is faithful in whatever religion he is following, he will be accepted by God."[93] He fears that the ecumenical movement is searching for "a common humanity irrespective of religion."[94] In both cases, Kato argued, the centrality of the cross of Christ in Christian doctrine is questioned. Therefore, Kato's emphasis on Christ's death on the cross must be understood in the light of the theological debates in which he was involved. What was at stake in his opinion, was not so much the meaning of the cross, but the uniqueness of salvation through Christ's death on the cross.[95]

This explains why Kato, in his works, does not elaborate on the function and meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ, nor on its significance within the African context. Rather than exploring the depths of the cross-event through African eyes, he advances the cross of Christ as a unique feature of Christianity and the only way to salvation, since humanity's fundamental problem is "alienation from God."[96] The cross of Christ, in some way, deals with this problem, offering freedom from sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal life.[97] Kato concludes that this message of salvation through the death of Christ alone must be proclaimed to Africans just as much as to other people.[98] The urgency of the situation called, in his view, for a strong defense of the centrality of the cross as the only way to salvation. In light of this, Kapteina argues that Kato's theology is determined by a Christocentric approach.[99] This approach to theology becomes clear when Kato pinpoints the following:

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[90] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 53-55; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 42-43; see further Kato, "Written Theology."

[91] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 57.

[92] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 174.

[93] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 32.

[94] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 44.

[95] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 149, 163, 177.

[96] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 17.

[97] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 181; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 19, 21-22; Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 37; see also Byang Kato, "Jesus Christ Frees," *Themelios* 1/3 (1976), 66-75.

[98] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 153, 157, 163-164.

[99] Kapteina, *Afrikanische Evangelikale Theologie*, 88.

> But if biblical Christianity is to survive and flourish in Africa, we must hold fast the truth that man's fundamental problem is sin against God, and that salvation is only through Jesus Christ. We must hold to the uniqueness of Christian revelation through the written Word and through the Living Word. To seek salvation elsewhere than through the shed blood of Christ is heretical. It is the preaching of another gospel, which really is no gospel. (..) The work of Christ is alone fully sufficient for our redemption.[100]

2.3 The heart of salvation: The soul

According to Kato, contemporary theological trends did not merely relativize the uniqueness of Christ's salvation—the very meaning of salvation was also contested. Delegates to the Conference organized by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in Bangkok at the turn of 1972–1973, with "Salvation Today" as it central topic, struggled with situations of injustice and poverty throughout the world and called for a more comprehensive approach to salvation.[101] This soteriological perspective, as formulated *inter alia* by the Indian theologian and chair of the WCC Central Committee M.M. Thomas in his opening address at the conference, presents salvation as "fullness of life," suggesting that salvation entails liberation from sin as well as liberation in the world here and now; it finds its fulfillment in the creation of a new humanity.[102]

Kato is highly critical of this interpretation of salvation. He describes the theology of "Salvation Today" as being preoccupied with deliverance in the here and now, and only secondarily with salvation from sins and the final judgment.[103] He argues that by also defining salvation in terms of outward liberation, the ecumenical movement has rejected the "authoritative basis of the Word of God" and thus created a "man-made message."[104] According to Kato, humankind's fundamental problem is first and foremost found on a spiritual level, since humanity has broken its relationship with God; his presupposition is that sin is the root cause of all human suffering. Consequently, the biblical concept of salvation entails "personal" or "spiritual" salvation.[105] Only when individuals have received inner salvation can

[100] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 22-23.

[101] Jacques Matthey, "Milestones in Ecumenical Missionary Thinking from the 1970s to the 1990s," *International Review of Mission* 8/350 (1999), 291-303.

[102] Madathilparampil M. Thomas, "The Meaning of Salvation Today: A Personal Statement," *International Review of Mission* 62/246 (1973), 158-169.

[103] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 143-144.

[104] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 142.

[105] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 143, 179.

African communities be transformed "in all aspects of life."[106] In other words, good works "do not precede nor produce salvation."[107] In Kato's analysis, the ecumenicals, with their insistence on outward liberation, mistakenly confuse the outcome of salvation with salvation itself, thus propagating a rather superficial approach to situations of injustice and oppression: "Unless the illness is properly diagnosed, the cure will ever remain elusive."[108] He summarizes his standpoint as follows:

> The nature of man's fundamental dilemma does not lie in mere physical suffering. It does not lie primarily in horizontal relationships with his fellow man. All human tragedies, be they sickness, poverty, or exploitation, are mere symptoms of the root cause, which the Bible calls sin. It is very sad to note that some key church leaders in Africa take these symptoms for the root causes.[109]

In Kato's opinion, the political dimensions of the emphasis on salvation here and now not only blurred the biblical concept of salvation but were also potentially dangerous. To make his point, he constates that the message of salvation as propagated within WCC and AACC circles, and also by the adherents of Black theology, seems to restrict salvation to a specific group, namely the oppressed and marginalized or the black people discriminated under the apartheid regime in South Africa.[110] As a result, Kato argues, the universality of the Christian faith as a saving message to all people is at stake.[111] Furthermore, and this is his main concern, the insistence on injustice and racism could eventually lead to the justification of violence against the oppressor, something which he considers unacceptable and unbiblical.[112] Kato claims that the message of salvation should be proclaimed to all people, regardless of their social status or skin color; Christian leaders should take up "the urgent task of bringing the salvation of Jesus Christ to both the sinful

[106] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 143.

[107] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 154.

[108] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 158; Kato, "Jesus Christ frees."

[109] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 16.

[110] The Bangkok conference also became famous for the call for a moratorium on foreign missions. At the instigation of John Gatu, president of the central committee of the AACC, delegates at the conference, frustrated about Western hegemony in church politics, issued a call for the unconditional withdrawal of foreign missionaries and funds. From now on, they argued, the non-Western church should take its own course. Kato considered the moratorium debate as a blunt rejection of the universal character of the church; one that would eventually weaken its universal message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. Kato, *Pitfalls*, 159-170; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 38, 43, 45; see further Robert Reese, "John Gatu and the Moratorium on Missionaries," *Missiology: An International Review* 42/3 (2013), 245-256.

[111] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 176-178; Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 50.

[112] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 34; see also Kato, "Lusaka Report."

oppressed and his oppressor."[113] Thus, instead of fighting for social issues or even supporting armed liberation groups, the African Church should invest in evangelism to win all people for Christ: "If Christian leaders are not the ones to raise the cry for spiritual salvation of our beloved African peoples, one wonders who will do it."[114]

Whereas Kato, in his thinking, prioritized evangelism as a means of proclaiming the message of "soul salvation" to all people, he did not categorically dismiss the sociopolitical aspects of the gospel. According to him, the church also has a prophetic calling. He elaborates that, since the world has not yet been freed from the consequences of sin, the ultimate liberation will only be realized at the second coming of Christ: "Meanwhile our frustrated groaning and longings in a sin-torn world must continue while we wait for the redemption of our bodies."[115] However, the struggle against oppression and apartheid in itself is commendable:

> In pointing out that political liberation is not a biblical understanding of the salvation Christ brings to men, we must add that struggles for political liberation are not wrong. The World Council is undoubtedly right when it emphasizes the strong prophetic demands in Scripture for social justice. Christians cannot isolate themselves from such struggles.[116]

2.4 The outcome of salvation: Transformation

This reconstruction of Kato's soteriology would be incomplete without mentioning Kato's insistence on the transformational power of what he saw as the essence of Christianity. Despite his polemical and at times uncompromising tone, his main work *Pitfalls* already depicts his deepest motivation:

> Show concern in social action but bear in mind at all times that the primary goal of the church is the presentation of personal salvation. As individuals are converted, they become instruments of revolutionizing the society for good. The church is not a department of social welfare for the government. It is a body of individuals called out to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ.[117]

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[113] Kato, "Lusaka Report," para.3; see also Kato, *Pitfalls*, 161, 179.

[114] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 161; see also Kato, *Pitfalls*, 148, 183; Byang Kato, "Evangelical Cooperation in Contemporary Africa," (n.d.) in *Perspectives of an African Theologian: The Writings of Byang H. Kato, Th.D.*, ed. Byang Kato (Data CD without page numbers; Nairobi: ACTEA, 2007).

[115] Kato, "Jesus Christ Frees," para.3.

[116] Kato, "Jesus Christ Frees," para.4.

[117] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 183.

However, in Kato's opinion, in order to become "instruments of revolutionizing the society for good," one should turn to Jesus Christ alone: "What Africa needs most is the new life of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit which enables Christians to live for Christ in all aspects of life, justice included."[118] Thus, Kato considers conversion a prerequisite for social change. Kato's main assumption, then, is that the heart of culture comprises people's "basic philosophy of life." With a reference to Galatians 2:20, Kato asserts that "[i]t is a fundamental Christian principle that Jesus Christ comes first and foremost in the life of the Christian."[119] However, this inner transformation can only be achieved, according to Kato, when one's "basic philosophy" is transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, thereby enabling men and women to serve the common good: "Unless the heart is truly changed, nominal African Christians will still have the same non-Christian philosophy of life."[120] Yet, when one's inner being is transformed, Kato explains, this "will not only attract more men to Christ, but will make our country a better place to live in."[121] Thus, Kato calls on Christian leaders, especially men, to share his vision for Africa:

> The church in Africa today is searching for educated men with a heart devotion [*sic*] to rise to the challenge facing the church of Christ. Graduates are needed as school teachers with a bias towards the Bible. Christian doctors with a word in season for the sick are in short supply. There is also a dire need of full-time Christian workers with the necessary qualifications. Such men are needed in theological education, local church ministry, communication through media, e.g., radio, T.V. and literature. It takes a real sacrifice of position, prestige and possessions, but if evangelical faith is to survive in Nigeria we must have such men.[122]

Kato's main objection to his opponents, then, is that contemporary theological trends, such as inculturation theology, the ecumenical movement with its insistence on political liberation, and Black theology, have rejected—in his analysis—the basic message of early Christianity of "Jesus Christ alone" as formulated in the ecumenical

[118] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 166.

[119] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 18.

[120] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 14.

[121] Byang Kato, "Christian Citizenship (Rom. 13:1-14)," (n.d.), para.12, in *Perspectives of an African Theologian: The Writings of Byang H. Kato, Th.D.*, ed. Byang Kato (Data CD without page numbers; Nairobi: ACTEA, 2007).

[122] Byang Kato, "The Role of the Christian Graduate in Nation Building. Message Given by Dr. Byang Kato General Secretary of A.E.A.M. at the launching service of Nigerian Christian Graduate Fellowship, University of Ife, 1975," para.12, in *Perspectives of an African Theologian: The Writings of Byang H. Kato, Th.D.*, ed. Byang Kato (Data CD without page numbers; Nairobi: ACTEA, 2007).

creeds,[123] thereby missing the opportunity to deeply impact the African continent. He argues that, for instance, the Bangkok conference adopted an "anthropocentric theology," which he also localizes in the rise of Black theology.[124] Kato concludes that, ultimately, this "anthropocentric" concept of theology, "dethrones the Omnipotent [*sic*] God and enthrones man."[125] For him, true salvation presupposes divine intervention, since only God is able to transform people's basic philosophy.[126] Relying on the work of the Mennonite missionary and anthropologist Donald Jacobs, Kato claims that Christianity should therefore be preoccupied with the heart of culture, namely on the philosophical level.[127] He assumes that, "if religion is what gives direction to life, Christianity must necessarily change the lifestyle or culture of the African."[128] Thus, he concludes, only by working from the inside out can the African continent be positively impacted.[129]

This further explains why Kato categorically rejects both Mbiti's inculturation theology, who sees "sufficient room for religious co-existence, co-operation and even competition in Africa,"[130] and liberation-oriented theologies, such as Black theology: "While black theology raises the right questions, it lacks the terms of reference. It is not a black Christ or black God we need, but the same eternal God of the Bible speaking to the black man in his need."[131] In Kato's view, the only way forward is through returning to the core message of salvation and transformation through Christ alone, since "[f]ormal changes do not mean a thing if the heart is not changed."[132] Therefore, he makes the following appeal:

> So my appeal to you is first of all to realize this great gulf that has been established between you and your God. Then also to point out the fact that Jesus Christ has done something about it. And, therefore if you would accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour now, the judgment of God that would have come upon you is placed on the Lord Jesus Christ once and for all. And as He suffered there on the

[123] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 129-130, 176, 183; Kato, "Jesus Christ Frees."

[124] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 45-52.

[125] Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 49.

[126] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 143, 179; see also Kato, "The Christian Surge."

[127] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 12-14.

[128] Kato, *Pitfalls*, 175.

[129] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 22-24.

[130] Mbiti, *African Religions*, 277.

[131] Kato, "The Christian Surge."

[132] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution*, 23.

> cross He bore the judgment, He has removed the curse. Therefore, as you accept Him today you are His child today and for evermore.[133]

Thus, in view of contemporary theological trends, which insisted on inculturation on the one hand and liberation on the other, and out of concern for the consequences of both movements, Kato endorses the supreme authority of the Bible, as an indispensable revelation and the only source for theology, presenting Jesus Christ as the only way to personal salvation and inner transformation, aiming to promote Christian service in Africa.

3. Reception of Kato's soteriological ideas

Perhaps it is not surprising that Kato's soteriological ideas provoked considerable controversy within African theological circles. The Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako critiques what he considers to be Kato's acontextual approach to Christian faith and theology. He asserts that, "[w]hilst it cannot be said that Kato was entirely lacking in critical discernment regarding the theological models and viewpoints he espoused, it is nonetheless the case that there is little in his outlook which does not stem from the deep roots in the conservative evangelical tradition—particularly the North American variant—of Christianity."[134] Bediako's main objection to Kato's theological stance, then, is what he describes as "Kato's postulate of the *acultural* nature of the Gospel."[135] At the end, according to Bediako, Kato suffices to introduce a Westernized form of Christianity into the African context. He concludes that Kato, with his insistence on the absolute primacy of the Bible, categorically rejects any understanding of theology as a synthesis of "old" and "new."[136] In addition, the Cameroonian theologian David Ngong, in his dissertation on African inculturation theologies, asserts that Kato "fails to realize that theology does not only draw from the Bible but also from the human experiences in various contexts."[137]

Besides the supposedly acultural character of Kato's theology, the Ghanaian Methodist theologian Mercy Oduyoye questions Kato's endorsement of the exclusive nature of the Christian message with regard to salvation by qualifying Kato's soteriological ideas as a "missionary theology" that is embedded

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[133] Byang Kato, "The Christian Home," *Today's Challenge* (August 1978), 32.

[134] Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 386.

[135] Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 413, emphasis in original.

[136] Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 413-416.

[137] David Ngong, *The Material in Salvific Discourse: A Study of Two Christian Perspectives* (PhD Thesis; Baylor University, US, 2007), 131; see further Victor Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 62-63.

in "traditional Christian dogmatics." She summarizes Kato's soteriological ideas as follows: "Salvation is the monopoly of Christianity, and its parameters are to be found in the Bible alone."[138] According to Oduyoye, it is debatable whether Christianity is the only line of communication between God and humankind; she points at experiences of salvation in the ATR as a source for understanding God's saving presence in history.[139] Moreover, the Nigerian theologian Victor Ezigbo repudiates Kato's presumption of the superiority of his understanding of the Christian concept of salvation.[140]

In line with these critical comments, several scholars, African as well as non-African, describe Kato as a representative of Western hegemony in church and theology, who does not make any significant contribution to the development of an African understanding of salvation.[141] John Parratt, former professor of Third World Theologies at the University of Birmingham, England, portrays Kato as someone who has "uncritically swallowed the opinions of his North American mentors."[142] Others have questioned, whether Kato, in criticizing scholars such as Agbeti, Mbiti, and Idowu, has recognized their deep frustrations as to Western dominance in church and theology.[143] Timothy Palmer concludes that Kato has often been depicted "as an extremist in terms of African theology."[144]

Nevertheless, there are scholars who have argued that, despite Kato's presumed Western/American outlook on soteriology, his theological legacy should be seen as a contextual response to the theological debates of his time.[145] In this respect, Ngong establishes that, "[w]hile 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."[146] He further adds that "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

[138] Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 62.

[139] Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 66-66; 102-105.

[140] Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies*, 55.

[141] Mark McEntire, "Cain and Abel in Africa: An Ethiopian Case Study," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, eds. Gerald West and Musa Dube (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2000), 248-259; Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 62-66.

[142] Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 62-63.

[143] John Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis of Theological Trends in Africa," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 4/3 (1980), 119-120; David Ngong, *The Material*, 131; see further Heaney, *From Historical*, 31-61.

[144] Palmer, "Byang Kato," 3; see also Kapteina, *Afrikanische Evangelikale Theologie*, 97-109.

[145] Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining*, 59-64; Ngong, *The Material*, 111-133.

[146] Ngong, *The Material*, 128.

present day Africa into consideration."[147] In line with Ngong's analysis, Ezigbo points to the bifold character of Kato's legacy: "On the one hand, he recognizes the need to promote some cultures and the identity of African peoples through constructing a contextual theology; on the other hand, he appears to be highly critical of some cultures, viewing them as incompatible with a biblical Christianity."[148] He elaborates by stating that Kato's literary corpus "presents us with a picture of Jesus who is undergoing an *identity crisis* – the Jesus who is neither truly Western nor truly African."[149] In spite of this apparent tension between Western and African aspects in Kato's thinking, Ezigbo then establishes that Kato's soteriological proposals should be regarded as a contextual evangelical contribution to the salvation debate, which he defines as a "dogmatic contextualization."[150] While both Ngong and Ezigbo thus argue that Kato should be read as a contextual voice, neither scholar references historical circumstances that might have influenced Kato's stance. By flagging the specific political and theological settings mentioned in Kato's work, this article anchors the argument that Kato's theology should be understood as a historically contextual theology.

Within evangelical circles, Kato's soteriological ideas have received a predominantly positive response, although the weaknesses in his analysis of contemporary theological movements have not gone unnoticed.[151] The Nigerian theologian Yusufu Turaki demonstrates that Kato searched for an alternative way to respond to the numerous challenges on the African continent. Turaki asserts that in view of what Kato perceived as 'disturbing' theological trends that emphasized culture or liberation, he "dared to provide an alternative method of doing theology."[152] In light of this, the Baptist missiologist Keith Eitel describes Kato's literary corpus as a quest for a "Scripture-dominant method" for contextualizing the gospel without compromising its central message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. However, in view of current theological debates, he constates that Kato "approached culture with the absolute standard of a priori truth."[153] Unfortunately, Kato's untimely death at the age of 39 prevented him from developing this

[147] Ngong, *The Material*, 133.

[148] Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining*, 60.

[149] Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining*, 62, emphasis added.

[150] Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining*, 62.

[151] Bowers, "Evangelical Theology," 85; Ferdinando, "The Legacy," 169-170.

[152] Yusufu Turaki, *The Unique Christ for Salvation: The Challenge of the Non-Christian Religions and Cultures* (Bowie, Maryland: Otakada.org, 2019), 33-34.

[153] Keith Eitel, "Contextualization: Contrasting African Voices," *Criswell Theological Review* 2/2 (1988), 334.

alternative method for church and theology in Africa; a new generation of African evangelical theologians would take up this challenge.[154]

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to investigate Kato's contribution to the salvation debate within African theological circles of the 1970s. In addition to the analyses of Ezigbo and Ngong, who underscored the contextual character of Kato's work, this article has argued that Kato's soteriology should be understood as a contextual evangelical response to the ongoing theological debates and to certain political trends of his time; he attempted to make an authentic contribution to the understanding of the biblical concept of salvation within the African milieu. Suggesting that the very essence of his interpretation of the gospel was endangered, he passionately attacked the culture- and liberation-oriented movements within African theological circles, which he considered the root cause of all "theological anemia."

Although the study is constrained by the fact that Kato left an unfinished legacy, this article has shown that Kato felt compelled to emphasize the exclusive nature of Christianity, insisting on personal salvation and inner transformation as prerequisites for social change. Reports on the persecution of Chadian Christians and calls for the politicization of the Christian message, however, may have created a feeling of urgency, eventually causing the debate to escalate. Thus, Kato resolved to categorically defend Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation. Because of his untimely and tragic death in 1975, Kato's theology in general and his ideas for the expression of Christianity in Africa were most likely only in their early stages. In which direction his thinking would have advanced remains an open question. Nevertheless, Byang Kato must be acknowledged as an African evangelical responding to the challenges of the day, who called for a construction of theology that is biblical, contextual, and African.

[154] Tiénou, "The Theological Task,"; Turaki, "The legacy."

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CHAPTER 3.

Between Rejection and Revitalization: Tokunboh Adeyemo and African Traditional Religions

Introduction

The Nigerian theologian and church leader Tokunboh Adeyemo (1944-2010) is mainly renowned for editing the *Africa Bible Commentary*,[1] which enjoyed a wide reception in Africa and elsewhere. Adeyemo was born in 1944 into an affluent Muslim family in Ibadan, western Nigeria (Yorubaland), and converted to Christianity at age 22. He studied at the Talbot School of Theology, and Dallas Theological Seminary, United States, completing his doctorate in theology in 1978. He then went on to study at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland under the auspices of Andrew F. Walls, where he examined the interactions between Yoruba religion, Islam, and Christianity. While pursuing this postgraduate program, Adeyemo was elected to succeed the late Byang Kato as general secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), an umbrella organization connecting national evangelical fellowships all over Africa. This was to become Adeyemo's life's work; he served the AEA until 2002, expanding the AEA network significantly.[2]

In the early years of his service at the AEA, Adeyemo was involved in the so-called salvation debates within evangelical circles. Concerned about the rise of contextual theologies, African evangelicals felt compelled to defend the uniqueness of what they called "biblical salvation"; they feared that contemporary re-evaluations of pre-Christian religiosity would eventually lead to syncretism. Like his predecessor at the AEA, Byang Kato, Adeyemo was adamant that religions other than Christianity could not be considered alternate paths to God, advocating the exclusivity of the Christian faith.[3] For this reason, Adeyemo is often mentioned in the same breath with Kato, as one of the African scholars who postulated a radical discontinuity between African traditional religions (henceforth: ATR) and

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* This chapter was previously published in *Exchange* 50(2) (2021).

[1] Tokunboh Adeyemo (ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006).

[2] Besides his work at AEA, Adeyemo held several other positions, including: chairman of *the International Council of the World Evangelical Fellowship* (now *World Evangelical Alliance*), chairman of the international board of *Open Doors*, chancellor and principal of *Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology* (now *Africa International University*), and elder of the *Nairobi Pentecostal Church*. From 1984 to 1993, he also was co-editor of the missiological journal *Transformation*. Shortly after retiring from the AEA, he initiated the *Centre for Biblical Transformation*, a leadership training center based in Nairobi, Kenya, which he directed until his passing in 2010. In 1994, Adeyemo received an honorary doctorate from *Potchefstroom University*, South Africa, for his outstanding Christian leadership. See further Christina Breman, *The Association of Evangelicals in Africa: Its History, Organization, Members, Projects, External Relations and Message* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1996), 53-59; Moses Owojaiye, "The Fall of an Iroko Tree: A tribute in Honor of dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo (1944-2010)." https://christianityinafrica.wordpress.com/2010/03/18/the-fall-of-an-iroko-tree-tribute-to-dr-tokunboh-adeyemo-1944-2010/ (accessed 30 October 2020); Bennie Van der Walt, "An Evangelical Voice in Africa: The Worldview Background of the Theology of Tokunboh Adeyemo (1 October 1944-17 March 2010)," *In die Skriflig* 45/4 (2011), 919-956.

[3] For an introduction to Kato's theology, see Wouter Van Veelen, "No Other Name!" The Contribution of Byang H. Kato to the Salvation Debate," *Exchange: Journal of Contemporary Christianities in Context* 50/1 (2021), 51-74.

Christianity.[4] At times he is even described as a rejectionist who questioned the validity of ATR. Consistent with their wider critique of African evangelical theology, both the Nigerian theologian Victor Ezigbo and the Cameroonian theologian David Ngong conclude that Adeyemo stood radically opposed to ATR and aspired to replace ATR with a Westernized form of Christianity.[5]

Other scholars, on the other hand, have pointed to Adeyemo's openness toward Africa's religious and cultural heritage. Without going into details, they claim that, in contrast with Kato, he attempted to relate the Christian message of salvation more directly to the African context.[6] However, this group of scholars seems to suggest that Adeyemo distinguished between African culture and African religion. For instance, though the Dutch missiologist Christina Breman indicates that Adeyemo moved beyond Kato by calling "for a creative interweaving" of Christianity with African culture, she simultaneously claims that he distanced himself from ATR.[7] Similarly, the German missiologist Detlef Kapteina, while acknowledging Adeyemo's openness toward an African worldview, only briefly discusses his ideas for a profound interaction between ATR and Christianity.[8]

Considering these diverging assessments of Adeyemo's contribution to the discussions on salvation, the question arises, how Adeyemo's stance regarding ATR relates to his allegiance to the worldwide evangelical tradition and particularly its uncompromising position regarding Christian uniqueness. How does Adeyemo assess and interpret ATR in relation to exclusivist interpretations of Christianity that prevailed in the African evangelical scene of the 1970 and 1980s? This article argues that while Adeyemo reiterates the uniqueness of salvation in Christ, as attested within international evangelical circles, his openness towards ATR indicates an attempt to formulate an authentic evangelical theology that is grounded in the African context.[9]

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[4] Andrew Igenoza, "Universalism and New Testament Christianity," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 12/3 (1988), 48-57; Isabel Phiri & Dietrich Werner (eds.), *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2013), 102.

[5] Victor Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 35-42; David Ngong, *The Material in Salvific Discourse: A Study of Two Christian Perspectives* (PhD Thesis; Baylor University, US, 2007), 122-133.

[6] Breman, *The Association*, 400-415; Detlef Kapteina, *Afrikanische Evangelikale Theologie: Plädoyer für das ganze Evangelium im Kontext Afrikas* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2001), 230-231; Yong Seun Han, *The Understanding of God in African Theology: Contributions of John Samuel Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria, SA, 2013), 61-63; Van der Walt, "An evangelical," 944-946.

[7] Breman, *The Association*, 412-413, 426.

[8] Kapteina, *Afrikanische*, 234-235.

[9] The present article is part of a larger project on African evangelical theology, which includes a diptych on Adeyemo's theology. The current article focusses on Adeyemo's publications on salvation. His proposals for a public theology will be discussed elsewhere.

Adeyemo has published extensively, even though he is mainly cited in connection to the *Africa Bible Commentary*. This article studies Adeyemo's early works on his assessment of ATR in relation to salvation, ranging from his appointment at the AEA in 1978 to the second International Congress on World Evangelization in 1989, when the salvation debate – and therewith the central concern of the debate with African inculturation theologies – was formally brought to a conclusion with the publication of the *Manila Manifesto*.[10] From 1989 onwards Adeyemo's focus shifted from the salvation debate to the topic of the credibility of African church leadership; he confirms as much in an interview from 1989.[11]

In the period under review, Adeyemo's main publication is *Salvation in African Tradition*[12] (henceforth: *Salvation*), which is the published edition of his master's thesis on African religiosity, submitted in 1976. Besides this book, that received much attention within African evangelical circles, his writings between 1978 and 1989 comprise lectures delivered at conferences, that were later published in theological journals, or consultation reports. Hence, apart from *Salvation*, Adeyemo's contribution to the salvation debate in the late 1970s and 1980s bears an occasional character. Therefore, rather than to presume that these writings present a comprehensively developed theology, this study aims to identify key-elements and recurring themes in Adeyemo's reflections on ATR.

The article is structured as follows: it offers a four-point analysis of Adeyemo's understanding of ATR in relation to the salvation debate. First, Adeyemo's discussion of the soteriological limitations of ATR will be presented. Next, Adeyemo's interpretation of ATR as a preparation for the gospel and a framework for articulating the gospel will be discussed. This will be followed by Adeyemo's assessment of ATR as a source for evangelical theology in Africa. Finally, some concluding remarks will be made.

[10] Lausanne Movement, *The Manila Manifesto*. https://www.lausanne.org/content/manifesto/the-manila-manifesto (accessed 29 December 2020).

[11] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Church in Africa (interview)," *Christianity Today* 33/15 (1989), n.p.; see for instance Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Africa by the Year 2000," *Transformation* 10/1 (1993), 7-9; Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Reflections on the State of Christianity in Africa* (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1995); Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Is Africa Cursed? A Vision for the Radical Transformation of An Ailing Continent* (Nairobi: Christian Learning Materials Centre, 1997); Tokunboh Adeyemo, Lessons on Rwanda for the Church in Africa. https://missionexus.org/lessons-on-rwanda-for-the-church-in-africa/ (accessed 9 November 2020).

[12] Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1979).

1. ATR as a vehicle of knowing 'true' salvation

At first glance, Adeyemo's assessment of ATR in relation to the salvation debate, seems to align with Kato's theological concerns.[13] In *Salvation*, his study on African religiosity, Adeyemo explicitly states that the aim of his research has been "to show the uniqueness of the Bible as God's Word and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ of the Bible, the perfect God-man and the Saviour of mankind."[14] Adeyemo clarifies that his book has been motivated by "the danger of syncretism."[15] In his analysis, the contemporary understanding of salvation as propagated for example by African inculturation theologians and the *World Council of Churches* has been conditioned by the resurgence of indigenous religiosity, which focuses on the here and now and only secondarily on the life to come. According to Adeyemo, the inculturation enterprise within African theology proposes a positive re-evaluation of ATR; he states that "liberal African theologians have uplifted traditional knowledge to the point where they see no need for redemption through Jesus Christ."[16] He discerns a similar dynamic in the ecumenical movement as embodied by the *World Council of Churches*. In his opinion, ecumenicals describe salvation exclusively in terms of human experiences of oppression, possibly influenced by the rise of liberation theology. He fears that by interpreting the concept of salvation in this manner, the distinctiveness of the Christian message would be lost. Therefore, Adeyemo maintains, both inculturation and ecumenical movements cast doubt on the monopoly of Christianity on salvation.[17]

De facto, in his book *Salvation* Adeyemo mainly engages with representatives of the inculturation enterprise, such as John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu, who were also Kato's main conversation partners. Referring to the proposals by Mbiti and Idowu who prioritize the study of ATR in the theological endeavor, he states that "one is perturbed over a seeming insistence to retain what is mere shadow, shallow, and empty when the perfect reality has come."[18] In line with Kato, he argues that Scripture should remain the primary source for theologizing. Although Adeyemo concedes that these scholars do not dismiss the Bible as an authoritative source, he questions their implicit submission that Christianity cannot claim the monopoly

[13] In a foreword to a biography on Kato, Adeyemo identifies with Kato's theological priorities, namely insisting on the primacy of the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the uniqueness of the Christ-event. Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Foreword," in *Byang Kato: Ambassador for Christ*, ed. Sophie De la Haye (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1986), 12-13.

[14] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 95.

[15] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, Author's preface.

[16] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, Author's preface. For the rise of inculturation theologies, see for instance John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1-24.

[17] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 94-95.

[18] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 93.

of salvation.[19] Adeyemo contends that the belief in a supreme God in ATR does not necessarily imply that Christianity and ATR share the same tenets, as for example, Idowu suggested in his study on Yoruba religion;[20] he holds that there is an essential distinction between ATR and Christianity. Though he concedes that God has revealed himself to African people through creation and providence, Adeyemo upholds that this "general revelation" is insufficient as regards salvation. In other words, ATR are not invalid *per se*; they are limited when it comes to what they offer in terms of knowledge of salvation.[21]

To undergird this position, Adeyemo elaborates that the African conceptualization of salvation is utilitarian and pragmatic, arguing that African peoples worship the gods for the sake of their own benefit, but do not worship them for who they are. He further demonstrates that the idea of reconciliation with a deity seems to be absent in ATR; sin is mainly seen as a disturbance of the social order of the living and dead, not as an act of rebellion against the high God.[22] Therefore he contends that ATR are inadequate instruments to save people from the final judgment; they are "limited as a vehicle of knowing God by the radical nature of man's fall, the effect of the fall upon man and the deception of man by Satan."[23] Adeyemo concludes that since ATR cannot serve as pathways to salvation, they should be supplemented by special revelation, which he defines as "soteriological revelation." Thus, it is only through Christ's intervention, that one discovers both the need for salvation and the way to salvation.[24] Consequently, Jesus did not come to introduce a new religion, but to end all rituals and religions. Instead of re-habilitating ATR, as promoted within inculturation and ecumenical circles, African theologians should proclaim that through Christ's atoning work "man has access back to God by simply believing Him."[25]

Despite his endorsement of the uniqueness of God's self-disclosure in Christ, Adeyemo seems to be cautious when it comes to expressing an opinion about the eternal destiny of those who died before hearing the gospel, stating that all will

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[19] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 80-85.

[20] Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962).

[21] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 17-30. Adeyemo applies the same argument to his interpretation of Islam, arguing that while Muslims worship the same Creator-God, their understanding of salvation is limited; like in Judaism, the concept of salvation in Islam is seen as cooperation between God and man, not as a divine gift. Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Idea of Salvation in Contemporary World Religions," *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 2/1 (1983), 10-12; see also Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Christ's Ambassadors in an Islamic Context* (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1986).

[22] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 51-61.

[23] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 26.

[24] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 27-28, 63-77; see further Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Salvation Debate and Evangelical Response," *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 2/2 (1983), 4-19.

[25] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 95-96; Adeyemo, "The Idea," 11-12.

be judged according to the measure of knowledge of God one has received.[26] Rather, he speaks respectfully about the ancestors, even suggesting that, when Christ came to earth, "our African great grandparents" were also enlightened by the gospel.[27] He also seems to evade a terminology of hell and damnation in his representation of the Christian faith, by stressing the gift-character of the Christian message.[28] For him, the missionary task of the church entails inviting all African peoples, traditionalists, Muslims, and others, to experience the fullness of life in Christ.[29]

2. ATR as a *praeparatio evangelica*

Though he highlights the limitations of ATR, Adeyemo does not characterize ATR as *idolatry*. Where Kato categorically distinguished between general revelation (as found in nature) and idolatry (as found in ATR and other religions), this distinction seems to be absent in Adeyemo's thinking. Whereas he describes ATR, as "nothing more than the veneration of the ancestors and the appeasement of the spirits,"[30] Adeyemo still approaches them as other, though distorted, *forms of revelation* – not as man-made idolatry.[31] Investigating the knowledge of God in his own Yoruba culture, he further states that ATR "can serve as a common ground in establishing a point of contact,"[32] suggesting that ATR have prepared the way for Christianity. He clarifies this position by pointing at the general manifestations of God in the world, such as natural phenomena, providence, and preservation, which have been apprehended as indications of the divine in all Africa. Though

[26] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Is Everyone Saved?" in *The Lion Handbook of Christian Belief*, ed. Robin Keeley (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1982), 418-419; see also Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 13.

[27] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Towards an Evangelical African Theology," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 7/1 (1983), 152-153. The reason for adopting this tolerant approach might be found in Adeyemo's own Yoruba background. As the Nigerian theologian Kelvin Onongha has argued, Yoruba culture is known for its peaceful co-existence of ATR, Islam and Christianity and its cross-religious tolerance: one is first Yoruba, then Muslim or Christian. Kelvin Onongha, *Towards a Missiological Model for Worldview Transformation Among Adherents to African Traditional Religion in Yorubaland* (PhD Thesis, Andrews University, US, 2014), 52-54.

[28] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Church and its Mandate for Social Change," in *The Church: God's Agent for Change*, ed. Bruce Nicholls (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), 167-169; Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Gospel and salvation," *Archives Lausanne II.* https://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/LausanneII/Adeyemo.htm (accessed 4 November 2020).

[29] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Testimony," in *The Calling of an Evangelist: The Second International Congress for Itinerant Evangelists, Amsterdam, the Netherlands*, ed. James D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1987), 107-108; Adeyemo, "Towards," 150. The same missionary method is proposed by the report of the Mini-Consultation on Reaching Traditional Religionists held in Pattaya, Thailand, in the context of the Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelization. Adeyemo was one of the co-writers of this report. Rather than condemning adherents of ATR, it motivates Christians to seek friendship with them to show God's love in Christ. Lausanne Movement, *Christian Witness to People of African Traditional Religions (Lausanne Occasional Paper 18)*, https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-18 (accessed 4 February 2021).

[30] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 92.

[31] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 81.

[32] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 24.

African peoples, because of the fall of man, only possess a hazy conception of God, Adeyemo maintains that God's self-revelation has been obscured, but not destroyed. Therefore, the ATR can be seen as a *praeparatio evangelica*; they serve as the basis on which the gospel can be explained.[33]

It is noteworthy, however, that Adeyemo explicitly distances himself from the so-called fulfillment-theory that was prevalent within the inculturation movement. Based on many similarities between ATR mythology and the biblical account, regarding the creation, the sacrificial system, and ancestors and spirits, among other things, its adepts suggested that Christ not only came to fulfill the Old Testament but also ATR. Adeyemo categorically rejects this possibility, fearing that the discontinuity between ATR and Christianity would be relativized. His main objection to the fulfillment-theory is that it implies that God, ultimately, would have ordained the worship of ATR. In his view, the difference between ATR and Christianity is not so much gradual, but essential.[34] On the other hand, his views seem to resonate with the fulfillment-theory by evaluating pre-Christian religiosity "as the foundation upon which the superstructure of special revelation rests."[35] Applying the image of Galatians 3:24, Adeyemo even describes ATR as a pedagogue, "commissioned with the task of pointing men and women to the existence of a holy and righteous God." Hence, like the Mosaic law, ATR confronts African peoples with "the lawgiver behind the natural laws and orderliness of the cosmos."[36] This ambivalence concerning the role of ATR vis a vis Christianity seems to remain unresolved in his thinking.[37]

This ambivalence in his systematic-theological evaluation of ATR becomes especially evident in the way Adeyemo uses terms and metaphors derived from ATR to illustrate the gospel message. While sometimes these metaphors and references merely serve as a contextual illustration to drive a point home, at other times he seems to suggest that some beliefs and practices in ATR foreshadow Christ or reflect the pre-existent Christ. When Adeyemo states that "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," he references a story from the Nuer, a people in

[33] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 17-30. Strictly speaking, Adeyemo does not use this Latin term. However, the function of ATR as a preparatory ground for the gospel is clearly suggested in his works. See for instance Van der Walt, "An Evangelical," 944-945.

[34] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 13, 28-29, 80-81.

[35] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 27.

[36] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 24.

[37] This ambivalence also emerges in the Lausanne report on ATR: "Whatever our understanding of the origins of ATR, we believe it has played, and still does, for its devotees, a special role among the peoples of Africa. It is believed that it, therefore, provides a point of contact or a sounding board for the message of God's ultimate revelation in Christ (e.g., in the traditional African idea of God). At the same time, we believe that, in several crucial aspects, ATR is incompatible with the gospel. We, therefore, accept that there are both elements of continuity and discontinuity between ATR and the Christian faith." Lausanne, *Christian Witness*, para.1.

the Upper White Nile region as a contextual imagery to explain the significance of the salvation in Christ. The story relates that, originally, heaven and earth were united by a rope or bridge; this link was broken accidentally, and the supreme being became unattainable.[38] He also refers to the sacrificial system of the Yoruba religion, which sees the blood sacrifice as the most precious gift one could offer to the gods; this, according to Adeyemo, could serve as a point of contact to explain Christ's sacrifice.[39] Adeyemo further uses the importance of blood sacrifice in ATR to clarify why some imageries resonate in an African setting. He declares: "In this context we can appreciate why an African convert loves to sing such songs as "There is Power in the Blood of the Lamb" over and over again. They are wrapped up in a world-view where vital participation expressed in forms of worship plays a prominent role."[40]

However, he seems to move beyond a mere illustration by referencing the common notion in ATR of the withdrawal of God, saying that "Africa's God, who, as they say, withdrew from men to heavens, has now come down to man so as to bring man back to God,"[41] inferring that ATR and Christianity reference one and the same God. Similarly, in discussing the Yoruba divinity *Ela*, who according to Adeyemo has similar mediatory traits as Christ, Adeyemo claims that Christ is "our Mediator par excellence." More so, he suggests the possibility that pre-incarnate Christ has revealed himself through *Ela* to the Yoruba people, thus casting *Ela* as a deity in which the pre-incarnate Christ is reflected.[42]

3. ATR as a framework for evangelical theology

Upon his appointment at the AEA, Adeyemo declared that "[w]e evangelicals have spent a great deal of time and resources trying to condemn ecumenical activities in Africa to little or no effect. Instead of reacting against a movement, it is time for us to take initiatives."[43] He states that evangelicals should pro-actively engage in theological debates about the identity of African Christianity.[44] To achieve this

[38] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 96.

[39] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 39-41.

[40] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 33. Also the Lausanne report on ATR enumerates many ways of relating the gospel to the traditional worldview; missionaries have every right to emphasize some elements found in ATR to introduce the Christian faith to African peoples. Lausanne, *Christian Witness*, para. 1,5.

[41] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 96; see also Adeyemo, "Towards," 148; see further John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 97-98.

[42] Adeyemo, "Towards," 148, 152-153.

[43] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Contemporary Issues in Africa and the Future of Evangelicals," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 2/1 (1978), 7.

[44] The same argument has been advanced by the Burkinabe evangelical scholar Tite Tiénou, who constates that evangelicals have been rather absent in the discussions on African theology since its inception in the 1950s. Tite Tiénou, "Recapturing the Initiative in Theology in Africa," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 11/2 (1987), 38-41.

goal, "evangelicals in Africa need a system which will express theological concepts in terms of African situations. Theology in Africa should scratch where it itches."[45]

Adeyemo finds this 'system' in the traditional concept of, what he calls, "cosmological balance." According to him, African peoples hold a religious outlook of life, that is characterized by a dynamic interaction between the spiritual and material realms. Although one can distinguish between the visible and invisible worlds, in reality, they are inseparable; they interact like communicating vessels. In the optimal situation, both worlds are in perfect harmony.[46] Adeyemo, who takes this worldview most seriously, also shows that, according to this worldview, the cosmic equilibrium is constantly threatened by evil powers.[47] These threats are not accidental; they occur when people ignore the rules and taboos of their particular society. Referring to the Yoruba religion, Adeyemo explains that the effects of sin have consequences in the cosmic realm; even a 'minor' sin could have catastrophic results.[48] In African thought, however, it is believed that the harmful effects of sin can be countered since the cosmic forces are controllable; they can be 'manipulated' through the performance of rituals, such as sacrifices and prayers.[49] Therefore, "maintaining a cosmological balance through divination, sacrifice and appeal to the indivisible powers has been the center-piece of African religiosity."[50]

According to Adeyemo, evangelical theology in Africa cannot ignore this predominant worldview, which he, personally, sees as a day-to day-reality.[51] He, therefore, frames the good news of the gospel in terms that the cosmic equilibrium has been once and for all restored by Jesus Christ.[52] By his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, Christ has restored the ontological relationship between the spiritual and material realms. In Christ, the evil powers that threaten the cosmic harmony have been defeated. Consequently, Christianity, as the more powerful spiritual

[45] Adeyemo, "Contemporary," 13; see also Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The African Church Struggles into Her Third Century," *Christianity Today* 23/19 (1979), 14-17. In this context, Adeyemo points at the proposals of the Kenyan scholar John Mbiti, who uses the African conception of time as the polar axis upon which his inculturation theology spins. Adeyemo, "Towards," 150; see further John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[46] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 21-22; see further Mbiti, *African Religions*.

[47] Adeyemo, "Towards," 150-152.

[48] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 51-56.

[49] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 33-36.

[50] Adeyemo, "Towards," 152; see also Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Social and Theological Changes in Conversion," in *Muslims & Christians on the Emmaus Road*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Monrovia, Cal.: Marc Publications, 1989), 222-223.

[51] Adeyemo, "Towards," 150-154.

[52] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 33, 52.

force, has taken over the mediatory role of ATR.[53] Hence, for Adeyemo, the Christian message can be expressed in terms of this cosmic balance and victory over evil. Quoting Romans 1:16, he defines the gospel as "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the gentile."[54] Without overlooking the doctrine of forgiveness of sins, which is central to evangelical theology, Adeyemo foregrounds the imagery of the victory over satanic powers and evil forces as found in the Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians:

> A theology of cosmological balance springs from a knowledge of cosmic struggle as described above and proclaims Jesus Christ as Victor and Liberator par excellence, the God-man who has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against humanity; and, having spoiled principalities and powers, death and the grave, he has set man free![55]

At the same time, Adeyemo holds that, until Christ returns, the "principalities and powers" continue to operate in this world; they constantly endanger the balance restored by Christ.[56] He, therefore, connects the 'African' concept of cosmological balance to the biblical concept of cosmological battle. Thus, in an article on the persecuted church in Africa, Adeyemo exhorts African Christians to prepare themselves for spiritual battle, knowing that Christ has already overcome the world of darkness.[57]

In light of this cosmological battle, the gospel message should be proclaimed holistically, that is in word and deed, to show that Christ indeed holds the ultimate power to save all life forms.[58] Through this comprehensive representation of salvation that focuses on both the visible and invisible worlds, "the triumph of the God-Man in the cosmic power-encounter" is highlighted.[59] When the gospel

[53] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 58-59, 95-96. For Adeyemo personally, the power of Christ was the reason to convert to Christianity, since in his opinion the Christian faith holds more power than Islam. Tokunboh Adeyemo, *The Making of a Servant of God* (Nairobi: Christian Learning Materials Center, 1993), 33.

[54] Adeyemo, "Gospel," 2.

[55] Adeyemo, "Towards," 152.

[56] Adeyemo, "The Church and its Mandate," 172-173.

[57] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Persecution: A Permanent Feature of the Church," in *Destined to Suffer? African Christians Face the Future*, ed. Brother Andrew (Orange, California: Open Doors, 1979), 23-36. It is an interesting question whether this accentuation of spiritual battle as the heart of daily Christian life has also been inspired by the rise of Pentecostal and charismatic theologies in Africa and elsewhere. Interestingly, Adeyemo was elder in the *Nairobi Pentecostal Church*. However, this question is beyond the scope of this study.

[58] By emphasizing holistic salvation Adeyemo also aligns with contemporary developments within the Lausanne movement with regard to the understanding of biblical salvation. See, for instance Van der Walt, "An Evangelical," 932-933.

[59] Adeyemo, "Gospel," 2; see also Tokunboh Adeyemo, "A Critical Evaluation of Contemporary Perspectives," in *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, ed. Bruce Nicholls, (London: Paternoster Press, 1985), 41-61; Adeyemo, "The Church and its Mandate."

message is formulated within the framework of this cosmological balance/battle, Adeyemo claims that "it is demonstrated that God is not absent from human history and struggles. Christ-centered theology cannot help but be functional, dynamic and relevant."[60] With a reference to Ephesians 6:12 he summarizes his theological model as follows:

> The church has been called to side with God in the battle against God's enemies, against all the demonic forces and activities under the leadership of Satan. The church is engaged in a battle of good against evil; of light against darkness; of life against death; of order against chaos; of sight against blindness; of law against anarchy; of righteousness against wickedness; of Christ against anti-Christs; of God against God-substitutes.[61]

In light of the foregoing, Adeyemo ascribes an important role to religious specialists to preserve the church in battle and restore the balance. Discussing the forms of worship in Yoruba religion, he indicates that religious persons, who continue to be regarded as the mediators with the gods after the arrival of Christianity and Islam, are still looked upon with respect in modern Africa: "It is not surprising that medicine men wield much power in Africa, and that priestly functions at sacrifices provide the strongest influences to maintain the unity of the community, especially after a breach of societary regulations."[62] Addressing African church leaders, Adeyemo contends that the church in Africa should take on the traditional role of religious specialists; its primary task should consist of interceding on behalf of their nations: "Religious professionals are still the most influential people in our continent. Probably this influence is a carry-over from the traditional African world-view, where reality is perceived, analyzed and interpreted through religious lenses." Therefore, he maintains that "[w]hen leaders are looking for help, in Africa they still look to religious people."[63]

4. ATR as a vital source for theology

In an article written in 1978, two years after his master thesis, Adeyemo still discusses African contextual theologies rather critically, stating that "[c]onsciously or unconsciously, these men are seeking for verification of Christian truth in

[60] Adeyemo, "Towards," 148. Also in the Lausanne report on ATR the cosmological balance/battle terminology abounds. Lausanne, *Christian Witness.*

[61] Adeyemo, "The Church and its Mandate," 172.

[62] Adeyemo, *Salvation*, 35.

[63] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Calling of the Theological Educator in Africa today," *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 8/1 (1989), 7; see further Adeyemo, "The Church and its Mandate," 175-176; Adeyemo, "Social," 222-223.

historico-political praxis. Theirs is a complete departure from the propositional revelation cherished by the conservatives."[64] He disqualifies the contextual approach as relativistic and situational, indicating that the Bible is used selectively to support one's preconceived standpoint. In another article, he repeats this view, suggesting that "[h]uman experiences can become normative rather than the inerrant and infallible Word of God."[65] In response, Adeyemo proposes a "biblical theology in an African setting," claiming that, contrary to culture-oriented and liberation-oriented theologies, which take human experience as a *locus theologicus*, evangelical theologians pursue a Bible-centered theology, that takes Scripture as its primary and normative source. Thus he maintains that every theological assertion must be verified by the teaching of the Bible.[66]

However, it appears that in the following years, Adeyemo nuanced this position. In an article published in 1983, he argues that to effectively communicate the message of salvation, evangelicals should apply "a four-dimensional hermeneutics: 1) communal, deriving from the community of believers; 2) pneumatic, illumined by the Holy Spirit; 3) contextual, taking seriously the cultural context; and 4) missiological, responding to God's mission of calling people from all nations to faith and obedience in Christ."[67] He further adds that "[i]t is also imperative that we exegete our socio-economic-politico and cultural contexts seriously. We need to know our people, our history and present day struggles so as to be able to relate the gospel sensibly." By espousing this multi-dimensional approach, Adeyemo claims that biblical truths cannot exist in a vacuum; Scripture can only become relevant to African peoples when related to their daily lives.[68]

In another article written in 1983 on the viability of African evangelical theology, Adeyemo seems to develop this issue further, arguing that, whereas the Bible remains the absolute basis for theologizing, other sources are needed to make Christianity relevant to the African contexts. In this respect, he mentions ATR as one of the main sources for constructing an evangelical African theology. Stating that God has also revealed himself to the Yoruba people before the arrival of Christianity, he proposes "a lively interaction" between what he describes as "the given revelation" (Scripture) and "the perceived revelation" (Yoruba religion). This "perceived revelation" is always to be examined in the light of biblical revelation. Through this

[64] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "An African Leader Looks at the Churches' Crises," *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly* 14/3 (1978), para.3.

[65] Adeyemo, "Contemporary," 9.

[66] See also Adeyemo, "The African Church Struggles."

[67] Adeyemo, "The Salvation," 19.

[68] This multi-dimensional approach approximates Mbiti's hermeneutical framework for African theology, that entails an interaction between the Bible, Christian theology, ATR, and the living church. See Mbiti, *New Testament*, 189-191.

lively interaction, a relevant Christian theology emerges and faith is firmly anchored in the context. Without dismissing the primacy of the Bible, Adeyemo pinpoints that doctrinal statements follow rather than precede this interaction between Bible and ATR. He ends his article by presenting a list of African religious categories that an evangelical theology should address to become relevant to African peoples.[69]

Furthermore, in a review of *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* written by the Nigerian theologian Osadolor Imasogie, Adeyemo expresses his disappointment about, in his view, the author's failure to contextualize evangelical theology within the African milieu. In response, Adeyemo maintains that a thorough study of African religious and cultural realities should be a prerequisite for theologizing in the African setting.[70] He argues that what he describes as, the lack of commitment to Christ in many African churches, "is totally due to the failure of Western orthodox theologians to take African worldviews into consideration in their theological formulations."[71] In an article on theological education in Africa, Adeyemo, therefore, argues that it is imperative that African theologians not only adequately exegete the Biblical account, but also their contexts; both sources must be brought into conversation with each other: "This will require that our curricula include courses not just in Bible but also in the African worldview, African religions, African history (both ancient and modern), African economics, and African politics."[72]

To be sure, by presenting building blocks for an evangelical theology in an African setting, Adeyemo's objective is not to distance himself from other forms of Christianity. Discussing the moratorium debate in the 1970s, when African leaders led by the Kenyan church leader John Gatu called for a withdrawal of Western support, Adeyemo makes it clear that African churches should not exist in isolation: "We cannot exclaim that we do not belong to others, because we do. We are the church of Jesus Christ in Africa because there is the church of Jesus Christ elsewhere."[73] Moreover, he identifies himself with the worldwide protestant-

[69] This list of ATR categories includes, among other things: the sacrificial systems, the veneration of divinities and intermediaries, the existence of spiritual entities and beings, the role of priests and mediums, and myths of creation and eschatology. Adeyemo, "Towards," 153-154.

[70] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa (book review)," *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 3/1 (1984), 87.

[71] Adeyemo, "Guidelines," 88.

[72] Adeyemo, "The Calling," 8. In another article, he explains that this conversational method has been inspired by Christ's conversations with his disciples: "Rather than 'communication to', a one-way model of instruction comparable to a postman delivering parcels at a spot and departing, Christ's method is 'communication with', a two-way model of interaction comparable to a hunter inviting his neighbors to feast on game." Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education," in *Evangelical Theological Education Today: 2 Agenda for Renewal*, ed. Paul Bowers (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1982).

[73] Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The African Church and Selfhood," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 5/2 (1981), 219; see also Adeyemo, "Towards," 149.

evangelical tradition that insists on concepts such as *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and *sola fide* (by faith alone).[74] Yet, he asserts that "it would be very unjust to condemn any culture as being totally demonic and this is something we ought to bear in mind as we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ."[75] Thus Adeyemo considers ATR an indispensable 'conversational partner' for constructing an African evangelical theology so that Africans can feel at home within global Christianity.[76]

Concluding remarks

This article has shown that Adeyemo presented a nuanced assessment of African traditional religiosity. Though he fully endorsed Kato's theological legacy with its insistence on the primacy of the Bible as God's ultimate revelation and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation, Adeyemo navigated between the positions of rejection and revitalization by valuing ATR as a preparation to and context for the gospel. In line with post-Lausanne evangelical theology, he accommodated both continuity and discontinuity between ATR and the Christian faith. Although Adeyemo did not develop his ideas on Christianity in relation to ATR systematically and maintains that ATR cannot serve as a vehicle for 'true' salvation, he allocates ATR a prominent role in presented building blocks for an authentic African evangelical theology. Though maintaining the discontinuity between ATR and Christianity in terms of salvation, Adeyemo suggests that ATR and Christianity share a common idea about God, that some aspects of ATR, such as the Yoruba deity *Ela*, foreshadow Christ and that ATR myths, imageries, and concepts can be used to achieve a contextually relevant representation and communication of the gospel. Moreover, he proposed the ATR concept of cosmological balance/battle as a 'system' for theologizing in the African context. Without questioning the exclusive authority of Scripture, he re-evaluated ATR as a source for developing a viable evangelical theology in Africa. Therefore, the suggestion that Adeyemo was a rejectionist of ATR seems to be unfounded. While it is understandable that Adeyemo has been identified with his predecessor Kato by theologians such as Ezigbo and Ngong, given his allegiance to the worldwide evangelical tradition and his defense of the uniqueness of the Bible and particularly the Christ-event, he pioneered new ways of formulating evangelical thought within an ATR worldview.

[74] Adeyemo, "The Salvation," 15.

[75] Adeyemo, "The African Church and Selfhood," 217.

[76] In this regard, Adeyemo seems to see an essential difference between ATR and Islam. Since he considers Islam a 'non-indigenous' religion that entered Yorubaland through Hausa and Fulani traders, he mainly stresses the discontinuity between Islam and Christianity. Hence, while one should treat Muslims with love, Islam cannot serve as a source for African Christian theology. See Adeyemo, "Social," 225-230.

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CHAPTER 4.

The Gospel as a Life to Live: Tokunboh Adeyemo and the Evangelical Debate on Mission

Introduction

Why would a Western European theologian study the works of an African church leader? In the Dutch context of secularization, in which I serve as a minister, many churches seem to have lost touch with society; church denominations thus place the question of how the church can become relevant again high on the agenda. For this reason, I am intrigued by African evangelical churches and leaders who seem to combine 'conservative' theological ideas with social engagement and cooperation. One of the purposes of this study is to show the relevance of their methodologies to Western theological reflection.[1]

In past decades, a significant body of research has been published on the rise of contextual theologies within African Christianity. However, the literature pays relatively little attention to the contributions of the evangelical movement to contextual theologizing.[2] On the whole, handbooks on African theology tend to overlook the works of African evangelical scholars.[3] In the rare cases that African evangelical theology is referenced, it is often characterized as a biblicist type of theology, which, as a reaction to emerging theologies that prioritize the study of African contexts (e.g. inculturation and liberation theologies), merely reiterates Western conservatism without engaging with the realities of life in Africa. Examples of such critics of African evangelical theology include Kwame Bediako (1992), Victor Ezigbo (2010), Augustine Musopole (1995) and David Ngong (2007). Their main point of critique is that evangelical theologians, by espousing a dualistic conception of reality, fail to understand the methodological implications of the incarnation of Christ in their formulation of the Christian faith. Consequently, they maintain that for African evangelical theologians, Christ's humanity largely remains a historical concept that has no implications for the theological reflection on the daily struggles of African people.[4]

Against the backdrop of these critical assessments of African evangelical theology, this article analyzes the theological legacy of one of Africa's renowned

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[1] This article is part of a broader research project that examines contextuality in African evangelical theology, with special focus on the works of thinkers such as Tokunboh Adeyemo, Byang Kato, and Tite Tiénou.

[2] I realize that there are multiple definitions of the term "evangelical." In this article I will only use the term for those who self-identify as evangelicals. In the African context, the evangelical movement is usually associated with the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), the umbrella organization of evangelical fellowships in Africa. See for a more detailed discussion of worldwide evangelicalism Larsen and Treier 2007:1–14.

[3] Thus for instance Parratt 1995, West and Dube 2001 and Phiri 2016. A positive exception appears to be Ngong 2017.

[4] For an overview of scholarly criticism of African evangelicalism, see Kapteina 2006 and Tiénou 2007.

evangelical theologians, the late Tokunboh Adeyemo (1944–2010), best known for editing the Africa Bible Commentary (2006). Adeyemo, who served as the general secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) from 1978 to 2002, is still considered one of the main voices in African evangelical circles.[5] Adeyemo is usually associated with the evangelical critique of the inculturation paradigm that emerged in the aftermath of decolonization in the 1960s. Although Adeyemo did participate in the vivid debates on the relationship between Christ and culture in the early years of his career, as I have argued elsewhere, categorizing him as a reactionist evangelical who merely critiqued inculturation theology does not do justice to his work. While Adeyemo endorsed the preeminent place of Scripture, he simultaneously advocated for the necessity of a creative interaction between the evangelical faith and Africa's religious and cultural heritage (Van Veelen 2021).

Building on that conclusion, the present article aims to analyze Adeyemo's contributions to the evangelical debate on the nature of mission. The International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 (henceforth Lausanne I) inspired evangelicals around the globe to rediscover the social implications of the gospel message.[6] However, this renewed focus on what was called "integral mission" raised questions about the relationship between evangelism and social action. Should the primacy of mission not be the verbal proclamation of the gospel? As the representative of African evangelicals, Adeyemo engaged in the debates following Lausanne I and advocated for a holistic interpretation of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19–20. By doing so, he moved beyond the dualistic framework of his predecessor Byang Kato (1936–1975), widely considered the founding father of African evangelicalism, who had insisted on the primacy of "soul salvation." Interestingly, few researchers seem to have noticed the new emphasis on holistic mission within African evangelical

[5] Tokunboh Adeyemo was born in 1944 into a royal Muslim family in Ibadan, western Nigeria. In search of the purpose of life, he converted to Christianity at age 22. He obtained a B.Th. from ECWA Theological Seminary, Nigeria, a M.Div. and M.Th. from Talbot School of Theology, U.S.A., a D.Th. from Dallas Theological Seminary, U.S.A., and a D.Phil. from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. After his theological studies, he leaded the AEA from 1978 to 2002, during which time he represented the African evangelicals on the International Council of the World Evangelical Alliance. He also served as principal and chancellor of the Africa International University (former NEGST), Nairobi, and as an elder in the Nairobi Pentecostal Church. After retiring from AEA, he founded the Centre for Biblical Transformation, which he directed till his passing in 2010. In 1994, he received an honorary doctorate from Potchefstroom University, South Africa, for his outstanding Christian leadership. See further Ayee 2010; Breman 1996:53–59; Owojaiye 2010; Van der Walt 2011.

[6] In his study on paradigm shifts in the theology of mission, the South African scholar David Bosch has shown that in evangelical circles, partly due to premillennialist theologies that expected the rapture of the church before the second coming of Christ, the interest in social and political participation had declined toward the end of the 19th century. From the 1960s onwards, voices emerged to broaden the church's mission: missionary involvement includes much more than merely "proclaiming the gospel" and "saving of souls." According to Bosch, when Lausanne I was held, many evangelical leaders were eager to rethink the social thought and practices of the church (Bosch 1991:413–415).

theologizing.[7] This article intends to fill this gap. It is guided by the following question: How did Adeyemo position himself in the post-Lausanne debates on the mission of the church? By conducting an analysis of Adeyemo's involvement in the debate, I argue that Adeyemo was part of a group of so-called "radical evangelicals" who promoted a broad, holistic, contextual and transformational understanding of mission.[8] In this way, I question the categories commonly used to describe African Christianity.

This article is structured as follows. In section 1, I provide an overview of the controversies on the nature of mission following Lausanne I, paying special attention to the positions of radical evangelicals. Then, in Section 2, by using the missiological ideas of the radical evangelicals as a theoretical framework, I analyze Adeyemo's contributions to the debate, from his appointment at the AEA in 1978 to the second International Congress on World Evangelization in 1989 (henceforth Lausanne II), during which the missiological statements of Lausanne I were formally reaffirmed in the *Manila Manifesto* (Lausanne 1989). This analysis is followed by a brief description of how Adeyemo engaged with the African situation in subsequent years. In Section 3, I conclude with my main point – that Adeyemo moved beyond the reactionist and dualistic tendencies of early African evangelicalism by foregrounding a broad, holistic and contextual approach to Christian mission in view of the transformation of Africa.

1. The Evangelical Debate on the Mission of the Church

Lausanne I is widely considered a milestone in determining evangelicalism's course with regards to mission toward the end of the 20th century (Steuernagel 1991:53; Tizon 2008:37). In his plenary address to the congress, Billy Graham, the great catalyst of the Lausanne movement, expressed his hope that evangelicals around the world would rediscover the élan of the missionary movement of the 19th century. In his analysis, the ecumenical movement embodied by the World Council of Churches (WCC) had departed from the evangelistic mandate as formulated at the famous Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910. Thus, he rallied

[7] Though some scholars (e.g. Ezigbo 2010:59; Ngong 2007:122–127; Van der Walt 2011) concede that Adeyemo advocated a holistic understanding of mission, they maintain that his thinking was deeply shaped by a dualistic (what they see as typically "evangelical") framework, which draws a sharp line between the spiritual and material. This article argues the opposite, namely that Adeyemo, in contrast with Kato, theologized from a holistic (and what he calls "African") perspective. The Dutch missiologist Christina Breman, in her dissertation on the AEA, also highlights Adeyemo's holistic style of theologizing, without further analyzing Adeyemo's works (Breman 1996:426, 436; see also Kapteina 2006:74–75, 80).

[8] Whereas Adeyemo's later works bear some similarities with the theology of reconstruction that emerged in the 1990s, that strived to reconstruct and transform Africa, this article argues that the bedrock of Adeyemo's social engagement must be sought in the evangelical debate on mission in the 1980s. I follow at this point the Kenyan scholar Humprey Waweru, who describes Adeyemo's theological position in the context of African reconstruction theology, while distinguishing him as an evangelical thinker who drew on his own sources (Waweru 2018:220–222).

evangelicals to take the lead in accomplishing the great task of world evangelization before the end of the century (Graham 1974).

While Lausanne I succeeded in uniting evangelicals around the global missionary mandate, the question of how to achieve this caused much controversy. During the conference, 'conservative' evangelicals, such as Peter Beyerhaus (Germany), Donald McGavran (US) and Ralph Winter (US), insisted on personal evangelism among "the lost" as the key focus of mission. The Anglican church leader John Stott stressed that, though evangelism should have primacy, personal conversion should not be considered the end; it should be followed by involvement in the world. More radical voices came from Latin American theologians, such as René Padilla (Ecuador) and Orlando Costas (Costa Rica). In their view, the church is called upon not only to verbally proclaim the gospel but also to deeply engage with the societal issues of particular contexts, as, otherwise, the gospel would only take root superficially. For these radical voices, the struggle against poverty and injustice was part and parcel of mission (Hunt 2011:82–83).

The controversies over the necessity for and forms of social engagement must be understood against the backdrop of the early 1970s. In their overview of developments within the Lausanne movement, missiologists Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden have shown that in the early 1970s, "the world had truly become a global village, a fact that had a major impact on the evangelical world." Television brought the horrors of the Vietnam War (and other crises) into American homes. For the first time in history, people were confronted with daily images of "far-off famines, disasters, and crises," such as the Biafran War (1967–1970). In the US, the civil rights movement of the 1960s had given impetus to the revolutionary Black Power movement, which caused much social upheaval. Latin American countries suffered under the hardships of military dictatorships, giving rise to liberation movements. On a global scale, the Cold War was raging. By the time Lausanne I was held, many evangelicals, especially those working in the context of poverty and oppression, felt they could no longer ignore the state of the world (Samuel and Sugden 1987:viii-ix).

Simultaneously, according to the American scholar Timothy Palmer, evangelicals were uncomfortable with emerging contextual theologies, such as Gustavo Gutierrez's "Theology of Liberation" and James Cone's "Black Theology," that seemed to define salvation primarily in terms of political and social liberation. Though Palmer stresses that the struggle against political and socio-economic oppression (Latin America) and racial discrimination and segregation (the US, South Africa) was laudable, he explains that evangelicals were concerned about the politicization of the biblical concept of salvation. According to Palmer, the evangelical world felt particularly challenged by the Assembly of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC that convened in Bangkok, 1974, and focused on the theme "Salvation Today." He states that evangelical observers at

the conference reported that salvation was discussed almost exclusively in "this-worldly" terms, without any reference to eternal life. This was the origin of the evangelical dilemma at Lausanne I: how to respond to the world's socio-political problems without losing sight of the central focus in mission, namely winning the nations for Christ (Palmer 2004:5–11).

Under the leadership of John Stott, Lausanne I opted for a compromise. Evangelism and social action were affirmed as "equal partners" in mission: The church is called both to bring good news and to be good news. Thus, Section 5 of the *Lausanne Covenant* embraced the concept of *misión integral* (integral mission), a phrase coined by Padilla (Lausanne 1974:para.5).[9] However, the idea of a partnership between evangelism and social action in mission did not resolve all tensions, as it was clearly stated that in "the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary" (Lausanne 1974:para.6). Consequently, at Lausanne I, personal conversion was still seen as the primary and ultimate goal of mission. Despite the remaining inconsistencies, Padilla claimed that the statements of Lausanne I were received with great enthusiasm, maintaining that "[t]he Lausanne Covenant was a death blow to every attempt to reduce the mission of the Church to the multiplication of Christians and churches through evangelism" (Padilla 1985:29).

Padilla's claim would prove to be excessively optimistic. The euphoric atmosphere of Lausanne I was soon overshadowed by discussions about the interpretation of Section 5 of the *Covenant*. North American evangelicals such as Leighton Ford, chairman of the Continuation Committee for the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, feared that the insistence on integral mission would distract the church from its evangelistic mandate – a development that he perceived within WCC circles (Steuernagel 1991:54). Between Lausanne I and Lausanne II, several international consultations were convened to clarify the relationship between words and deeds in mission. Adeyemo attended most of these conferences, representing evangelicals in Africa.[10] While the Consultation on World Evangelization, held in Pattaya, Thailand, in 1980 (henceforth Pattaya) highlighted personal evangelism – considered by Padilla, Costas and others as a step backward (Padilla 1985:29–30) – other consultation reports advocated for a close connection

[9] The American scholar David Kirkpatrick has shown that Latin-American evangelicals such as René Padilla and Samuel Escobar have exercised major influence on the development and global spread of the term "integral mission." He further clarifies that these theologians, while referencing their own (evangelical) resources, developed the idea of integral mission in the same context of poverty and oppression as liberation theology (Kirkpatrick 2016; see also Samuel & Sugden 1987:ix).

[10] As far as I have been able to find out, Adeyemo was present at the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle (Hoddesdon, UK, 1980), the Consultation on World Evangelization (Pattaya, Thailand, 1980), the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (Grand Rapids, Mich., US, 1982), the Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need (Wheaton, US, 1983), Singapore 87: A Conference of Younger Leaders (Singapore, 1987) and the Second International Congress on World Evangelization (Manila, Philippines, 1989).

between the personal and communal dimensions of the church's mission. Despite these efforts to harmonize the diverging and sometimes opposing interpretations of the Great Commission, a unified concept of mission was not achieved (Hunt 2011; Steuernagel 1991; Sugden and Bosch 1982).

In his assessment of the evangelical debate on mission, the Filipino-American missiologist Al Tizon has shown that the controversy was characterized by three tensions that were interrelated. The first tension was defined by narrow and broad approaches to mission. Is social concern included in the missionary task of the church (the broad view)? Or is the church's mission confined to the verbal proclamation of the gospel (the narrow view)? Closely related to this first tension, the second tension dealt with the question of prioritization. If socio-political engagement is indeed part and parcel of the church's mission, what should come first, evangelism or social responsibility? The third tension was characterized by the differences between what Tizon called "First World Theology" (Western theology) and "Two Thirds World Theology" (non-Western theology) since Lausanne I had given church leaders from Africa, Asia, and Latin America a platform to share their ideas. After Lausanne I, these leaders from the Global South began to assert themselves more prominently, claiming the right to theologize contextually and the urgency of doing so.[11]

With regard to these three tensions, Tizon observes that a particular group of mostly non-Western theologians, called the "radical evangelicals," with René Padilla as their leading figure, opted for a broad, holistic and contextual view of mission.[12] These "radicals" rejected the dichotomy between word and deed, as well as the language of prioritization, which they considered typically Western. In their view, words and deeds merge in God's mission. Therefore, they stated, it is principally, as well as practically, impossible and unnecessary to differentiate between evangelism and social concern in mission. Instead, they promoted a radically holistic view of mission (Tizon 2008:43–52). Referencing the socio-political contexts in which liberation theology emerged, Tizon depicts their position as a

[11] In the African contexts, the third tension cannot be separated from the call by some African church leaders, led by John Gatu, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, for a moratorium on Western missions and missionaries. Though the call for moratorium was formally reacted by Lausanne I, this does not mean, of course, that these 'post-colonial' ressentiments were not present in the evangelical world. See further Shaw 1997:285–286.

[12] Names linked with the standpoints of "radical evangelicals" include, among many others, Orlando Costas, Samuel Escobar and René Padilla from Latin-America, David Gitari and Kwame Bediako from Africa, Vinay Samuel and David Lim from Asia, Ronald Sider (US) and Chris Sugden (UK) (Tizon 2008:5, 103).

radical evangelical integration of the priorities posed by liberation theologians (Tizon 2008:53–70).[13]

Tizon shows that the ideas of the "radical evangelicals" were systematized by Vinay Samuel from India and Chris Sugden from England, who developed the concept of "mission as transformation" as an alternative and more appropriate term to describe the church's focus with regard to mission. In accordance with the biblical promise of re-creation, they argued that the ultimate goal of the church's mission is not so much "soul salvation" but rather the healing and restoration of the world. Thus, churches are divinely ordained to be agents of change in their societies. After the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility in 1983, the group of radical evangelicals began to self-identify as transformationist theologians.[14] By the time Lausanne II was held, these so-called "transformationists" operated more or less independently from the Lausanne Movement, initiating several structures, such as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT), the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) and the journal *Transformation*, which was edited by Adeyemo, Vinay Samuel and Ronald Sider (Tizon 2008:71–80).[15]

Lausanne II clarified the direction of the Lausanne movement. Although the global charismatic movement was widely represented for the first time and although the poor were featured prominently on the agenda, the conference was dominated by proponents of what was called the "AD 2000 movement" headed by Argentinian-born missionary Luis Bush. With the Cold War drawing to a close and the turn of the century approaching, millennial expectations were running high. Evangelicals believed there was an opportunity to reach billions of "unreached" in the "10/40" window (the rectangular area where the majority of the world's Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists live) by the year 2000. Some expected that the task of world evangelization could and should be fulfilled within a few years or decades (Coote 1990:15–17; Hunt 2011:83–84; Steuernagel 1991:55).

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[13] "As they allowed the challenges of liberation to re-orient them theologically to the misery of the suffering poor, radical evangelicals experienced a profound tension between their socio-political contexts and their traditional evangelical way of doing theology. The latter did not seem to have anything significant or relevant to say to the very real social, political and economic problems of the poor" (Tizon 2008:59).

[14] The Indian scholar Jacob Thomas defined "transformation" as "a multifaceted process involving socio-cultural and economic realities and situations that dehumanize humanity. The church is called to work with God in the transformation of societies and in leading people and their cultures to freedom and wholeness" (Thomas 2003:131).

[15] The birth of the transformationist movement within worldwide evangelical theology is usually related to the First Conference of Evangelical Mission Theologians from the Two Thirds World in Bangkok, Thailand, 1982. For the first time in history, evangelical missiologists from the Global South gathered to theologize "without strings attached, whether organizational, financial, or ideological" (Samuel and Sugden 1983:4). See further Tizon 2008:51.

According to Tizon, in spite of the contributions of transformationist theologians such as Tokunboh Adeyemo, Peter Kuzmic (Croatia) and Os Guiness (England) at Lausanne II, the overall focus was on developing communication and marketing strategies by which to accomplish the Great Commission in the closing years of the 20th century.[16] Hence, Lausanne II failed to provide a thorough analysis of the world's structural problems (Tizon 2008:81; see also Thomas 2003:131–140). Though the concept of integral mission was formally restated in the *Manila Manifesto*, the Peruvian scholar Samuel Escobar, deeply disappointed with the outcomes of Lausanne II, concluded that the Lausanne movement was more divided than ever before (Escobar 1991:11–12).[17]

In the next section, I use the theological position of transformationist theologians as a theoretical framework to analyze Adeyemo's contributions to the debate on the relationship between evangelism and social concern. Transformationist theology is a broad view of Christian mission, focused on holism rather than prioritization, the necessity of contextual theologizing and the concept of "mission as transformation." How does Adeyemo fit the above description of the transformational perspective on mission? The critique often leveled against African evangelicalism is that it fails to take the concerns of African people seriously. I argue that an in-depth analysis of Adeyemo's theological position shows that this critique is unfounded.

2. Adeyemo's Involvement in the Debate

2.1 Advocating a Broad View of Mission

At Lausanne I, evangelicals in Africa were represented by Byang Kato, who issued warnings against 'alarming' developments within ecumenical circles (Breman 1996:47, 343–350). Adeyemo was studying at the time. Shortly after his appointment at the AEA in 1978, however, he joined the post-Lausanne debate on mission, promoting a broad understanding of mission. In an article on contemporary issues in Africa, he stated that the church's missionary responsibility "does not preclude works of charity which are an intrinsic part of the good news" since Christ "liberates the

[16] The urgency to accomplish the task of world evangelization before AD 20000, must also be seen against the backdrop of the WCC Mission Conference in San Antonio, Texas, 1989. Some evangelicals were still worried about the 'ambivalent' attitude toward other religions within ecumenical circles, as it was affirmed at San Antonio that the limits of God's love are unknowable. Other evangelicals underscored that the similarities between ecumenicals and evangelicals were greater than the differences. See Neely and Scherer 1990.

[17] In his overview of the history of the Lausanne Movement, Robert Hunt, Perkins Director of Global Theological Education, has shown that it was at the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town, 2010, that "evangelical unity appears to have been replaced by the fostering of a wide variety of evangelistic partnerships, with the result that no agenda, strategy, or theological assessment of the world situation either predominates or is necessary in order to mobilize the churches to evangelize" (Hunt 2011:84).

total man: the material and the non-material" (Adeyemo 1978:12–13). Having noted this, he cautioned that the church must be careful not to lose her distinctiveness as ambassador for Christ: "Since the church is in the world but not of the world, she should not be indifferent to the social, political, and economic struggles of mankind; neither should she sacrifice her ambassadorial function at the altar of social involvement" (Adeyemo 1978:13). Similarly, in his monograph *Salvation in African Tradition*, he argued that the purpose of mission is more than personal salvation, as someone who is converted becomes a "citizen of righteousness in the society" (Adeyemo 1979a:89). While warning against "liberal ecumenicals" who describe salvation only in terms of "deliverance from the here-and-now oppression," he maintained that, biblically, the gospel has social implications. Therefore, "[t]hough salvation is personal, from the biblical standpoint, it is hardly individualistic as one may witness in the West. Man is saved within contexts: the context of his immediate family, relatives, community and society at large. Within these contexts he is to demonstrate the properties of light and salt" (Adeyemo 1979a:88).

In 1980, Adeyemo attended the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle to further discuss the concept of integral mission, which had aroused much controversy. Although he was not one of the presenters at the conference, he signed the *Evangelical Commitment*, in which attendants resolved to develop "a just and simple life-style" (Lausanne 1980a:para.10) – a statement that was interpreted by conservative evangelicals as neglecting the priority of world evangelization (Steuernagel 1991:54; Tizon 2008:44–45). In the same year, Adeyemo attended Pattaya, where he participated in a mini-consultation on Christian witness among adherents of African traditional religions (ATRs). While the outcomes of Pattaya were unsatisfactory to many, the working group on ATRs, directed by the Burkinabe theologian Tite Tiénou, expressed a radically broad view of mission. It was emphasized that ATRs "are essentially social, practical, and anthropocentric. Their views of life tend to be holistic" (Lausanne 1980b:para.5). Hence, in the African setting, the church would be completely out of touch if it foregrounded the spiritual and eternal aspects of salvation: "If we fail to show how our God meets them, we should not be surprised if the people think our religion unattractive or merely seek traditional help for situations in which we do not provide it" (Lausanne 1980b:para.5). To avoid this, Christians should immerse themselves in local communities to represent Christ through their daily lives: "People see us, and if what they see is positive and attractive they will also be interested in what we proclaim" (Lausanne 1980b:para.6).

Thus, in his early works, Adeyemo emphasized the broadness of the church's mission, emphasizing the interconnectedness of words and deeds, evangelism and social responsibility. This theological standpoint expressed in

his literary works seems to be confirmed by his attendance of the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle and the working group on ATRs during Pattaya.[18]

2.2 Moving Beyond the Language of Prioritization

Two years later, Adeyemo was asked to share his ideas on mission at the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR). In his presentation, he outlined nine different evangelical positions regarding the relationship between evangelism and social action, closing with his own, in his own words, "undogmatic conclusion." Basing himself on the ministry of John the Baptist as narrated in Luke 3:1–20, among other texts, Adeyemo radically rejected the language of prioritization as regards the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility. He stated that social action is implied in evangelism. Therefore, he proposed the holistic ministry of John the Baptist as a paradigm for mission:

> John spoke against both personal sins and structural evil. He addressed the rich as well as the poor. As the rich need to be liberated from their greed, selfishness, pride and self-satisfaction, so do the poor from fear, poverty, ignorance and disease. John was socially involved with his people. He confronted the dispossessed and the powerless in the same strong terms as he did the privileged and powerful bureaucrats. His gospel knows no color or class or sex. (Adeyemo 1986a:58)

Though Adeyemo, in his exposition, declared that the eternal is of greater importance than the temporal, he maintained that, in the practice of mission, the language of prioritization should be avoided: "To answer the question, 'Which comes first?' I will say that the reality of life doesn't usually present itself to us in either/or. More often we are engaged in both/and" (Adeyemo 1986a:59). The South African missiologist David Bosch, in responding to Adeyemo's presentation at the consultation, agreed with him, suggesting that "Third World Christians, not sharing the Greek heritage of dualistic thinking to the same degree that Westerners do, have a far more holistic understanding of the gospel than do Western Christians" (Bosch 1986:67).[19]

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[18] Adeyemo's broad understanding of mission also becomes apparent in his approach to Islam. In a booklet on evangelical missionary work among Muslims, he questioned, what he saw as the Western tendency to describe mission as a one-way process. Building on his own experience as a converted Muslim, he explained that a direct call to conversion seems to work counterproductive: "This presupposes that you should not demand a Muslim to repudiate Islam per se, saying it is satanic, diabolical or demonic. Because of such an attitude, Muslims immediately raise barriers and do not listen to us" (Adeyemo 1986b:10). Rather, Christians should establish friendships with Muslims to make visible, in words and deeds, God's redeeming love through Christ.

[19] More recently, Bosch's conclusions were confirmed by the Swiss theologian Ronald Hardmeier, who concludes that Adeyemo clearly presented himself as a radical evangelical at CRESR (Hardmeier 2008:247–250).

Following CRESR, Adeyemo began to more explicitly position himself as a holistic thinker. In a series of articles published in 1983, referencing the works of radical evangelicals such as René Padilla, Samuel Escobar and Ronald Sider, he argued that the debate concerning the church's mission creates a false and unnecessary opposition between evangelism and social action, as the vertical and horizontal perspectives merge in God's mission (Adeyemo 1983a, 1983b, 1983c). To strengthen this statement, he argued that the New Testament concept of salvation entails "a restoration of that original relationship, fellowship and communion with the living personal Creator-Father God. It is holistic: body, mind, soul and spirit. It is both vertical and horizontal. The one who is reconciled with God is sent to his world, to his neighbour and to his community to live-out a righteous, holy and just life in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Adeyemo 1983b:12). In Adeyemo's view, the focus on works of righteousness does not mean that the verbal proclamation of the gospel is of lesser importance; the uniqueness and finality of Christ need to be proclaimed as the only way to salvation. However, his point in these articles is that "[w]e cannot do this faithfully without confronting the power structures of our day – the rich, the privileged and the powerful. A call to justice and righteousness is an integral part of the Gospel" (Adeyemo 1983c:150).

Adeyemo's ideas about the holistic character of mission seemed to crystallize at the Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need in Wheaton, Illinois, in 1983 (henceforth Wheaton). In his plenary address, he referred to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, in which the church is called one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This means, according to him, that "[t]he Church cannot afford to exhaust itself in self-serving. If it does, it smacks of death. It may have been called to worship the Lord; it has also been sent to serve the world" (Adeyemo 1986c:165). For Adeyemo, then, the point of reference is Christ himself, who incarnated to save and transform all of creation. Interestingly, in his representation of the church's mission, he does not take Matthew 28:19–20 as his primary reference but Luke 4:18–19, which is a quotation from Isaiah 61:1–2. In the Lukan text, Christ holistically describes his earthly ministry in terms of proclamation, deliverance and healing. Likewise, the church is called upon to reflect Christ's earthly ministry by confessing Him as Lord, proclaiming the good news, healing the brokenhearted and liberating the bruised:

> This takes the Church out of its comfortable environment, and places it in market places, on the highways and by-ways, in ghettos, in prison cells, in refugee camps, in rural as well as urban centers – wherever people are; people wounded and bruised by the scourge of sin and the violent brutality of man against man." (Adeyemo 1986c:171)

Toward the end of his presentation, Adeyemo linked the Lukan missionary mandate to John 17, the so-called High Priestly Prayer, in which Jesus prays for unity among his followers, stressing the close connection between such unity and effective mission. Adeyemo's intention, then, seems crystal clear: to leave behind the divisions and debates concerning the relationship between evangelism and social action and to make visible to the world, in all human work, the good news of Christ. Only love and unity among Christians will convince the world of the transformational power of the gospel (Adeyemo 1986c:173–178).[20]

At Lausanne II, Adeyemo reiterated his profoundly holistic understanding of mission. This time, in addition to biblical references, he advanced a historical argument, demonstrating that 'traditional' evangelicalism was characterized by a strong commitment to society, such as the issue of slavery and the fight against poverty. Referencing the lives of William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury and Martin Luther King Jr., he argued that works of righteousness are not a consequence of the gospel but an integral part of it. Hence, he asserted that one truncates the gospel when the good news is only verbally proclaimed. He then stated, "Yes, the Gospel is not only a creed to believe but a life to live!" (Adeyemo 1989a:6). It is noteworthy that Adeyemo ended his exposé by pointing at the exemplary life of Mahatma Gandhi, urging Christians to do likewise: "If Gandhi who never claimed to be a Christian could practice such a separation, dedication, consecration and surrender, the burden is upon us, followers of Jesus Christ, to invade the world with Christ's love in the unfinished task of world evangelization urgently!" (Adeyemo 1989a:6).

2.3 Claiming the Right to Theologize Contextually

In the early years of his career, Adeyemo, possibly influenced by dualistic Katonian theology, strongly warned against the rise of contextual theologies. He feared that, should people read the biblical text from the standpoint of lived realities, the Christian message would "become relativistic, existential and situational" (Adeyemo 1978:9; see also Adeyemo 1979b). However, from 1980, the year in which the post-Lausanne discussions on the focus in mission began to escalate, onwards, his views seem to begin to shift. This becomes apparent in an article on the moratorium debate. While Lausanne I had rejected calls for a moratorium on Christian missions, Adeyemo underscored the legitimacy of the African quest for selfhood. He explained that, historically, mainline African churches were organized based on the pattern of the sending church. However, "there has to come a time when the church must identify with the present-day realities, and to continue to hold on to a

[20] Adeyemo issued the same call for cooperation and unity in mission at Singapore 87 (Lausanne Movement 1987).

foreign structure will only lead to the death of the church." Therefore, he strongly advocated ecclesiological independence, both theological and organizational, claiming that "the day is gone when the authority to obey is in the Vatican, or in Canterbury or elsewhere in Europe or of some "providence" who dispenses dollars from America. Jesus Christ has to be the Lord of the church and Jesus Christ alone" (Adeyemo 1981:218).

This does not mean that Adeyemo favored a radical rupture with Western theology.[21] In an article on the plausibility of an African evangelical theology, he maintained that theology in Africa will only flourish if it relates to the everyday experiences of African people. However, he emphatically stated that "theology for Africa cannot be done in disregard of theologies elsewhere in Christendom. Otherwise we open ourselves to sectarianism at best and heresy at worst" (Adeyemo 1983c:149). Though Adeyemo maintained this position throughout his career, he appears to have increasingly distanced himself from developments within the Lausanne movement. In a 1989 interview, when asked about the major challenges of African Christianity, Adeyemo promoted his broad and holistic understanding of mission, stating that "[t]he church faces a question of credibility and authenticity. People will not hear our message of the gospel unless we can speak in the context of the social crises that are happening" (Adeyemo 1989b:para.1). In the same interview, he questioned whether the Western churches would seriously listen to voices from the South: "Are the churches in the West and North ready to learn from us? Just because we are a Third World church doesn't mean we have third-class spirituality. There are lessons this young, dynamic church can teach, of faith, commitment, perseverance" (Adeyemo 1989b:para.4).

One can identify the same sense of alienation when Adeyemo, referencing the strong presence of North-American and Asian voices at Lausanne II, claimed that "the new Lausanne is not only Western and Asian, but also primarily for evangelicals within the mainline churches" (cited by Breman 1996:336). In the following years, he increasingly questioned the North American and Asian tendency to compartmentalize reality (e.g. Breman 1996:436). In an article on African contributions to World Christianity, he argued that African people do not divide reality but approach it holistically. Restating his holistic theological position that "Africans don't draw a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, for all belongs to God," he claimed that the post-Lausanne discussions on the focus in mission are foreign to African thought (Adeyemo 1991a:89–90). In another contribution, in discussing the state of Christianity in Africa, he even discarded the debate as "academic": "A West African proverb says: 'An empty sack cannot stand' or 'A hungry

[21] It should be noted here that all theology is contextual - including Western forms of theologizing. I consider the idea of the contextual nature of any theology to be beyond dispute.

stomach has no ears'. It is academic to ask an African Christian: 'Which comes first, evangelism or social concern?' Reality of life rarely divides into 'either or' especially in a situation of natural calamity and economic poverty such as we live in" (Adeyemo 1995:10).

Similarly, in an editorial published in *Transformation*, Adeyemo referenced the public address of the Armenian Catholicos Aram I, moderator of the seventh Assembly of the WCC, held in Canberra, Australia, in 1991. According to the WCC moderator, despite the growing interest in evangelical and charismatic churches within ecumenical circles, the Assembly had been unable to achieve "a vital and coherent theology." Applying this statement to the evangelical debates on mission, Adeyemo argued that the vitality of theology depends on "its ability to renew the church in its life and mission." He added that such renewal and reshaping of theology are mostly found in non-Western contexts "of poverty, powerlessness and religious plurality" – issues that Lausanne II, in his view, had failed to address adequately (Adeyemo 1991b:n.p.).

Seemingly disappointed by the turn Lausanne II had taken, Adeyemo presented his 'own' AD 2000 agenda for Christianity in Africa. In an article published in 1993, he restated his position that African Christianity urgently needs to develop its own theology. Until such time as it does so, he claimed, Christianity in Africa will only remain superficial. It was his conviction that this theological vocation cannot be pursued by 'outsiders.' Therefore, he urged African evangelicals to deeply reflect on issues such as civil wars, drought and famine and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This means, among other things, that church programs should not focus on winning souls but on making disciples: "The Church is mandated to reproduce Jesus Christ among all the peoples of the world. And we have no right to reduce the assignment to what we call 'world evangelization'. The influence of the Church in the society must match its numbers – as an agent of change" (1993b:9).[22]

2.4 The Church as an Agent of Social Transformation

In his presentation at Wheaton, Adeyemo had already accentuated the prophetic calling of the church as an agent of change in society, claiming that what counts, in the end, is not one's personal salvation but pursuing the righteousness of God's

[22] In line with this vision, he edited the well-received *Africa Bible Commentary* (ABC), a one-volume Bible Commentary that attempts to be "African in terms of its authorship and its content, which must reflect its African context" (Adeyemo 2006:ix). Though some questioned whether the ABC succeeded in presenting a uniquely African sound (e.g. Stenschke 2009), John Stott, in his foreword to the ABC, applauds the authors' attempt to theologize primarily and principally from an African perspective (Adeyemo 2006:vii).

kingdom.[23] Quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who said that the church is the church only when it exists for others, he stated that "[o]ne could say that the ultimate measure of a church is not where it stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where it stands at times of challenges and crisis – as in Ethiopia, Namibia, South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, the Middle East, or Vietnam" (Adeyemo 1986c:171). In Adeyemo's vision, the social participation of the church not only involves caring for the poor and oppressed but also publicly addressing structures of injustice: "In today's society, the more rampant form of wickedness is structural evil taking the form of discrimination, violence and exploitation. This dehumanizing monster manifests itself in institutions where power and privilege are shared along racial, tribal or sexual lines with total disregard for individual worth" (Adeyemo 1986c:173).[24]

Adeyemo practiced what he preached. From the mid-1980s onwards, he launched a number of AEA programs and commissions to engage with the socio-political challenges in Africa, such as poverty, civil wars, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and unjust economic and political systems. These programs paid special attention to the situation of the church under the Marxist regimes in Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique and in segregational societies such as South Africa and Namibia (Breman 1996: 77–80; 149–166; Kapteina 2006:74–75). The *Evangelical Peace Mission* to South Africa was under Adeyemo's own leadership. It was a series of consultations intended to support South African evangelical leaders in their struggle against apartheid (Breman 1996: 161–163).[25] In 1985, a group of South African theologians drafted the Kairos Document to address the institutionalized racial segregation in their country. Though Adeyemo pointed out that the document was considered too liberal in evangelical circles, he declared that African evangelicals could no longer ignore the structural racism in South Africa (Adeyemo 1989b:para.1). While the *Evangelical Peace Mission* received less attention than anti-apartheid movements within mainline churches, Adeyemo, in his foreword to Christina Breman's study on

[23] It is remarkable that in Adeyemo's work, despite his emphasis on socio-political justice, the notion of the kingdom of God, a key-term in liberation theology, does not seem to play a major role. Perhaps this has to do with Adeyemo's fear that the church would identify too much with the state, as in former Zaire or South Africa (Adeyemo 1995:14; 1997b:96–97, 105–107). Also Thomas has shown that the kingdom motif is not absent in the transformationist view, but that the primary focus was on the "ethics of the kingdom" (Thomas 2003:108).

[24] Adeyemo's transformational perspective also comes to light in approximately 30 editorials that he co-published with Vinay Samuel and Ronald Sider in the journal *Transformation*. Between 1984 and 1993, he addressed societal issues such as poverty, apartheid, economic oppression, religious persecution, and the situation in the Middle East. In the first editorial, the editors suggested that "[i]f evangelicals can boldly propose relevant, biblical solutions to our world's difficult dilemmas, we might transform not just the evangelical community but also global society" (Adeyemo 1984:1).

[25] Besides directing the *Evangelical Peace* Mission, Adeyemo attended the famous Rustenburg Conference in 1990, when South African churches collectively confessed guilt over the unjust systems they had supported (Breman 1996:433).

the AEA, maintained that "evangelicals participated in the process of dismantling apartheid in South Africa" (Breman 1996:xviii).

Two publications in the early 1990s show Adeyemo's growing awareness of the pivotal role of the church in the transformation of Africa. First, the AEA published *A Christian Mind in a Changing Africa*, a collection of papers that were presented at AEA consultations toward the end of the 1980s. In his foreword to this publication, Adeyemo stated that, despite the exponential growth of Christianity in post-independence years, the church has had little or no impact on African society; missionary activities were directed at getting people saved rather than changing their hearts and minds. Thus, he advocated for a paradigm shift: "Where has the church failed in its duty? Definitely in the singular area of not winning the minds of African Christians with the truths of the gospel" (Adeyemo 1993a:vi). In another publication, he discussed the courage of archbishop Janani Luwum of the Anglican Church of Uganda, who stood up against the regime of Idi Amin and suffered martyrdom. He urged churches to function as the conscience of the nation. Cautioning that the church should never identify with the state (as was the case in former Zaire), he noted that it should also never withdraw from society. Instead, "[t]he church must maintain its cutting edge: not of this world, yet in this world" (Adeyemo 1994b: 75).[26]

The Rwandan genocide seems to have deepened Adeyemo's vision of the centrality of the church in societal transformation.[27] In only three months' time, between half a million and 1 million Rwandan people were massacred. In an article published in 1997, Adeyemo recalled that "[c]hurch leaders could scarcely explain how this could have happened, considering that 85 percent of Rwanda's 8.2 million people were Christians" (Adeyemo 1997a:para.1). Probing some of the causes of the Rwandan disaster, Adeyemo stated that Rwandan churches were preoccupied with mass evangelization and had failed to change the people's lifestyle (Adeyemo 1997a:para.3). Shortly after the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the second Pan-African Christian Leadership Assembly was held, which attracted participants from all Africa. Adeyemo played a leading role in organizing the conference. In his opening address, the South African bishop Desmond Tutu referenced the servant attitude of Nelson Mandela, pointing to Mandela as one of the few African leaders who had positively

[26] On many occasions, Adeyemo translated his view of mission as transformation to grassroots level. For instance, in a series of lectures in Kenya and Zimbabwe he pointed at the political service of Daniel, who fully lived out the gospel in a pluralistic and sometimes dangerous context (1993c). At another congress, gathering African Christian women from all Africa, he called on women to change their societies through their prayers, efforts and example: "You can be God's instruments to right the wrongs of our rapidly deteriorating society" (Adeyemo 1994a:19).

[27] Personally, Adeyemo was deeply affected by the Rwandan genocide. Thus attested by Otto de Bruijne, staff worker at AEA in the 1980s and 1990s and close friend of Adeyemo, in an interview with the author of the present article. See further Van der Walt 2011:927–28.

impacted the course of their nation. Concerned about the increase of violence that plagued the continent, delegates at the gathering pledged "to address major issues facing Africa at the end of the century" (Breman 1996:378).

In subsequent years, Adeyemo was a much sought-after speaker in Africa and beyond, and he actively participated in the intellectual debate on Africa as a "lost continent" launched by thinkers such as Kenyan professor George Kinoti, the American-Kenyan thinker Ali Mazrui and Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni (Waweru 2018:220–222). Although Adeyemo, in his contributions to this debate, did not develop any new missiological ideas, he argued that Africa is not a "lost" or "cursed" continent but rather a continent with great potential that suffers from a lack of vision and leadership. Amidst the multiple crises that had plagued African nations since the independence years of the 1960s, he believed that the unique calling of the church was to become an actor of change in a shattered continent (Adeyemo 1997b, 2001). Restating the transformational vision he had presented at Wheaton, Adeyemo argued that the church has the social responsibility to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, proclaim the good news, heal the brokenhearted, liberate the oppressed and disciple the nations (Adeyemo 1997b:51–71). According to Adeyemo, this socio-political involvement of the church accords with the traditional African conception of reality, which does not differentiate between sacred and secular (Adeyemo 1997b: 77–78). Thus, he called on evangelicals to "rise and change Africa!" (Adeyemo 1997b:128).[28]

In 2003, Adeyemo founded the Centre for Biblical Transformation to inspire and equip African leaders, both inside and outside the church, to restore and transform their nations.[29] The results of these training programs were published in his monograph on leadership. Pointing at some positive African leadership figures, such as Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson (Liberia), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Léophold Senghor (Senegal), Seretse Khama (Botswana), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia) and Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), he claimed that, although far from perfect, these leaders "are proof that Africans can indeed govern themselves" (Adeyemo 2009:26–27). He also acclaimed the example of the Namibian president Samuel Nujoma, who, after three consecutive terms of political service, peacefully made way for his successor in 2005 (Adeyemo 2009:60). Encouraging evangelicals to become politically active, by, for example, running for office, he expressed hope that a new generation of Christian leaders would soon rise up to serve, lead and change Africa (Adeyemo 2009:108–110).

[28] Adeyemo delivered the same transformational message at the Global Consultation on World Evangelization, Pretoria, 1997. Heartily underlining the GOCWE vision to evangelize the African continent, he emphasized the issue of accountability: the church's mission hinges on responsible leaders, who are willing to serve with integrity (GOCWE 1997:n.p.).

[29] https://www.cbtafrica.org.

3. Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have aimed to demonstrate that Adeyemo should be viewed as an evangelical thinker who promoted a broad, holistic and contextual approach to mission in view of the transformation of Africa. As a representative of African evangelicals, he engaged in the post-Lausanne discussions on the nature of mission, moving beyond the dualistic framework of his predecessor Kato. Choosing Luke 4:18–19 as his primary reference text, he discarded the language of prioritization of Lausanne I and instead advocated for a holistic approach to mission. In line with his more comprehensive understanding of the missionary mandate, he questioned the Western tendency to divide and compartmentalize reality, noting that "the gospel is a life to live." Furthermore, by embracing the concept of "mission as transformation," he clearly aligned himself with the group of "transformationists," as is made apparent by, among his other actions, his involvement with the journal *Transformation*. Thus, this study has shown that Adeyemo's theological position needs to be understood in relation to the theological priorities of "radical evangelicals."

It is noteworthy that Adeyemo, especially in his later works, seemed to be increasingly attentive to the notion of contextuality. This is because on the one hand, he felt disappointed about the outcomes of Lausanne II, which had failed to address the world's structural problems of poverty, oppression and exclusion, and, on the other hand, because of the pressing issues the African continent was facing, such as religious persecution under Marxist regimes, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the Rwandan genocide. Both factors seem to have fueled already existing postcolonial sentiments in Adeyemo's thinking. Though Adeyemo, throughout his career, has underlined the global nature of the church, his later works express a growing awareness that only Africans can adequately address Africa's specific issues and challenges. In accordance with this perspective, Adeyemo's attention seems to have shifted from doing works of charity as an expression of the gospel message to the prophetic calling of the African church to become an actor of change in society and to fight against all forms of structural evil.

While Adeyemo has not responded directly to critics of African evangelical theology, his contributions to the evangelical debate on mission invalidate the critique that African evangelicals merely promote a Westernized and spiritualized form of Christianity that fails to engage with African affairs. Though, given his theological educational background and his position as AEA's general secretary, he was undoubtedly influenced by North American dualism, he increasingly distanced himself from these dualistic assumptions and patterns, aiming to make evangelicalism more credible and relevant to African contexts. In this respect, Adeyemo's theological legacy also shows indebtedness to the works of fellow

transformationists such as Escobar and Padilla, as well as influences of contemporary currents and trends in African theology, such as South African black theology and postcolonial, liberation and reconstruction theologies. In light of all this, this study illustrates that categories commonly used to describe African evangelicalism, such as "biblicist," "conservative," "dogmatic" and so on, seem to be inadequate to address the complexity, heterogeneity and contextuality of African evangelicalism. Simultaneously and indirectly, this article also critically interrogates the validity and analytic relevance of categories developed in one context as descriptive norms or analytical tools in another context.

In conclusion, Tokunboh Adeyemo needs to be acknowledged as an African church leader and reformer who was deeply concerned with the welfare of Africa and challenged evangelicals around the world to fully live out the demands of the gospel in their own contexts.

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CHAPTER 5.

Prescriptive Theology for the Local Church: Tite Tiénou's Hermeneutical Contributions to African Evangelical Theology

Introduction

In the academic literature, African evangelical theology has often been characterised as a 'biblicist' form of theologising that does not account for the hermeneutical questions that arise from the encounter between the Christian message and African contexts (e.g. Mbiti, 1986; Parratt, 1995). This negative perception seems to be based on the radical line of Byang Kato, the first African General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (now the Association of Evangelicals in Africa; AEA) and widely regarded as the founding father of African evangelicalism.[1] Kato is particularly known for his fierce critiques of African inculturation theologians, such as John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu, who, in their search to contextualise the Christian faith within the African milieu, called for a revaluation of African traditional religiosity. Both Mbiti and Idowu considered Africa's religio-cultural heritage an indispensable bedrock for constructing an authentic form of Christianity in Africa. As I have argued elsewhere (Van Veelen, 2021b), Kato was not opposed to the idea of contextualisation, although he strongly warned against what he saw as the 'syncretistic' tendencies of the inculturation project; furthermore, he upheld the Bible as the only legitimate and ultimate source for theological reflection in Africa (Kato, 1975, 1985).

Though Kato was influential in shaping African evangelical theology, he was not its sole representative. Shortly after his untimely death in 1975, Tite Tiénou, then a young evangelical pastor from Burkina Faso, called upon African evangelicals to move beyond Kato's reactionary posture to seriously engage with the hermeneutical challenges posed by the inculturation movement.[2] It was Tiénou's conviction that a proper contextualisation could only occur through a dynamic interaction between the horizons of the Bible and African people. This article spotlights Tiénou's hermeneutical contributions to African evangelical theology.

Tiénou, currently Professor and Dean Emeritus at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) in Deerfield, USA, was born on January 16, 1949, in Mali, but

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[1] By 'evangelical' I refer to those who self-identify as evangelical. Usually the evangelical movement in Africa is linked to the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), https://aeafrica.org. See for a definition of and introduction to African evangelicalism: Michael, 2017.

[2] Various terms have been used to designate the process of contextualising Christianity: incarnation, indigenisation, inculturation, local theologies, and so on. The term contextualization became prevalent through the work of the Theological Education Fund within the World Council of Churches that coined the term in 1972. In the following, the generic term 'contextualization' will be used to refer to the process of appropriating the Christian message within a specific context. I will use the term 'inculturation' exclusively to reference one of the main currents within African theology that seeks to express the Christian faith within the African religio-cultural thought-forms. See for different approaches to contextual theologising: Bevans, 1985.

he moved to Burkina Faso at an early age with his parents. Following his theological studies at the Christian and Missionary Alliance Seminary (now the Alliance Theological Seminary) in Nyack, New York, and the Faculté Libre de Théologie Évangélique de Vaux-sur-Seine, France, he served as pastor of the French-speaking Christian Alliance Church in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. There, he founded the Maranatha Institute in 1976, a bible school that provides training for local church leaders. In 1980, Tiénou moved to the United States to pursue a PhD degree at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. During this time, he worked as teaching assistant to Professor Charles Kraft at the School of World Mission. In 1984, he graduated from Fuller with a PhD thesis on methodological issues regarding African Christian theologies. In the same year, he received the Contextualization Award for 1984 from the School of World Mission. After his doctoral studies, he taught theology and missiology at the Alliance Theological Seminary. In 1993, he returned to Africa to serve as President and Dean of the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Since 1997, he has served as Professor of Theology of Mission as well as Academic Dean at TEDS. In the early years of his career, Tiénou played a prominent role within the AEA. He succeeded Kato as the Executive Secretary of its Theological Commission and served as Chairman of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa – a project of the AEA (Breman, 1996: 32-33; Essamuah and Ngaruiya, 2013: 3-7; see also Tiénou 1984b: 222).

Scholars such as Kwame Bediako (1994: 16), David Bosch (1984: 23), Donald Carson (1985), and Yong Seung Han (2013: 61-63) have noted that Tiénou, after Kato's tragic passing, propagated a more dialogical and constructive attitude vis-à-vis the inculturation enterprise; however, they have not discussed his work in detail, meaning that his contributions to the field of contextual hermeneutics have gone largely unnoticed. Only the German missiologist Detlef Kapteina, in his study on African evangelical theology, briefly discusses Tiénou's hermeneutical proposals; yet, he does not provide a thorough analysis of how Tiénou's ideas are related to contemporary theological discussions (Kapteina, 2001: 128-133, 207-217). The present article aims to address this gap by studying a selection of articles and monographs on hermeneutics, which Tiénou published after Kato's death and during his first period in the United States, when he intensively studied the topic.[3] Moreover, this article addresses the following questions: What contributions does Tiénou make to the development of African evangelical hermeneutics? What were the theological challenges that moved Tiénou to develop his hermeneutical ideas? The article argues that Tiénou, in his hermeneutical work, endeavours to

[3] From the 1990s onwards, along with his appointment at TEDS, Tiénou's attention seems to shift from contextual hermeneutics to missiology. His missiological contributions will be discussed elsewhere.

develop what he calls 'a third way'. This 'third way' honours Kato's legacy, yet moves beyond it to seriously address the challenges raised by the inculturation enterprise. Characteristic of Tiénou's contribution is that he foregrounds the local Christian community, as both the source and the addressee of theology.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In Section 1, I discuss three contemporary theological challenges that seem to have prompted Tiénou to develop his own hermeneutical approach. In Section 2, I outline Tiénou's hermeneutical approach to contextual theologising, analysing how he responded to the challenges discussed in Section 1. Finally, Section 3 presents concluding thoughts.

1. Three Theological Challenges

1.1 Kato's Unfinished Theological Legacy

In the 1970s, Tiénou began to develop his hermeneutics in response to several challenges. The first theological challenge was Kato's call for an African evangelical theological movement. A few months before his death in 1975, Kato's book *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* was published. Its main purpose, according to Kato, was "to sound an alarm" that the course of African Christian theology was mainly determined by 'liberal' thinkers. Therefore, evangelicals would do well to get involved in the theological debates in Africa (Kato, 1975: 16). In *Theological Pitfalls*, Kato critically assesses the works of Mbiti and Idowu, as well as the emerging ecumenical movement in Africa, embodied by the All Africa Conference of Churches. He concludes that contemporary African Christianity had become susceptible to a widespread universalism – which refers to the idea that all people are saved irrespective of whether they believe in Christ. Towards the end of the book, he calls upon evangelicals to safeguard "Biblical Christianity in Africa", stating that they should uncompromisingly hold on to the Bible as "the final infallible rule of faith and practice". Kato's emphasis on the Bible as a sole normative tool for theologising in Africa does not equate to a denial of the need for contextualisation; rather, he suggests that African Christians should find ways to "express Christianity in a truly African context". However, he does not explain how he envisaged this interaction between the Bible and the African situation (Kato, 1975: 181-184). A few months later, Kato drowned off the Kenyan coast – leaving behind an unfinished theological legacy.[4]

In a study on the history and identity of the AEA, Dutch missiologist Christina Breman states that Kato's "sudden death was a shock to his family, to AEA, to the whole evangelical world inside and outside Africa. He died at a time when he was very much needed. The whole evangelical world felt a sense of considerable

[4] See for an assessment of Kato's radical theological line: Van Veelen, 2021b.

loss" (Breman, 1996: 49). In addition, Tokunboh Adeyemo, Kato's successor as General Secretary of the AEA, asserts that "Kato was removed from the arena when we needed him most" (Adeyemo, 1986: 13). Nevertheless, in his work, Adeyemo seems to delicately distance himself from Kato's radical line, presenting the African concept of 'cosmological balance' as a framework for developing a contextualised evangelical theology in Africa (Adeyemo, 1983).[5]

Kapteina also argues that Kato's main contribution is to be found in reactivating the theological awareness of evangelicals in Africa, since African theology was mainly constructed without them. He highlights that Kato played a pivotal role in urging African evangelicals (and their foreign partners) to give up their 'traditional' suspicion of theology, stating that theological reflection is indispensable for building a healthy Christianity in Africa. Sadly, Kato's untimely death prevented him from further shaping the profile of African evangelicalism (Kapteina, 2006: 70-72). Thus, when Tiénou became active within the AEA, the question was not so much whether – but rather *how* – evangelicals should engage in the theological debates in Africa; that is, how can a form of Christian theology be achieved that is truly biblical and truly African? To enhance the internal debates, Tiénou was asked to deliver his view at the "Byang H. Kato Memorial Lectures" at the ECWA Theological Seminary in Igbaja, Nigeria, in 1978; his contributions were published in both French (Tiénou, 1980) and English (Tiénou, 1982d).

1.2 The Quest for an African Theology

The second theological challenge is found in contemporary developments within 'mainstream' African theology, both in Roman Catholic and Protestant circles. The first decades after the emergence of African contextual theology, generally associated with the Roman Catholic publication of *Des Prêtres Noirs s'Interrogent* in 1956, were marked by the questioning of the validity of an African formulation of theology as distinct from Western forms of theologising.[6] One of the main fruits of this early period was the recognition of the intrinsic value of pre-Christian African religions and cultures as resources for theologising. Mbiti, among others, has made considerable effort to demonstrate that African peoples were not "religiously illiterate" before the arrival of Christianity. This, according to Mbiti, makes Africans perfectly capable of reflecting independently on the theological issues that arise

[5] For an analysis of the development of Adeyemo's theological ideas after Kato's passing, see: Van Veelen, 2021a.

[6] Reference should be made here to the famous debate on the desirability and feasibility of an African construction of theology (as distinct from classical Roman Catholic theology), between the Congolese student and later bishop Tharcisse Tshibangu and the Belgian Alfred Vanneste, then dean of faculty at the University of Lovianum in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. This debate, that took place in the academic year 1959-1960, is widely seen as the beginning of the methodological discussions on African theology. See: Tshibangu, 1987.

during their encounter with the Christian faith (Mbiti, 1970). However, the legitimacy to deal with their own theological affairs does not automatically engender a deeper rooting of Christianity in African life, as Mbiti notes elsewhere that Christianity in Africa, despite its tremendous growth, is "still estranged to the depths of African societies" (Mbiti, 1969: 239). Thus, having established the legitimacy of African theology, the following methodological question arises: How should the theological enterprise in Africa proceed?

In December 1977, two decades after the publication of *Des Prêtres Noirs*, African ecumenical theologians convened in Accra, Ghana, to define the contours of what they considered an authentic African way of doing theology. The Final Communiqué issued at the end of the Accra conference stressed the need to "shift from hagiography of yesterdays to a more critical approach that starts from African worldviews, examines the impact of Christianity, and evaluates the varieties of African responses" (Appiah-Kubi and Torres, 1979: 191). To develop such an 'Africanised' method of theology, the communiqué stated that African theologians should draw on the following sources: the Bible and Christian heritage, African anthropology, African traditional religions, African independent churches, and other African realities. However, the manner in which these sources should interact went undiscussed (Appiah-Kubi and Torres, 1979: 192-193).

Because of this methodological ambiguity, according to the South African Bishop Desmond Tutu, "African theology has failed to produce a sufficiently sharp cutting edge" (Tutu, 1978: 368). Moreover, Mbiti articulates the growing concerns of African theologians regarding the effectiveness of their theological output, asserting that African peoples "are saying YES to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; but they are saying NO to foreign Christianity. They want to evolve a Christianity which bears the imprint of being MADE IN AFRICA. But exactly how this will be worked out still waits to be seen" (Mbiti, 1978: 393 – capitals in the original). To stimulate the quest for a proper theological method, the Ghanaian biblical scholar John Pobee published a book titled *Toward an African Theology*. It offers a tentative sketch of what an African theology could look like based on the traditions of the Akan people in Ghana (Pobee, 1979). Tiénou engages with these discussions in his dissertation, opting for Pobee as one of his interlocutors in a study on methodological issues in African theologies.

1.3 The Contextualisation Debate

The third theological challenge is related to the ongoing discussions about contextualisation within international evangelical circles. One of the outcomes of the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, held in July 1974, was a growing awareness among evangelicals that the Christian message cannot be communicated in a vacuum. Tiénou attended the Congress on behalf of the AEA.

Whereas missiological developments within the ecumenical world, as embodied by the World Council of Churches, were critically followed – considered by many to be too liberal – it was broadly recognised within evangelical circles that the gospel can only be proclaimed effectively when expressed in the languages and cultures of the recipients. Thus, the unfinished task of World Evangelisation cannot be completed without addressing the issue of culture. This raised the following question: What exactly is the relationship between gospel and culture? (Lausanne, 1974: para.10).

In 1978, the Lausanne Committee's Theology and Education Group convened the Willowbank Consultation on Gospel and Culture to "reflect critically on the implications of the communication of the gospel cross-culturally" (Lausanne, 1978: para.1). Tiénou attended the consultation on behalf of the AEA. As its main outcome, the conference embraced the concept of contextualisation as a theological task and priority. Though the term 'contextualisation' was coined by the Theological Education Fund within the World Council of Churches in 1972 – and thus not without controversy – delegates at Willowbank acknowledged that all theology is influenced by culture. The Consultation Report drafted at the end of the gathering enumerated various models of contextualisation without expressing a clear preference for one. Rather, it stated that each model will have to prove itself, in terms of enabling "God's people to capture in their hearts and minds the grand design of which their church is to be the local expression" (Lausanne, 1978: para. 8).

David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, in their overview of the contextualisation debate within evangelical circles, demonstrate that two opposing lines emerged after the 1974 Lausanne Congress, namely a "dogmatic contextualization" championed by the New Zealand missiologist Bruce J. Nicholls, which focused on an unalterable essence of the gospel that supersedes and judges any culture, and the "dynamic-equivalence model" proposed by Charles Kraft, which takes its starting point in a specific culture, in which the gospel is dynamically articulated according to the questions and challenges of the local situation (Hesselgrave and Rommer, 1989: 48-69). When Tiénou arrived at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1980, he found himself in the middle of these evangelical controversies about the correct approach to contextualisation.

The aforementioned three theological challenges – the unfinished theological legacy of Kato as leader of the AEA, the quest for an appropriate method of doing African theology, and the ongoing discussions on contextualisation within the worldwide evangelical movement – all seem to reflect a growing awareness that Christianity was a global movement characterised by an extremely rich variety of adherents, cultures, expressions, and theologies. Classical (read: Western) theological approaches and concepts were increasingly viewed as inadequate for expressing the Christian message in contexts other than the Western world. The global and

diversified nature of Christianity called for context-specific methods that make the gospel message relevant to people in their everyday lives. Thus, from three distinct but interconnected perspectives, Tiénou was confronted with basically the same issue of contextualisation – namely how to achieve a proper contextualisation of the Christian message in Africa. In other words, the question was as follows: How can a type of Christianity that is genuinely Christian and genuinely African be developed?

2. Tiénou's Hermeneutical Contributions

2.1 Navigating Between Kato and Mbiti

This section analyses how Tiénou responded to the aforementioned challenges through insights from the international evangelical debate on contextualisation. Two historical events seem to have shaped his thinking. The first was the Second General Assembly of the AEA, held in Limuru, Kenya, in 1973. On this occasion, Kato delivered an impassioned plea to rediscover the importance of what he called 'sound theology' to determine the course of Christianity in Africa (Breman, 1996: 68-70). In retrospect, Tiénou, who attended the assembly as a 24-year-old pastor, sees the gathering "as a turning point in evangelical theological development in the continent". He recalls that "Kato did not have to do any convincing. The leaders knew that the lack of theology was one of the chief problems of African Christianity" (Tiénou, 1987a: 39).

The second event was the first Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA) held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1976, which gathered evangelical and ecumenical leaders from across Africa (Breman, 1996: 374-376). One of the keynote speakers was Mbiti, who presented a paper on the relation between Christianity and African culture. He argued that only when African Christians, without any external pressure, make the Christian faith their own will it have a future in Africa; Africans should find ways to be simultaneously and harmoniously Christian and African (Mbiti, 1977). Tiénou was also asked to present at PACLA. Without directly responding to Mbiti's presentation, he essentially followed Mbiti's line of argumentation that African Christians often feel that they are caught between two worlds, that of Christianity and that of African life. Therefore, Tiénou maintained that African Christian leaders should prioritise the internalisation of the gospel message, stating the following: "As long as the gospel is considered an imported product, it will not have real roots in Africa!" (Tiénou, 1976: 40).

A few years later, in his Byang H. Kato Memorial Lectures delivered in 1978 at ECWA Theological Seminary in Igbaja, Nigeria, Tiénou elaborated on

both events.[7] First, he honoured Kato for alerting the evangelical movement to the fact that theology in Africa was being constructed without them. Thus, after Kato's sudden demise, the evangelicals faced an immense task, namely to further develop his theological strategy for a Christianity that is truly both Christian and African. Tiénou stated the following: "Le Dr Kato a executé le travail pour nous. Quelle direction allons-nous prendre et de quelle manière?" (Tiénou, 1980: 16).[8] Simultaneously, Tiénou, like Adeyemo, seemed to gently distance himself from Kato, suggesting that his depiction of African religions was too negative: "Il est certain qu'il se trouve des éléments valables dans la religion traditionnelle africaine. Tout n'est pas l'œuvre du diable. Nous devons tous reconnaitre ce fait et rendre justice à Mbiti" (Tiénou, 1980: 25).[9] Second, Tiénou referred to Mbiti's exposé at PACLA, comparing his theological position to the church father Clement of Alexandria, who endeavoured to accommodate biblical theology to Greek philosophy. According to Tiénou's analysis, Mbiti's insistence on the value of pre-Christian religiosity could indeed potentially lead to a form of syncretism – one of Kato's major concerns. Nevertheless, Tiénou ended his lecture with a call to African evangelical leaders not to be content in solely critiquing others, but rather to contribute positively to the development of theology in Africa: "Trop longtemps, nous nous sommes contentés de critiquer! Notre théologie a été trop longtemps réactionnaire! Mais la critique est aisée et l'art est difficile! Manifestons notre art en prenant l'initiative, avec une théologie positive" (Tiénou, 1980: 44).[10]

In an article published in the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Tiénou engages more profoundly with Mbiti's presentation at PACLA (Tiénou, 1979). Situating the search for an African theology against the backdrop of international gatherings such as the World Conference on Salvation Today (1973), First Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (1974), Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1975), and Willowbank Consultation on Gospel and Culture (1978), he states that the need for contextualisation is now widely recognised. However, he points to what he considers a methodological flaw in the works of Mbiti and other inculturation theologians, namely the assumption that a proper contextualisation can be achieved through a clear definition of African culture. Tiénou indicates that

[7] These lectures were later published in Tiénou, 1980 (French version), Tiénou, 1982d (English version) and Tiénou, 1990c (second and revised English version). Two lectures were also published as separate articles (Tiénou, 1981, 1982c).

[8] English translation: "Dr. Kato has done the work for us. Which direction do we take now and in which way?"

[9] English translation: "Certainly there are valid elements in African traditional religion. Not everything is the work of the devil. We must all recognise this fact and do justice to Mbiti."

[10] English translation: "For too long we have been content to criticise! Our theology has been reactionary for too long! But criticising is easy and art is difficult! Let us demonstrate our art by taking the initiative, through a positive theology."

Mbiti – in his attempt to demonstrate that African traditional societies have many similarities with the biblical world, and thus, are a perfect preparation for the gospel – tends towards generalisations and simplifications. According to Tiénou, assuming that African cultures are essentially homogeneous is problematic. He argues that although striking similarities might exist between African peoples, one can hardly maintain that African people throughout the continent share the same system of ideas. Tiénou maintains that because of this methodological problem, Mbiti fails to move beyond the realm of generalities; that is, he only stresses the need for contextualisation without going into specifics.

In his article, however, Tiénou does not primarily address Mbiti and other leading African theologians with this critique. Rather he focuses on his own international evangelical constituency, urging them to abandon their position on the sidelines of the theological debate in Africa. Instead of easy criticism, evangelicals should proactively engage in the theological debates in Africa (Tiénou, 1979: 27).

2.2 Promoting Contextual Hermeneutics

In a message delivered at the fourth General Assembly of the AEA held in Lilongwe, Malawi, in 1981, Tiénou seems to further move away from both Kato and Mbiti by underlining the need for hermeneutics as a means to contextualise the Christian message in Africa. It is his conviction that African evangelicals, as well as inculturation theologians, have for too long neglected the hermeneutical questions that arise from the encounter between the Bible and African contexts. He argues that hermeneutics, being concerned with the meaningful articulation of the Christian message in a specific context, could play a pivotal role in developing an appropriate methodology for theologising in Africa. Referencing the Berean Christians, who according to Acts 17:11 searched the Scriptures to examine the apostolic teaching, Tiénou stresses that a proper hermeneutical approach can only be found in close relationship with the Church, since the primary purpose of theology is not the generation of more knowledge, but rather "the maturing of all God's children" (Tiénou, 1983b: 41).

At this point, it is crucial to note that Tiénou delivered this speech while already studying in the United States at the Fuller Theological Seminary. His contribution at the AEA assembly exhibits an affinity with the work of Kraft – one of the key figures in the evangelical contextualisation debate, for whom Tiénou worked as a research assistant. As we have already seen, Kraft emphasises that theology is always culturally and locally conditioned. Unlike Nicholls, who insisted on an eternal essence of the gospel that is and should be the same in every culture, Kraft stresses the dynamic and ongoing nature of the contextualisation process. Referring to the work of the Swiss biblical scholar Daniel von Allmen, Kraft maintains that no theology is absolute but always echoes the particularities and limitations of

a specific culture and community in a specific time. As a result, contextualisation is a risky endeavour; attempts to translate the Christian faith into a particular context do not always work well and could potentially lead to syncretism. However, this risk, according to Kraft, is inevitable when one seeks to communicate the Christian message cross-culturally, and therefore, it is one worth taking (Kraft, 1978).

Tiénou's indebtedness to Kraft becomes evident in a contribution on evangelical theological education in Africa, where he openly criticises Kato's position as being preoccupied with contextualising "an absolute biblical theology" (Tiénou, 1982b: 46). Highlighting God's example of communication through the incarnation, Tiénou states that the process of contextualisation cannot be reduced to translating a timeless message into the language and culture of the recipients; rather, it is an extremely complex and multifaceted process. In this respect, he references the dynamic-equivalent method of Kraft, arguing that proper contextualisation occurs not at the level of cultural forms (as he interprets Kato's suggestion to mean) but at that of "deep meanings". Therefore, the involvement of the Church as a hermeneutic community in search of meaning is indispensable in the process of contextualisation: "It is an ever present process whereby Christians, in their own settings, seek to be better disciples of Christ" (Tiénou, 1982b: 48). Tiénou makes it clear that this dynamic understanding of contextualisation involves the acceptance of risk, since the Christian message is easy to misunderstand or even manipulate.[11]

Having asserted that all theology is contextual, in contrast to Kato's position, Tiénou addresses, in another contribution, the methodological challenges of the inculturation movement, of which Mbiti was one of the main representatives. He examines the feasibility of the comparative method used by inculturation theologians, in a study of the classical theological concept of a *Deus absconditus* in relation to the concept of God in the Bobo religion (Tiénou, 1982a).[12] In his analysis, despite the obvious similarity of God being described in both cases through negative attributes (*via negativa*), the Bobo religion cannot simply be caught within Western theological concepts – which is a critique of Mbiti's methodology. While Tiénou applauds Mbiti's efforts to demonstrate that African peoples were not religiously illiterate before the arrival of Christianity, he argues that Mbiti fails to move beyond Western theological conceptions.[13] According to Tiénou, it is problematic that Mbiti

[11] The depiction of contextual theology as a risky endeavor also seems to have been borrowed from Kraft's missiological approach (Kraft, 1978: 347-348).

[12] This article was also published in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* – underlining that Tiénou's primary point of reference and his addressees is the (African) evangelical world. See Tiénou, 1983a.

[13] The main criticism of Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa* is that he endeavours to describe African religions in terms of Western systemic-theological categories, such as God's omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. Although Mbiti presents an impressive collection of religio-cultural data in his study, he seems to reduce African religiosity to a homogeneous system of ideas. See further: Mbiti, 1970.

still aims to describe African religiosity according to Western concepts. Would not the African perceptions of reality call for a specific methodology?

Tiénou further elaborates that, historically, God always reveals himself in a particular time and situation. Rather than searching for an all-encompassing framework for theology, as suggested by Kato and Mbiti – albeit from different theological standpoints, Tiénou argues that theologians are called to develop theologies *in a specific context*. Therefore, authentic African theology can only be produced in what he calls the "prescriptive mode", which refers to a theology that focuses on a specific local Christian community as the source and addressee of theology. Thus, the task of a theologian is not to build yet another system of ideas but rather to guide a particular local community to appropriate God's Word in their specific situation: "Prescriptive theology, then, will always have a specific target – a given Christian community in a given cultural milieu. Generaliszations, if they are made at all, must come later" (1982a: 445). The departure from both Kato and Mbiti could not be more evident.

2.3 Tiénou's Three-Dimensional Method for Contextual Theology

Tiénou took his doctoral studies as an opportunity to tackle the challenges and questions posed by Kato's legacy, the African inculturation theologians, and the evangelical contextualisation debate.[14] In the introductory chapter of his dissertation, he again appraises the efforts of African scholars to inculturate the Christian message in African contexts. He states that "there can be no real theology in Africa (and elsewhere) apart from a serious interaction between the biblical text and the total context in its cultural, religious, economic and social dimensions" (Tiénou, 1984b: x). Although his study mainly focuses on methodological issues within the inculturation movement in Africa, its secondary and equally critical purpose is "to address evangelicals of Africa as a specific audience, because theological development is even less within evangelical churches in Africa. I will seek to encourage and motivate them to accept the theological task confronting them" (Tiénou, 1984b: 6).

Following an in-depth analysis of the works of inculturation theologians John Mbiti, Tharcisse Tshibangu, John Pobee, and Anselme Sanon,[15] Tiénou argues that these African thinkers all seem to suffer similar methodological flaws. First, their respective theologies were produced at the academy, often presented as

[14] For a summary of his dissertation, see Tiénou, 1985a.

[15] Of these four theologians, Sanon is the least known. The reason to discuss Sanon's work seems to have to do with Tiénou's close relationship with this Roman-Catholic priest, with whom he worked during his ministry in Bobo-Dioulasso. It was Sanon, converted from the Bobo traditional religion, who showed the young Tiénou how Bobo religious concepts, forms and rituals could be used in articulating the Christian message (Essamuah and Ngaruiya, 2013: 3). Although Tiénou's critique of Sanon's contextual approach is less severe, he points out that also Sanon is guided by generalising anthropological insights.

dissertations at Western universities. As a result, their studies draw largely from anthropological and sociological sources, rather than from conversations with African churches. Tiénou declares that works presented by inculturation theologians often provide the impression of a stranger looking in.[16] He further highlights that all four theologians take a general concept of African culture as their starting point. Though the authors acknowledge Africa's cultural diversity, they essentially seem to suggest that African societies share a common cultural stratum. In their view, it is the task of the theologian to reconstruct this 'African culture' to formulate the gospel within an African cultural framework. As we have already seen, Tiénou maintains that it is problematic to assume that African people throughout the continent share the same system of ideas.[17] He argues that inculturation theologians, despite their impressive studies on African traditional cultures and religions, fail to address the specific needs and questions of African people. Furthermore, he raises the question of whether the main task of the theologian is indeed to construct a theology for the whole of Africa. Regardless of whether this is possible at all, Tiénou maintains that the focus should be on the local church to bring its members to maturity (Tiénou, 1984b: 21-27, 72-74; 118-121).

In response to these methodological issues, Tiénou argues that African theologians should take a specific faith community as their primary point of reference. To make his point, he leans in particular on Daniel von Allmen's article on the birth of theology in early Christianity. In his study, Von Allmen demonstrates that theology is never developed in isolation; it arises within a community of believers who embrace, interpret, and appropriate the gospel message, seeking to proclaim it (Von Allmen, 1975). Consequently, as Tiénou puts it, "the theology produced is non-systematic and non-speculative in nature". He clarifies that the theological specialist only comes later, "almost like an appendix", to perform the twofold function of critical reflection (on the basis of the biblical account) and the introduction of order. Therefore, theologies are always formulated in and drawn from specific situations, before moving to a more general level. Tiénou argues that inculturation theologians move from generalities and abstractions to particularities, whereas they should do the opposite, as the primary task of theology is to serve the church in its own, specific context (Tiénou, 1984b: 123-126).

Inspired by Von Allmen, Tiénou proposes the following three-dimensional method for contextualisation: to meet the real needs and questions of African

[16] Tiénou's own dissertation does not entirely escape such criticism. He may have done thorough field research among his own people, the Bobo 'prescriptive' theology presented toward the end of his dissertation seems to come largely from his own hand. This is counter to his notion that contextualization should come from below.

[17] Elsewhere he makes his point even more clearly: "All this rich variety of Christian experience in Africa makes it rash to generalize. What is often presented as African Christianity is seldom more than a local reality applied to the continent as a whole" (Tiénou, 1985b: 139-53).

Christians, the theological specialist should bring into dialogue the local church (as the primary focus of theology); the wider social, cultural and religious context; and the Bible. Tiénou contends that only through a lively and ongoing interaction between these three determinants can a proper contextualisation be achieved. Noteworthily, Tiénou consistently lists the three components in this order, beginning with the church in its specific situation. Unlike Kato and Mbiti, who respectively opted for a biblical or African framework for theology, Tiénou starts with the local community of Christians, who seek to understand the Christian message in light of their daily struggles. His point is that one cannot genuinely contextualise the gospel without first engaging with the local situation. He uses the imaginary scenario of a physician who first diagnoses a disease and then prescribes a cure. Likewise, the theologian should deeply engage with the local situation of the church and its wider context before prescribing the 'cure' of the gospel – which may differ according to the local situation. Hence, the theologian is not so much accountable to his academic colleagues as to the local community that he serves:

> The theologian should not start with the traditional cultural and religious context because his responsibility is not primarily to society in general. His task is not to develop a theology for people of a given cultural and religious tradition. Rather he must help Christians, in a given cultural and religious tradition, develop a theology suited to their needs. In that sense, responsible theology is one which causes Scripture to speak to people in the context of their history, their culture, their religious heritage and calls them to be God's ambassadors where they are (Tiénou, 1984b: 129).[18]

Having designated the local congregation the focus and addressee of hermeneutics, Tiénou guards against relativism – namely the idea that all truth is relative. With reference to the French philosopher Paul Ricœur, Tiénou asserts that African theologians should invest in exegetical study to understand "the total discourse provided us in Scripture". He considers it to be the responsibility of theological specialists to ensure that theologies generated by local communities accord with Scripture. However, this does not mean that the Bible must always be read and applied literally. Understanding the Bible as discourse involves not so much interpreting an isolated text but rather understanding the grand narrative, thereby uncovering the deeper scriptural truths for speaking with relevance to the hearts and minds of African Christians. This insistence on appropriating the narrative of

[18] Tiénou's description of the role of the theological specialist in leading and equipping local Christian communities evokes the concept of Christian Base Communities in Latin America, initiated by, among others, the Roman-Catholic priests and brothers Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. I have not been able to discover whether Tiénou has been inspired by Latin American liberation theology.

Scripture can be considered the normative element in Tiénou's hermeneutical method (Tiénou, 1984b: 173-175).

Tiénou maintains that this exegetical rigour is precisely what is neglected by inculturation theologians. He critically discusses what has been called "mnemic hermeneutics" – a term coined by the Sierra Leonean theologian Harry Sawyerr. This term, derived from the Greek word *mnémè* (memory), references the tendency among African theologians to interpret the Bible on the basis of apparent similarities between the biblical and African situation, without thoroughly studying the Bible text in its own historical setting.[19] In Tiénou's analysis, this "hermeneutics of remembrance" inevitably leads to a form of Bible interpretation that is solely determined by the nostalgic presuppositions of the interpreter. Ultimately, mnemic hermeneutics allows for the biblical text "to be interpreted without any controlling factors other than the interpreter's wishes" (Tiénou, 1984b: 181). In response, Tiénou asserts, after examining the local situation of the Church in its wider context, that the theologian is "to bring the corrective of Scripture into the situation" (Tiénou, 1984b: 189).[20]

To undergird his critique, Tiénou references the hermeneutical insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Anthony Thiselton, who have emphasised the two-sided nature of the hermeneutical process. Traditionally, hermeneutics was conceived of as interpreting a text in its historical setting. Gadamer and Thiselton, among others, have questioned this one-sided approach, arguing that one's interpretation is not only determined by the text but also – and to the same extent – by the interpreter's presuppositions. In their view, hermeneutics involves the interaction of two horizons, namely that of the biblical text and that of the world of the interpreter. Scripture acquires meaning when both horizons – of the Bible and of the interpreter – are brought into dialogue.

Endorsing this two-sided understanding of hermeneutics, Tiénou maintains that one should not minimise the tension between the biblical and African worlds – as mnemic hermeneutics appears to do. Only in and through this tension can the Christian message be meaningfully articulated and appropriated. Therefore, he considers the task of the theologian to be to ensure that both horizons are equally taken seriously: the totality of the Bible (including elements that conflict

[19] In a paper published in the same year as his dissertation, Tiénou critically assesses the works of African inculturation theologians, such as Edward Fasholé-Luke and Harry Sawyerr. He concludes that these African theologians, among others, operate within a mnemic framework: they tend to make an apparent analogy – in this case the importance of family in both the biblical and African worlds – decisive for interpreting Scripture. See further: Tiénou, 1984a.

[20] The theological specialist seems to play a pivotal role in Tiénou's three-dimensional method, since it is the task of the theologically trained leader to connect the three dimensions in a fruitful and responsible way. It remains somewhat unclear what exactly the role of the community is in this hermeneutical process.

with African worldviews) and the totality of African experiences. Tiénou emphasises that, as with Scripture, the African horizon "is a multiple one" – an implicit critique of the inculturation project. Therefore, the biblical message can only be responsibly transmitted, through an in-depth participation in and understanding of the particularities and complexities of the local situation (Tiénou, 1984b: 175-179).

One of the consequences of his three-dimensional conception of hermeneutics, according to Tiénou, is that African theologians should abandon the idea of achieving a continent-wide theology. The hermeneutical method that he proposes "takes contextualization seriously in that it seeks to develop a theology capable of solving problems which are specific to a given community" (Tiénou, 1984b: 185). As we have seen, African theologians should strive to diagnose the local situation to prescribe the salutary message of the gospel. This means that the content of the gospel message may vary from context to context: "Generalizations, if necessary, must come after theology has taken root in local situations. Perhaps generalizations and theoretical theologies are not at all necessary" (Tiénou, 1984b: 190). Consequently, he rejects the generic term 'African theology', yet he consistently speaks of African Christian *theologies*. These are theologies that bear a "prescriptive" character – engaging with the problems and issues of the local situation. Furthermore, Tiénou states that the crucial matter in the project of constructing an African theology is not whether a theology bears an African colour or flavour. Rather, the crucial question should be as follows (Tiénou, 1984b: 129-130, 187-190): Does a particular theology call God's people in a specific setting to a greater obedience to Christ?

2.4 African Evangelical Theology as a Third Way

Upon his appointment at the Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack, New York, Tiénou further developed his thinking, speaking of a "third way" between African academic theologies and popular theologies, or theologies that originate outside of the academy. In 1986, he was asked to deliver an address at the Africa Update Conference held in Glenn Ellyn, USA. Openly addressing missionary "strategists and decision makers", he reiterated his view that African evangelicals, because of their "mistrust of theology", have been rather absent from the debate on the outlook of African theology. He argued that it was now time to take the initiative. He called it "providential" that in the contemporary developments of African theology, a gap exists between academic and popular theologies – counting the evangelical movement among the latter. Since evangelicals, because of their more practical understanding of theology, "are numerous in popular theology", they seem best positioned to bridge the gap between the academy and expressions of Christianity at the grassroots level. Therefore, "[e]vangelicals in Africa can recapture the initiative by experimenting with a third way which neither remains in scholastic

discussions nor disdains real life issues. That is how evangelical theology will remain missionary" (Tiénou, 1987a: 40).

In a contribution in the *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, he further expounds his ideas presented at the Africa Update – 1986, conceding that Kato's work, as well as his own, fall into the category of academic theology: "Not too many people in the local churches in Africa are reading such works. I am not offended when I find that the local pastor has not read my book" (Tiénou, 1987b: 6). Therefore, Tiénou asserts that a paradigm shift is required. Instead of focusing on producing literary works on the contours of an African theology – an implicit critique of the inculturation enterprise – academic theologians in Africa should prioritise the training and equipping of local pastors and evangelists, enabling them to responsibly appropriate the Bible within their own situation. In other words, theology must be re-established as a function of and for the church and its mission. Then, genuine African theologies will emerge from the grassroots. Tiénou elaborates this idea as follows:

> What we need to do is to provide such people with a proper approach to biblical interpretation in Africa. I do not mean just the academics. The simplest village evangelist needs to understand how to interpret the Bible rightly in context. He may not have read all the wonderful things about hermeneutics that are available. Someone will have to teach him in ways that he will understand and find useful. But if that happens, if thereby a proper interpretation of Scripture takes place at the grassroots, informed by a proper understanding of culture, then such a pastor's preaching and counselling will be sound African theology of the best and most needed sort, whether he realizes it or not. The pastor would not call it theology, but he would be using good theology, true African theology (Tiénou, 1987b: 7).

According to Tiénou, this situation calls for action. Among the reasons for what he pinpoints as the "theological malaise", he mentions proclamation without theological reflection and denominational fragmentation, claiming that the evangelical movement in Africa suffers from a lack of focus and determination. Thus, a form of Christianity is sustained that may be impressive in numbers but is rather disappointing in its impact. Although the situation, in Tiénou's view, is critical, there is still hope – provided that evangelicals can manage to overcome the polarisation between academic and popular theologies. He asserts the following:

> To do so, they must place more emphasis, not on academic theology, but on academic theology that is in touch with, responding to, and facilitating popular theology through a range of creative approaches, for the equipping and maturation of the church. If our academic theology results only in obtaining degrees and

> writing pompous books, then I for one want nothing to do with it. But if it encourages more missionary proclamation, more discipleship, more faithfulness to our Lord, then assuredly this is the kind of theology that makes sense for Africa (Tiénou, 1987b: 10).

One encounters the same sense of urgency in the second and revised edition of his book *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa* (Tiénou, 1990c). In the introductory chapter, he restates his position that evangelicals in Africa can no longer neglect their theological responsibility to relate the Bible to African issues. Thus, theology is never finished – rather, it is the task of every new generation of Christians: "Evangelical theology takes God's self-disclosure in Scripture as its norm. But it should also take seriously the context in which the knowledge of God is to be communicated. That is why Christian theology is never stated once and for all. Every generation of Christians, in every culture, must seriously tackle this theological task" (Tiénou, 1990c: 12). It is significant that Tiénou, in the last chapter of this revised edition, seems to shift emphasis from prayer to strategic reflection, suggesting that more is required than a renewed spirituality: African evangelicals must develop a multiplicity of theological programmes to enable local churches and pastors to appropriate the Christian message in their own contexts and communities (Tiénou, 1990c: 51-54; see also Tiénou, 1991).

Having called upon African evangelicals to pursue a "third way" of theologising as a bridge between academic and popular theologies, Tiénou acknowledges that the theoretical reflections on the contours of theology in Africa have now reached calmer waters. In an article published in the *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* in 1990, he applauds the efforts of African scholars who, since the independence years of the 1960s, had advocated the legitimacy of an African way of doing theology: "The right to difference, even for Africans, is now largely recognised. This is no small accomplishment" (Tiénou, 1990b: 32).[21] He asserts that it is now time to build on the accomplishments of the first generation of African thinkers, to promote a plurality of African theologies that account for the immense variety of the African continent. Although African Christianity faces immense challenges, it seems that the intensity of the discussion has disappeared. This more irenic stage provides room to also share Tiénou's hermeneutical ideas outside of the African evangelical world (e.g. Tiénou, 1990a, 1993).

[21] Tiénou's observation aligns with the analysis of the Nigerian scholar Justin Ukpong who discerns three stages in African theological reflection, namely a reactive-apologetic phase (1930s-1970s), a reactive-proactive phase (1970s-1990s) and a proactive phase (1990s). From the 1990s onwards, African theology has been characterized by a growing diversity of perspectives and methodologies, ranging from feminist approaches, reconstruction and liberation theologies, to popular readings of the Bible. See Ukpong, 1999.

3. Conclusion

This article has investigated Tiénou's hermeneutical ideas in relation to the theological debates of his time. It argues that Tiénou's early works must be situated against the backdrop of three theological challenges, namely Kato's unfinished theological legacy, the quest for an African construction of theology, and the contextualisation debate within international evangelical circles. Where Kato emphasised the primacy of the Bible in theology and Mbiti took culture as his starting point, Tiénou argues that theology must start with the hermeneutical issues that arise from the encounter of African Christians with the Bible. In Tiénou's analysis, both Kato and Mbiti's approaches to theology fall short, as they ignore the specificities, complexities, and contradictions of African life in their quest for an overarching framework for theology in Africa (whether 'biblical' or 'African').

In turn, Tiénou radically foregrounds the local community as the focus and addressee of contextual theology. All theology, he maintains, is local. Building on the missiological work of Kraft and Von Allmen and inspired by Western hermeneutical insights, Tiénou advocates a three-dimensional method for contextual theology, consisting of a dynamic and ongoing interaction between the local church, the wider sociocultural and religious contexts, and the Bible. He asserts that the primary task of theologians is not to advance a system of ideas, nor is it to develop a continent-wide 'African' theology; rather, their task is to inspire, guide, and equip African Christians to appreciate and live out the gospel message in their own situation. It is within the day-to-day lives of ordinary Christians that the gospel becomes real; moreover, it is in close conversation with such *specific* groups of local Christians that the biblical message can be genuinely contextualised.

By underscoring the central role of the local community in hermeneutics, Tiénou sketches an alternative path – a third way – for doing theology in Africa. Because of his focus on the local community, he critiques the notion of an 'African theology' and consistently speaks of African *theologies*. He argues that the 'Africanness' of any theology is measured by its relevance to concrete African Christians; theology should be done in what he calls the "prescriptive mode", producing African theologies that address and prioritise the context-specific questions of a particular group of Christians. Genuinely relevant theology only emerges when ordinary African Christians, accompanied by a theological specialist, seek to relate the gospel message to their everyday problems.

Tiénou developed his hermeneutical ideas in relation to wider discussions within 'mainstream' African theological circles as well as the international evangelical community; however, his primary audience seems to be the African evangelical movement as embodied by the AEA. Furthermore, his hermeneutical contributions seem to reflect the diversifying trends and currents within post-Katonian evangelical theology. By presenting his hermeneutical approach as a

third way between academic and popular theologies, he urges evangelicals to take the initiative in the theological enterprise in Africa in view of contextualising the Christian message within the African milieu.[22]

[22] The reception of Tiénou's hermeneutical ideas within the (African) evangelical world needs further study. Tiénou received the opportunity to expound some of his hermeneutical ideas in *Issues in African Christian Theology* (Ngewa et al., 1998), but is remarkably absent in the well-known *Africa Bible Commentary* (Adeyemo, 2006). Also Elizabeth Mburu, in her introduction to African hermeneutics, does not mention Tiénou's contributions (Mburu, 2019). It seems that, despite his radical choice to start with the local church as the focus and addressee of theology, Tiénou too has not been able to close the gap between the university and the church.

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CHAPTER 6.

‘The Right to Be Different’: Tite Tiénou’s Engagement with Ali Mazrui’s Synthesis of Religions

Introduction

Kenyan scholar Ali Al'amin Mazrui (1933–2014) is widely acclaimed as one of Africa's intellectual giants of the 20th century. During his long and rich career at academic institutions both in Africa and the United States, he explored topics such as African politics, north–south relations, Muslim extremism, and globalisation.[1] Mazrui is best known for hosting the BBC television series *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (1986), in which he fiercely critiques Western involvement in Africa from colonial times to the time of shooting the documentary, arguing that independent Africa needs to defy any form of Western interference.[2] One of Mazrui's main convictions expressed in this documentary is that Africa's contemporary problems are tied to the long (and continuing) Western domination of Africa, which has utterly destroyed African societies. As part of this postcolonial critique, he points to the problematic link between colonialism and Christian missions, claiming that missionary Christianity has caused the religious and cultural alienation of Africans. Challenging the (in his view typically Western) claim to exclusive truth, he argues that there is room for Christianity in Africa only when it renounces its missionary zeal and merges with other religions.

Remarkably, few African Christian theologians have responded to Mazrui's conclusions on the relationship between colonialism and Christianity. Some thinkers (Adeyemo 2009; Kombo 2000; Punt 1999) mention him as a political thinker who situated himself between the currents of Afro-pessimism and African renaissance—but none of them have addressed the theological implications of his ideas. The position of Ghanaian scholar Kwame Bediako seems to explain the silence from the Christian side. He states that Mazrui's ideas are hardly worth considering, since one of Mazrui's premises is that Christianity is essentially alien to Africa's pre-Christian religious tradition (Bediako 1989; 1994; 1996). In this respect, it is noteworthy that Burkinabe theologian Tite Tiénou deeply engaged with Mazrui's postcolonial ideas. Tiénou, professor emeritus at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS), Deerfield, Illinois, has been one of the main contributors to African evangelical theology in the past few decades. According to him, the issues raised by Mazrui cannot simply be ignored by African Christians. Tiénou's position is all the more remarkable because

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[1] Among the many introductions to Mazrui's intellectual heritage, the following are worth noting: Adem 2016a; Adem 2016b; Bemath 2005; Kayapinar 2014; and Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015.

[2] I am aware of the ambiguity of the terms such as 'the West/Western' and 'Africa/African.' For example, both Mazrui and Tiénou use 'the West' in different ways—to refer to Western Europe, North America, or both.

Tiénou considers himself an evangelical, and African evangelicals are often accused of avoiding intellectual debates in Africa (Kapteina 2006; Musopole 1995).[3]

Unfortunately, Tiénou's reflections on Mazrui's works have gone largely unnoticed.[4] This article attempts to fill this void by analysing Tiénou's dialogue with Mazrui.[5] By doing so, it shows that Tiénou challenges African Christian leaders to take the questions posed by postcolonialism seriously, while at the same time insisting on safeguarding a distinct Christian identity within a pluralistic Africa. More specifically, this article explores the following question: How does Tiénou respond to Mazrui's proposal for a synthesis of religions to ensure peace and prosperity in Africa? To answer this question, Section 1 introduces some of Mazrui's works that seem to have stimulated Tiénou's thinking. Next, Section 2 examines Tiénou's conversation with Mazrui, through an analysis of a selection of Tiénou's contributions from the mid-1980s to the beginning of the 21st century—the period in which Mazrui was one of his main interlocuters. Lastly, Tiénou's engagement with Mazrui is evaluated in Section 3. The article argues that Tiénou embraces Mazrui's position, but simultaneously claims that African Christians have every right to be different, both from Western Christianity and Africa's pre-colonial past, maintaining that that there is space for a distinct expression of Christianity in postcolonial Africa.

1. Ali Mazrui's Proposal for a Synthesis of Religions

Introducing Mazrui's intellectual legacy seems to be a hazardous endeavour. Mazrui was not only a prolific writer who addressed a wide range of topics, but also an original and eclectic thinker who, apart from his overtly postcolonial position, cannot easily be captured within a specific intellectual current. While discussing African affairs, he formulated his thoughts without always concluding or grounding his argumentation (Makinda 2016). In this section, two lines of Mazrui's thought are highlighted. The first is the anti-Western sentiment that permeates his thinking; in view of contemporaneous challenges in Africa and beyond, Mazrui considered the West to be the primary aggressor. Second, and closely related to this, Mazrui's

[3] By evangelicals, I mean those who self-identify as evangelical. In the African context, the evangelical movement is commonly associated with the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA). Tiénou himself is well aware of the accusation that evangelicals are not interested in intellectual debates in Africa (Tiénou 2007a: 219). As I have argued elsewhere, the idea that African evangelicals uncritically endorse a Western Christianity needs to be nuanced (Van Veelen 2021a; 2021b; 2023).

[4] Only David Tarus and Stephanie Lowery seem to categorise Mazrui and Tiénou as two thinkers who both reject Western dominance in African affairs. This connection, however, is not further elaborated (Tarus and Lowery 2017). Matthew Michael mentions Tiénou as someone who questioned the Western 'hegemony postulate'—without assessing Tiénou's indebtedness to Mazrui (Michael 2017: 154–55).

[5] This article is the second part of a diptych on Tiénou's contributions to theological reflection in Africa. The first article on Tiénou's engagement in the inculturation debate during the early years of his career will be published elsewhere. With this research project, the author of the present article aims to make a fresh contribution to the debate on contextualisation in African theology.

objections to missionary Christianity are discussed; Mazrui saw the link between colonialism and missions as one of the issues that could endanger Africa's future.

In 1979, Mazrui was invited to deliver the BBC Reith Radio Lectures to analyse the state of affairs in sub-Saharan Africa after two decades of independence. In his second lecture, he shared a recurring humiliating experience when going through customs at European airports: Whereas white passengers were allowed to pass through, Mazrui was always stopped. He cited this example to make the point that Africans may not be the most brutalized in history—that distinction belonging to the Jews hunted down by the Nazis—but they are unquestionably the most humiliated. Whether through the slave trade, European colonisation, or racialist political structures, Africans have been, and continue to be, oppressed by foreign powers. In his lecture, Mazrui wonders why Africans are the most humiliated of peoples compared to other regions subjugated by colonial rule. His conclusion is that Western involvement in Africa was and continues to be guided by a deep-rooted racism (Mazrui 1979).

Mazrui's own biography might explain his anti-Western stance. Born into an influential Muslim family, he grew up in a white-dominated and segregated Kenyan society. The Mazrui family had been rulers of Mombasa and slave traders on Africa's east coast, but lost most of their power with the arrival of British colonial rule. His father was the chief *Khadi* of Kenya, the highest authority on Muslim law. During the Mau Mau resistance (1952–60), a bloody nationalist war against the British authorities, generally seen as the foundation of the process for Kenya's independence, Mazrui studied in the United Kingdom—critically following the violent repression of the British authorities.[6] Having finished his political and philosophical studies, he returned to Africa to teach at Makerere University, Uganda (1963–73), where he experienced the chaos and terror under Idi Amin. He was eventually forced to leave the country after declining Amin's invitation to become his personal advisor. In the following decades, he taught at the University of Michigan (1974–91) and Binghamton University in New York (1991–2014), producing an enormous intellectual corpus on the state and future of postcolonial Africa.[7]

In *The African Condition* (1980), Mazrui further elaborates on the ideas expressed in his Reith Lectures. He maintains that the colonisers demolished most of Africa's institutions of rule and authority and, hence, created a political void by the time of independence—the root cause of the continent's instability at the time of writing (Mazrui 1980: 1–22). To illustrate his point, he references Rudyard

[6] For Mazrui's early thoughts on Africa's struggle for independence, see *On Heroes and Uhuru-Worship* (Mazrui 1967a).

[7] Within the context of this article, I only focus on those of Mazrui's ideas that Tiénou addresses in his work. From the 1990s onward, Mazrui's attention shifted to Islamic studies, following the rise of Islamic terrorism by the turn of the century. See Mazrui 1992a; 1993a; Adem 2016b.

Kipling's controversial poem 'The White Man's Burden' that expresses the Western 'plight' of civilizing and Christianising African societies. Instead, Mazrui claims, European colonisers came with 'the terror of gunfire and the terror of hellfire.' Mazrui stresses that Western powers not only destroyed Africa's societal systems and structures (gunfire), but by doing this, they also annihilated their religious significance (hellfire). By destroying Africa's societal structures that were deeply grounded in religion, the colonisers created an Africa that had lost its sense of self-governance and self-esteem (Mazrui 1980: 123–4).

Throughout the book, Mazrui sketches two lines of thought. First, he advocates a radical deconstruction of Western interference in Africa, with the aim that Africans rediscover their capacity to govern themselves. Next, by embracing Kwame Nkrumah's concept of Pan-Africanism, he proposes the creation of a *Pax Africana*—an African political order.[8] Against the background of the ongoing Cold War tensions, with reference to the global Non-Aligned Movement that aimed to counterbalance the world's bipolarisation after the Second World War, Mazrui suggests that Africa, centrally located between the West and the East, is best positioned to restore global balance. But this *Pax Africana* could only be achieved when the dominant religions give up their claim to exclusivity (Mazrui 1980: 113–38).

Mazrui not only criticised colonial governments, but also attacked Africa's post-independence political leaders. In his *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*—the book accompanying the BBC television series—Mazrui states that '[t]he ancestors of Africa are angry' (Mazrui 1986b: 11). This ancestral curse, in Mazrui's analysis, was largely caused by Africa's own leaders, who readily embraced inherited colonial institutions. Mazrui shows that although colonialism had been formally abolished, its deeper structures and patterns were alive and well—often sanctioned by Africa's political élite. This infuriated Africa's soul: 'It is as if the indigenous ancestors have been aroused from the dead, disapproving of what seems like an informal pact between the rulers of independent Africa (the inheritors of the colonial order) and the West—a pact which allows the West to continue to dominate Africa' (Mazrui 1986b: 12). Referencing Chinua Achebe's book *No Longer at Ease*, Mazrui advocates for a radical rejection of all Western systems—like a human body that rejects its transplanted organs (Mazrui 1986b: 210–11).[9]

That being said, Mazrui concedes that Africa cannot return completely to pre-colonial times. Nevertheless, 'there may be a case for at least a partial retreat, a case for re-establishing contacts with familiar landmarks of yesteryear and then

[8] During his PhD studies, Mazrui conceived the idea of a *Pax Africana* out of concern for Africa's potential for self-government. Within the context of the continuing Cold War, he carried the concept further by claiming that Africa should assume its role in pacifying the world. See Mazrui 1967b.

[9] In an article published in 1993, Mazrui points at national borders as a colonial legacy that caused economic stagnation. According to him, Africa's borders, too, must be decolonized (Mazrui 1993b).

re-starting the journey of modernization under indigenous impetus' (Mazrui 1986b: 21). After all, the main problem with modern Africa was that the inherited structures were 'deficient in authenticity' (Mazrui 1986b: 295). Borrowing from the British-Irish thinker Edmund Burke, known for the idea of conservative authenticity, Mazrui holds that Africa's future could only be ensured when built on Africa's past (that is, its indigenous societal systems). African nations should therefore develop themselves according to what Mazrui calls 'the principle of indigenous authenticity.' They should launch a process of modernisation while radically breaking with Western hegemony: modernisation without Westernisation (Mazrui 1986b: 201). He ends his book by recapturing the concept of *Pax Africana*: In the face of Cold War tensions, African countries must unite to form a 'counter-power' of peace and stability on a global scale (Mazrui 1986b: 313–15; see also 1992b; 1993b).[10]

What are the implications of Mazrui's political ideas for his approach to Christianity? Strictly speaking, Mazrui does not argue that there is no room for Christianity in Africa.[11] He acknowledges that the African continent has some of the oldest forms of Christianity (in Egypt, Ethiopia). His main argument, however, is that while ancient forms of Christianity, as well as Islam, accommodated African indigenous values, this was not the case with missionary Christianity introduced by colonial rule. In Mazrui's analysis, the exclusive and at times aggressive nature of missionary Christianity (in contrast to the more accommodative approach of Islam) had caused a distortion of the previously irenic religious situation in Africa.[12] Since the 19th century, the balance of power between religions had shifted: Two imported religions, Islam and Christianity, now competed for the African soul (Mazrui 1986b: 135–57). At this point, Mazrui emphasises that this religious competition was essentially alien to African life, since 'traditional African creeds did not have the ambition to convert the world' (Mazrui 1980: 95).

Mazrui then advocates 'Africanizing new Gods,' suggesting a 'mix' or 'synthesis' of religions in Africa—without clearly defining what he means by this. This process of merging Africa's major religions—African traditional religions, Islam, and Christianity—should be presided by the oldest one, which Mazrui considers to be most authentic. After all, '[l]ong before the religion of the crescent or the religion

[10] As in *The African Condition*, Mazrui argues in *The Africans* for Africa's nuclear proliferation as a means of restoring the global balance of power. Mazrui's call, which aroused much controversy, will be left out of the discussion.

[11] This has been suggested by Kwame Bediako, who points at the epilogue that Mazrui wrote for Okot p'Bitek's book *African Religions in Western Scholarship*. Although Mazrui, in his epilogue, does indeed make some critical statements about Christianity, he does not consider (as p'Bitek does) the Christian religion to be essentially alien to the African milieu. See Bediako 1989; 1994; 1996; Mazrui 1970.

[12] Mazrui hastens to say that this did not mean there was no serious strife in Africa before the coming of Islam and Christianity. His point is, however, that these conflicts were defined more by ethnicity than by religion (Mazrui 1980: 95–6).

of the cross arrived on the African continent, Africa was at worship' (Mazrui 1986b: 135). Furthermore, he emphasises that African traditional religiosity, compared to the missionary and exclusive nature of both Islam and Christianity, had the capacity 'to tolerate and accommodate alternative religious cultures' (Mazrui 1980: 95). Thus, for Mazrui, harmony among this 'triple heritage' of religions could only be achieved when the newer religions were incorporated by the oldest and most tolerant one.[13] This synthesis of old and new would restore the balance for the common good of African societies (Mazrui 1985).[14]

Mazrui espouses the same synthetic approach to religion in *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (1990). By the end of the Cold War, American political observers, such as Francis Fukuyama, suggested that the world would soon reach 'the end of history'—the global acceptance of Western liberal democracy. According to Mazrui, this would be a highly undesirable scenario. In his book, he denounces the American tendency to dominate the world, also culturally, as one of the greatest threats to global stability. Coining the term 'dialogue of the deaf,' he argues that north–south relations were still defined by structural racism (Mazrui 1990: 116–28). Rather than looking to the West, the world should expect much from Africa, the violated and yet vital continent that had the potential of becoming 'a laboratory of both religious ecumenicalism and ideological cooperation' (Mazrui 1990: 257).

2. The Right to Difference: Tiénou's Response to Mazrui

Endorsing Mazrui's Postcolonialism

In a 1986 article discussing the missionary complexities of contemporary Africa, Tiénou mentions Mazrui as a critical observer of African Christianity who, in response to the rapid pace of Westernisation since the partition of Africa, repudiated any foreign meddling in African affairs—including Christian missions. Tiénou then comments, 'One may not agree with the position which equates missions with colonialism. The fact remains that missions and missionaries are part of a very complex reality in Central Africa' (Tiénou 1986: 3). He further argues that as long as the East or West keeps trying to take control of Africa, the frustrations of Africans will only increase. In the face of the continuing political and economic domination of Africa, he urges foreign mission boards and missionaries 'to pay more attention to the heartbeat and heartaches of the continent.' After all, Christianity in Africa

[13] The idea of a triple heritage of religions is not new. For example, the Kenyan scholar John Mbiti discerns three systems of thought that are dominant in Africa, namely Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions (Mbiti 1969: 262–77). Reference should also be made to Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah, who promoted a synthesis of the three principal religious forces in Africa (Tiénou 1991c: 8).

[14] In another contribution, he points to the Yoruba culture in Nigeria, where the three main religions seemed to have found a form of coexistence. Mazrui foregrounds this religious cohabitation within Yoruba society as a model for political stability in Africa (Mazrui 1986a).

will only survive when it bears the mark 'Africa owned' (Tiénou 1986: 4; see further Tiénou 1985).

Around the time of the end of the Cold War, in an article published in the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (1990), Tiénou embraces Mazrui's thesis that colonialism had caused the cultural and religious alienation of Africans, because 'Westerners denied the Africans civilisation and thought' (Tiénou 1990c: 26). To illustrate this, he points to Robert H. Milligan, a British missionary who, in his works *The Jungle Folk of Africa* (1910) and *The Fetish Folk of West Africa* (1912), described Africans as 'savages' and bluntly stated that the difference between 'civilised society' and 'savage society' could not be greater. Though Milligan's work was written in the early 20th century, Tiénou's main concern was that 'the ideas expressed by Milligan are still part of current missionary thought in relation to Africa…. Words like 'savage' have not yet disappeared from missionary hymns, even some of the most recent ones!' (Tiénou 1990c: 27). Therefore, he champions Mazrui's call for the continuing liberation of Africa, not only politically, but also culturally and theologically: 'As long as Europe and the West continue to dominate the economy and educational systems of Africa, the quest for the right to difference will remain' (Tiénou 1990c: 32).

Tiénou buttresses this argument by a personal experience. From 1985 to 1993, he taught at Alliance Theological Seminary, Nyack, New York. In a letter submitted by the Tiénou family to *Alliance Life* in 1990, he responded to some derogatory statements by an American missionary, expressed in a previous edition, who described Africans as savages who 'urinate anywhere, anytime they wish.' This article, in Tiénou's words, 'moves us back to the era of the 'white man's burden' with its numerous stereotypes about Africans. Is it not possible to keep missions before your readers without demeaning and denigrating 'missionized' Africans?' (Tiénou 1990a). Around the same period, Tiénou was member of the International Advisory Council for the second Lausanne Congress, Manila, 1989. One of the axioms of Lausanne II, propounded by the AD 2000 movement, was that 'the poor are the unreached, the unreached are the poor.' In an article published in *Missiology*, Tiénou states that the equation of the poor with the unreached showed that missionary reflections within the global Lausanne movement were still shaped by the nineteenth-century imaginary 'which equated spiritual darkness with skin pigmentation.' He writes, somewhat sarcastically, 'If the poor are the unreached, and the unreached are the poor, there is no need to worry about the rich West. Let us concentrate our efforts on the poor benighted heathen. If that happens, we will have come full circle' (Tiénou 1991b: 301).[15]

[15] The concern with inadequate stereotypes in Christian missions is one of the redlines in Tiénou's theology. See especially Tiénou 1991a; 1996; 2016b.

Despite his endorsement of Mazrui's postcolonial stance, Tiénou questions the solution proposed by Mazrui that Africans have to choose between the two options of Westernisation and Africanisation. In an article published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, he stresses that the African continent is home to a myriad of cultures, many of which are intertwined. How then would one determine what is authentically African? Tiénou argues that by reducing the issue of alienation to a choice between Westernisation and Africanisation, Mazrui does not account for Africa's cultural and religious complexity. He contends that only when African intellectuals integrate the complexities of African life can and will the sense of alienation be overcome. Hence, 'Africanness and correctness should not be measured in either dissimilarity or similarity to the West. The way forward is to measure the Africanness of any theology purporting to be African to the degree to which it speaks to the needs of Africans in their total context' (Tiénou 1990b: 76).

The Right to Difference

In an article published in the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (1991), Tiénou further examines Mazrui's claim that European colonisers, enthused by the slogan 'Christianise, colonise, civilise!' initiated an identity crisis in Africa. In this article, he shows that colonialism and missions seemed to spring from the same epistemological basis, as both aimed to replace African cultures by (what they considered to be) a more 'civilised' one, namely the Western–Christian culture. He clarifies, 'Like a bulldozer, missions tended to level other traditions so that the construction workers might erect buildings in 'international style' on the new sites' (Tiénou 1991c: 6). Tiénou further argues that current missiological thought still suffered from a 'binary division of the world' that saw the West as civilised, rational, and Christian and saw the rest of the world, especially Africa, as primitive, irrational, and pagan. Therefore, he asserts that it is not surprising that Mazrui, among others, equated missions with Western imperialism and called for a radical re-Africanisation of African societies.[16]

Tiénou then examines what he calls Mazrui's 'slogan of resistance'—that 'the ancestral is the authentic.' Though he concedes that Mazrui did not call for a complete return to Africa's pre-colonial past, he again challenges the rationale in Mazrui's thinking that Africans have to choose between the two options of Westernisation and indigenous authenticity. First, he argues that Mazrui's concept of an unspoiled pre-colonial Africa is an artificial reconstruction, since every society is constituted of influences from both from within and without. Furthermore,

[16] Both Mazrui and Tiénou seem to paint a one-sided historical picture at this point. While there is no denying that Western missions were characterized by imperialistic and racialist tendencies, Steven Kaplan has provided ample evidence that many Western missionaries were involved in the Africanisation of Christian communities (Kaplan 1986).

he shows that societies anywhere in the world are subject to constant change. Therefore, Mazrui falls into the trap of oversimplification by insisting on ancestral authenticity to overcome the identity crisis of Africans. Tiénou argues that rather than basing oneself on an artificial and monolithic reconstruction of Africa's past, the authenticity of any intellectual idea should be measured by its speaking to Africans in the complexities of everyday life.

In response to Mazrui's synthetic approach, Tiénou proposes the category of 'difference' as a way to overcome the sense of alienation felt by Africans. Rather than forcing people into one system of thought, as suggested by Mazrui, 'the master synthesizer' (Adem 2016b), the first freedom of Africans should be 'the right to be different'—a term Tiénou borrows from Burkinabe intellectual Joseph Ki-Zerbo. With regard to the development of an authentic African Christianity, this means that African Christians have every right to be different—*both from Western Christianity and from traditional religions*. Tiénou therefore calls upon evangelical Christians to exert their right to difference: 'If choosing to become a Christian necessarily involves detaching oneself in some respects from one's traditional culture and religion, that is a legitimate stance to take in modern Africa. Otherwise, why bother to change at all?' (Tiénou 1991c: 9).

In an article published in 1993, Tiénou further elaborates on the concept of difference. He states that both the globalisation of Christianity and the recognition of the world's cultural diversity call for a variety of expressions of the Christian faith. In other words, the universal character of the gospel can only be preserved through a process of diversification. Without mentioning Mazrui, he seems to suggest that Mazrui, among other postcolonial thinkers, failed to move beyond the either/or categories of the intellectual debates after the independence years: either Westernisation or Africanisation. Tiénou argues that this time of globalisation demands another intellectual framework, one that focuses not so much on systems of thought (as Mazrui does) as on the specific situations and contexts in which the gospel is expressed. To undergird this, he references American missiologist Robert Schreiter, who claimed that global Christianity should assume difference as a central category for theologizing. Tiénou's conclusion is that only through the development of distinctive indigenous theologies 'can the Christian movement become genuinely multicultural and yet remain truly universal' (Tiénou 1993a: 250).

The Danger of Syncretism

There is yet another reason why Tiénou is critical of Mazrui's synthetic approach: It eventually results in syncretism. In 1991, in an address delivered at the Alliance World Fellowship meeting in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, Tiénou expressed his concerns about the widespread use of nominalism in Africa—an institutionalized form of religion that emphasizes conformity to prevailing social standards over

personal conversion. While not explicitly mentioning Mazrui, he observed that in the aftermath of independence, an intellectual climate had been created which promoted an understanding of religion 'that is not too demanding' (Tiénou 1994: 6). In this lecture, Tiénou linked nominalism and syncretism—the blending of different religious systems. According to him, 'the merchants of religious ideas' in Africa, by downplaying the differences between religions, had created a 'religion of spectators' that led to confession without conversion. With reference to 2 Timothy 3:5, he called upon evangelical Christians to internalize the gospel message so that it became a force of transformation, both personal and societal (Tiénou 1994: 10).

From 1993 onward, upon returning to Africa to serve as president and dean at the Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne (FATEAC) in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, Tiénou further cautioned against syncretism. During this period, tensions ran high in the country, leading to a civil war in the early 2000s. In view of the political unrest, Tiénou again engaged with postcolonial thinkers such as Mazrui and Cameroonian historian Achille Mbembe, both of whom tended to minimise the differences between religions for the sake of Africa's well-being. According to Tiénou, Mazrui's idea of Africa as a laboratory of religious and ideological cooperation was not only far too optimistic, given the growing tensions between Islam and Christianity, but also jeopardised the calling of the church, commissioned into the world 'to magnify Christ and his gospel.' For him, the missionary and Christ-centered focus of Christianity, called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, is beyond dispute and non-negotiable. Tiénou acknowledges that '[d]enigration, conquest and triumphalism have too frequently been ingredients of Christian missionizing in Africa' (Tiénou 1993b: 242). However, this does not mean that Christians should accept the relativistic (and in his view syncretistic) ideas of Mazrui and Mbembe. Rather, Christians should seek a balanced way between boldness and meekness in expressing their faith.

In this regard, Tiénou frequently mentions the article 'Christianity on the March' by the American missionary Dick France (France 1977). Although it is written by a Westerner, Tiénou, throughout his works, considers it a roadmap for African Christian reflection (for example, Tiénou 2001; 2016a). One of France's main concerns is that Christianity in Africa, especially in the evangelical variety, continues to be dominated by Western thought and, hence, is infused with its triumphalism and denigration of African religions and cultures. He therefore calls upon African evangelicals to discard any form of neo-colonialism. Simultaneously, however, France cautions against the emergence of a pragmatic approach to Christianity that, influenced by traditional African thought, is preoccupied by the immediate practical benefits of Christianity rather than making God its ultimate focus. For France, the absorption of Christianity by a previously existing religion would mean that the heart of Christianity—knowing and loving God through Jesus Christ—would be lost.

It seems that Tiénou shares this sentiment when rejecting Mazrui's proposals for a religious synthesis as a means of stability in Africa.

In yet another publication, Tiénou more explicitly dismisses Mazrui's proposals as a form of syncretism. He emphasizes that, over the centuries, the Christian religion has been expressed in pluralistic settings. Indeed, it is characteristic of Christianity that its followers are 'strangers and sojourners' in this world (Hebr. 11:13; 1 Petr. 2:11). Thus, the pluralistic African experience as such is not under discussion. This being said, Tiénou argues that Mazrui advocates a form of syncretism, rather than 'religious pluralism,' because he proposes that the newer religions be absorbed by the oldest one. Tiénou argues that like Hinduism, African religions can be seen as a 'federation of faiths'—based on the conviction that there are many paths to God. However, he maintains that the worldview of African traditional religions is at variance with the Christian worldview.[17] Tiénou's main concern is that through Mazrui's relativistic and syncretistic ideas, a religious climate will emerge that is 'inimical to conversion and exclusivism' (Tiénou 1999: 150). According to Tiénou, Mazrui's proposal of a synthesis of religions will only reinforce the already existing superficiality of Christianity in Africa; swallowed by traditional religions, the Christian faith will lose its theological distinctiveness and, hence, its transformative ethics.

Tiénou already sees this happening in the politics of Côte d'Ivoire's former presidents, Félix Houphouët-Boigny and Henri Konan Bédié, who translated Mazrui's idea of religious pluralism into a political doctrine: religious synthesis as the foundation of civic peace. Caught within such a political program, religion increasingly becomes a pragmatic tool in the hands of politicians rather than a transformative force that challenges and changes people. Consequently, the idea of personal conversion—so central to the evangelical understanding of the Christian message—becomes controversial or even presumptuous. Therefore, one of the main challenges for modern African Christians is 'to articulate how Christian identity is possible even with religious pluralism' (Tiénou 1999: 150).

Authentic African Christianity

When Tiénou moved to the United States in 1997 to teach at TEDS, he seems to have been confronted once more with the Western dominance in theology, which provided him with another reason to revisit Mazrui's postcolonial thinking. Considering syncretism as one of the greatest theological challenges in Africa, in the American academic context, he was challenged with an attitude of superiority

[17] In several studies Tiénou has argued that, ultimately, the theocentric worldview of Christianity is incompatible with the anthropocentric worldview of African indigenous religions (Tiénou 2004a; 2004b; Hiebert, Shaw, Tiénou 1999).

toward non-Western expressions of Christianity. Once again, Tiénou turned to Mazrui's work to find the words to articulate his concerns.

In a presentation at the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, he referenced the studies of missiologists such as Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls when stating that the centre of gravity of Christianity had now shifted from the North to the South. Consequently, the West could no longer lay claim to being the centre of Christian faith and reflection.[18] Nevertheless, Tiénou constates that the idea of a multicultural and polycentric Christianity hardly seems to penetrate the Western academia. In this context, he applies Mazrui's 'dialogue of the deaf' to the relationship between Western theology and the rest of the world (Tiénou 2005: 12). Despite the globalisation of Christianity from the 19th century onward, 'the rule of palefaces' (a term borrowed from Andrew Walls) remains the norm in the theological enterprise. Now is the time to turn the tables: Indigenous theologies should be at the heart of academic theological reflection (Tiénou 2005: 12–17).

In accordance with Mazrui's 'dialogue of the deaf,' Tiénou clarifies that non-Western theologians must always account for the contextual and universal aspects of their ideas, while their Western colleagues are hardly ever asked to do so.[19] Moreover, he notes that when theologians from Africa, Asia, or Latin America are invited to discuss a theological issue, their Western colleagues seem to be more interested in the contextuality than in the originality of their ideas: 'I have often wondered if the real value of an African theologian to a Northern/Western seminary may not have more to do with his or her *Africanness* than with the person's expertise in a particular discipline!' (Tiénou 2005: 14; italics in the original). Tiénou then argues that Western theology should abandon its 'global domination,' which he categorically rejects as a form of 'provincialism' (Tiénou 2005: 17).

Although Tiénou acknowledges that Mazrui rightly challenges Western exclusivism and triumphalism (also in theology and missions), he questions Mazrui's emphasis on a religious synthesis as a way to build a new, decolonized Africa. In a contribution on African evangelical theology for *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, Tiénou again proposes the category of difference to account for the universality and contextuality of the gospel message. He calls on African evangelical Christians to chart a path that, on the one hand, rejects Western hegemony in theology and, on the other, preserves a distinct Christian identity within a pluralistic African setting. To this end, the specific questions and issues of

[18] Considerable parts of this address were delivered at theological institutions in the US, such as Calvin College and TEDS (Tiénou 2005: 1, footnote 1).

[19] It is worth noting that in this second American period, Tiénou wrote a contribution on the American-Liberian pastor Edward Blyden (1832–1912), who was denied theological training in America and is widely seen as one of the main inspirers of the philosophies of Pan-Africanism and *négritude* (Tiénou 1998).

a Christian community must be addressed from a Christian perspective: 'The most pressing challenge for evangelical theology in Africa is the requirement to serve fully the needs of Christians and churches in Africa without being an appendix to Western or other theologies and also without being an exotic mixture of Christianity and African cultures or religions' (Tiénou 2007a: 221; see also 2000a: 46).

In this regard, Tiénou stresses that the category of difference (as opposed to Mazrui's synthesis) calls for a less triumphalist and militant expression of Christianity. His belief is that only when the Christian church in Africa finds ways to boldly and humbly share the gospel message will a decolonised, and thus authentic, Christianity emerge. In a presentation at a FATEAC International Colloquium, he outlined what authentic Christianity in Africa could look like. Discussing the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 27–37), which is actually a commentary on the essence of the Mosaic law, Tiénou emphasises three elements, namely, confession (God is the only one), devotion to God and your neighbour (the double commandment of love), which translates into social commitment—regardless of one's skin colour, religion, or origin. In this way, Christians can distinguish themselves amid the plethora of viewpoints in Africa, not aggressively, but through humbly embodying the good news of Christ (Tiénou 2014; see also 2007b; 2016a). Ultimately, it had been Tiénou's own parents who had provided an example of an authentic Christian identity in a pluralistic context:

> I think of my parents in this respect. They were among the first in their towns to accept the Good News when it was presented there. I recall their anxiety and pain when they would pray for their acquaintances who did not know Christ. I also witnessed their excitement and joy as they shared the Gospel. They were not coerced into this by powerful, foreign religious zealots. They did it freely because they believed that everybody ought to know the same freedom they found in Christ (Tiénou 2000b: 182–83; capitals in the original).

3. Conclusion

This article has investigated Tiénou's engagement with Mazrui's thesis that colonialism and Christian missions have caused the religious and cultural alienation of Africans. It shows that Tiénou endorses Mazrui's postcolonial critique while simultaneously criticising his proposals for a synthesis of religions. Tiénou concurs with Mazrui's analysis that Western colonial presence—and its concomitant force of missionary Christianity—has caused an identity crisis in Africa which reverberates to this day and deeply affects and shapes African politics and African Christianity alike. Like Mazrui, he also maintains that the old idea of the 'White Man's Burden' still persists in contemporary ideas (including missiological reflections) about Africa.

However, Tiénou's criticism of Mazrui takes two distinct forms. First, he questions the validity of Mazrui's representation of pre-colonial Africa. In Tiénou's view, Mazrui wrongly assumes an idyllic harmony within Africa before the arrival of missionary Christianity. Tiénou maintains that Mazrui fails to account for the rich diversity of cultures and religions within Africa in the past and present and questions one of Mazrui's basic premises, namely, that the ancestral is authentic. According to him, Mazrui's equation of antigenicity with authenticity is problematic: Why should Africa's past automatically be more authentic than its present? Tiénou therefore critiques Mazrui's proposal for a synthesis of religions presided by the oldest one, as a means to ensure Africa's welfare. He contests the idea that a return to an imaginary past is a viable way forward and rather argues that the authenticity of any theology or ideology claiming to be African should be measured by how it speaks to Africans in their everyday struggles today.

Tiénou's second line of criticism of Mazrui is theological. He maintains that Mazrui's proposal for a merger of religions seriously distorts the central focus of Christianity, leading to a form of syncretism. Consequently, according to Tiénou, the Christian faith will lose both its theological distinctiveness and its transformative ethics. In response to Mazrui's synthetic method, Tiénou foregrounds the concept of difference as a central category for intellectual reflection in Africa. He claims that African Christians are not necessarily limited to choosing between Westernisation and Africanisation. In a modern Africa that is characterised by its growing complexity, Christians have every right to be different, both from Western and traditional elements, as they seek to boldly and humbly live out their faith. In view of widespread nominalism and the danger of syncretism, he considers the development of a distinctive Christian identity and theology within a pluralistic Africa one of the main challenges for African theologians.

Despite Tiénou's criticism of Mazrui, his work evidences how deeply he was influenced by the latter. When, upon his return to the United States, Tiénou was confronted once again with Western hegemony, especially within the academy, he turned to Mazrui's concept of the 'dialogue of the deaf' to formulate a retort. Building on the work of Mazrui, among others, Tiénou argues that the global nature of the Christian faith calls for varied expressions of Christianity. Otherwise, the Christian message would remain imprisoned within one cultural framework. Between Mazrui's postcolonial criticism (which Tiénou sees as too reactionary) and Western theological reflection (which he sees as too provincial), Tiénou urges African Christian scholars to exert their right to be different. Only then would the Christian faith truly become 'Africa owned.'

In conclusion, Tiénou's nuanced postcolonial position seems to offer valuable insights for Christians living in pluralistic religious contexts anywhere in the world, seeking ways to express their faith both distinctively and humbly.

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CHAPTER 7.

Gathering the Threads: Contextuality and Evangelical Theology in Africa

Introduction

This dissertation investigated the works of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou against the backdrop of the criticism that African evangelical theologians associated with the AEA have uncritically propagated a Western form of theology. In the last two decades of the 20th century, scholars of African theology have reviled AEA theologians for neglecting the challenges of contextualization and thereby failing to address Africa's context-specific issues, a critique that has been reiterated until today. This dissertation critically investigated this critique and whether and how Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou, as three first-generation AEA theologians, practiced contextualization in their theological writings.

This final chapter presents a synthesis of the findings and formulates a conclusion. The first section outlines the key research findings in relation to the issue of contextualization thus far and briefly summarizes the main findings from each of the preceding chapters. The second section uses the translation model ("contextualization as translation") presented in the introductory chapter as a lens through which to analyze the research findings and answer the central research question. The third section evaluates the study as a whole and discusses its contributions to the field of African theology and the questions that emerged. The last section proposes the general conclusion of this dissertation: within the framework of contextualization as translation, Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou intensively engaged with African affairs and developed diverging ways to contextualize evangelical theology in Africa rather than reiterating a prefabricated theology. More specifically, Kato interpreted contextualization mainly as a missionary strategy, while Adeyemo and Tiénou advocated for contextualization as a theological method.

Summary of the Research Findings

This dissertation focused on the following question: *Do African evangelical theologians associated with the AEA, particularly Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo, and Tite Tiénou, practice contextualization as a theological method and, if so, in what ways?* The research centered on Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou because they are three first-generation AEA theologians who have profoundly shaped the AEA's theological orientation and are widely regarded as representatives of African evangelical theology. Furthermore, all three were deeply engaged in debates on contextualization within the international evangelical movement and African theological circles. The main method used in this dissertation was a literature study on Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou's written theological output in relation to the topic of contextualization. In this way, a triptych emerged of three key figures from the early decades of the AEA movement (roughly between the mid-1970s and early

2000s) in terms of their approaches to and methods of contextualizing evangelical theology in African settings.

Chapter 2 investigated Kato's involvement in the salvation debate in African theological circles of the 1970s. It argued that his soteriological ideas should be understood in relation to ongoing international and African theological debates and some political currents of his time. Suggesting that the very essence of the gospel was jeopardized, Kato passionately attacked contemporary African theological trends, which insisted on inculturation on the one hand (Agbeti, Idowu, and Mbiti) and/or liberation as salvation on the other (the [African] ecumenical movement). Kato contended that the theological priorities of both inculturation and liberation ultimately called into question the Bible as the sole normative source of theology. He felt that, as a result, the core of Christianity—personal and eternal salvation through Jesus Christ alone—was jeopardized and replaced by what he considered to be a distorted gospel. Kato's theological concerns appear to have been sparked by three contemporary developments: the persecution of Chadian and Congolese Christians due to a political ideology that glorified traditional culture, the politicization of the gospel at the AACC's Lusaka conference in 1974, and the rise of Black theology in the context of South African apartheid. In Kato's analysis, these events showed that Christianity in Africa was politicized under the influence of inculturation and liberation tendencies and was therefore losing its unique Christ- and salvation-centered focus. However, Kato's primary goal was not to radically uphold a specific form of (North American) evangelical theology but rather to preserve the distinctiveness of Christian theology in terms of revelation and salvation. He did not oppose contextualization as such but felt compelled to highlight the risks involved in contemporary contextualization processes and warn against what he considered to be theological naiveté. Unfortunately, because of Kato's untimely death, his theological program, which was presented toward the end of his book *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, only tentatively sketches the contours of his vision of a Christian theology that is genuinely Christian and African.

Chapter 3 examined Adeyemo's assessment of African traditional religions (ATR) in relation to ongoing debates on salvation in international evangelical circles in the 1970s and 1980s. In line with his predecessor Kato, Adeyemo highlighted the unique and exclusive message of Christianity with regard to salvation in his writings. He fully endorsed Kato's theological legacy and its insistence on the finality of Scripture as God's ultimate revelation and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation. However, in line with post-Lausanne I theology and in contrast to Kato, Adeyemo made allowances for elements of both continuity and discontinuity between ATR and Christianity. Carefully navigating between the paths of rejection and revitalization, it was his growing conviction that, without integrating ATR terms,

concepts, and worldviews, the gospel would take root only superficially. In search of a conceptual framework to contextually express the gospel, he proposed the idea of "cosmological balance" (the struggle to preserve a balance between good and evil powers) as a way to express central evangelical tenets (e.g., the victory and supremacy of Christ) in terms of an African worldview. According to Adeyemo, the church should take over the traditional role of the religious specialist to restore the disturbed balances in African societies in holistic ways. Furthermore, the chapter outlined that Adeyemo's assessment of ATR was characterized by ambivalence. On the one hand, he rejected the fulfillment theory propounded by inculturation theologians (ATR as Africa's Old Testament), stating that ATR cannot serve as pathways to salvation. On the other hand, he sometimes described ATR as a *praeparatio evangelica*. Similarly, he deemed ATR (as well as other African realities) to be an indispensable context, framework, and source of contextualization while upholding the Bible as ultimate source in terms of salvation. However, Adeyemo did not clarify the relationship between the Bible and other sources of theologizing. In spite of these ambiguities, he allocated a prominent role to Africa's pre-Christian heritage when contextualizing evangelical theology in Africa.

Chapter 4 retraced Adeyemo's contributions to evangelical debates on mission after Lausanne I (1974). The renewed emphasis on integral mission (a reaction to the near exclusive focus of the evangelical movement for verbally proclaiming the gospel) provoked much discussion within the evangelical world: What exactly is the relationship between proclamation and social action in mission? The chapter showed that, while Adeyemo was undoubtedly influenced by North American evangelicalism, he increasingly aligned himself with the priorities of a group of non-Western theologians called "radical evangelicals," which comprised, among others, René Padilla and Orlanda Costas. Engaged in this group of critical evangelical theologians, he moved beyond the language of prioritizing proclamation in mission (which is characteristic of North American missionary approaches) and advocated for a broad, holistic, contextual, and transformational understanding of the missionary mandate: the gospel is a life to live. This missiological standpoint also led him to prioritize African issues in his thinking. Disappointed with the outcomes of Lausanne II (1989), which he believed was solely preoccupied with evangelistic strategies to win the world's "unreached" (the AD 2000 movement) and increasingly concerned about the state of the African continent (e.g., civil wars, South African apartheid, Rwandan genocide, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic), Adeyemo became convinced that only Africans could adequately address these African issues. He advocated for the right and responsibility of African Christian leaders to pursue their own contextual theological agenda. Insisting on the concept of the prophetic function of the church and elaborating on the pivotal role of religious specialist

within African societies, he called upon African churches to fight against all forms of sin (both personal and structural) for the transformation of Africa.

Chapter 5 discussed Tiénou's hermeneutical contributions to African evangelical theology. It argued that Tiénou's ideas should be understood in relation to three theological challenges: Kato's unfinished theological legacy, the quest for an African method of theology, and the contextualization debate in international evangelical circles. Amid these discussions, Tiénou advocated for a "third way." In his work, he criticized both Kato and Mbiti and argued that both theologians sought to formulate an overarching conceptual framework, whether the Bible (understood as one coherent message) or African cultures (understood as one coherent system). In Tiénou's analysis, both Kato and Mbiti's approaches to theology fell short because they ignored the endless variety and complexity of African life in their quest for a continent-wide theology (whether "biblical" or "African"). In turn, Tiénou maintained that all theology is local. Distancing himself from the generalizations of both Kato and Mbiti, Tiénou proposed a three-dimensional method for doing contextual theology that brought into dialogue the local congregation (as the primary focus of theology); the wider social, cultural, and religious context; and the Bible. Thus, he ascribed a decisive role in contextualizing evangelical theology to the local community of Christians. Although he conceded that Christianity aims at universality as a world religion, Tiénou insisted that contextualization takes place at the local level (rather than at the level of general theoretical concepts) and argued that the theologian is primarily accountable to the local Christians that they serve rather than fellow theologians. In this regard, he proposed a "third way": instead of developing an overarching theology for all of Africa, African evangelical theology should be done in what Tiénou called "the prescriptive mode," which means equipping local Christians to embrace, interpret, and live out the Christian faith according to their own situation.

Chapter 6 analyzed Tiénou's engagement with Ali Mazrui's thesis that colonialism and Christian missions brought about the religious and cultural alienation among Africans. The chapter outlined that, although Tiénou critically discussed Mazrui's ideas (particularly his assumption that Africa's future lies in its ancestral past and proposal for a synthesis of Africa's major religions, presided by ATR), he embraced Mazrui's postcolonial perspective as a framework for critical thinking. Like Mazrui, Tiénou accused Western colonial powers and the Christian missionaries that came in their wake of having imposed their value systems on Africans and their cultural and religious traditions, thus destroying the very heart of African societies. Tiénou maintained that this cultural dominance continues to the present, even in theology. Therefore, he argued that theology must be decolonialized to become authentically African. Using Mazrui's expression of "the dialogue of the deaf," Tiénou challenged the lingering Western dominance of theology. According

to Tiénou, the global nature of Christianity demands a plurality of expressions of the Christian message. Therefore, he argued, local theologies should be at the heart of academic theological reflections. Between Mazrui's postcolonial criticism and the claim of Western theology to universality, Tiénou proposed the term "difference" (as used by the Roman Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter) as a central and decisive category for theologizing anywhere in the world. It is only through a process of differentiation that the catholicity of Christianity can be preserved; otherwise, the Christian faith will remain provincial (e.g., imprisoned in Western theological frameworks and concepts). Thus, Tiénou appealed to African Christians to exert their right to be different as they seek to follow Christ within their own contexts.

Analysis of the Research Findings

As described in the introductory chapter, the translation model is the main evangelical paradigm for contextualization. It can be characterized by two features. Theologically, the model upholds a propositional notion of revelation. It presupposes that special revelation (as distinct from general revelation) is complete; God has revealed himself once and for all through the history with Israel and the life of Jesus, as contained in Scripture. This biblical revelation is theologically delineated and guarded by the Christian tradition. Because of this approach to revelation, the translation model assumes that the Christian religion consists of what it describes as a kernel and a husk: a supra-cultural, non-negotiable core of Christianity (kernel) and its cultural packaging (husk). Methodologically, then, the translation model proposes a method by which a central message of Christianity (Bible and tradition) is expressed in a specific context. According to this model, the process of contextualization consists of studying the context (the husk) in such manner as to effectively formulate the gospel (the kernel). Its primary goal is to express a preconceived central message of the Christian faith to ensure that it becomes meaningful within a specific context, without compromising its central focus. However, what comprises the "kernel" of the Christian tradition and what is contextual are contested in evangelical circles.

We have also seen that the translation model was first and foremost presented as a *missionary strategy* that aims to "translate" the kernel, which is the central Christian message, into contexts that were not yet Christianized. However, among some theologians, the model gradually developed over time into a *theological method* that values local contexts, situations, questions, and communities as sources for theologizing. This development has provoked much discussion and remains contested among evangelicals worldwide. Is the local context allowed to determine and/or shape the content of the message and, if so, in what way and to what extent? Since Lausanne I (1974), there has been an ongoing debate within the evangelical world regarding the essential and peripheral aspects of the gospel

message. Therefore, it is important to underscore that, although there is no dispute about the basic concept of translation ("transmitting a message"), there are a variety of interpretations when it comes to the non-negotiables of the Christian faith and different perceptions of its goals. Thus, the translational model should be seen as a spectrum of different and diverging approaches (see Moreau 2012).

Because the translation model is the predominant paradigm of contextualization in the global evangelical movement, I opted to use contextualization as translation as the analytical framework with which to examine the research findings summarized in the above sections. I made this decision to be able to assess African evangelical theology on its own terms. Accordingly, the following analysis is guided by three questions that follow the basic structure of the translation model: What is the non-negotiable message of Christianity, according to Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou? To what extent does the local context shape this central message? Finally, is contextualization primarily perceived as a missionary strategy or as a theological method?

Byang Kato

Although Kato did not systematically reflect on the process of translating the Christian message in his writings, he consistently emphasized Jesus Christ as the only way to personal and eternal salvation. His primary reference text was Acts 4:12, stressing that there is salvation in no one else—a clear statement against the AACC's socio-political articulation of the gospel's salvific message. As seen in Chapter 2, Kato's interpretation of the gospel message consisted of four building blocks: (1) God has redemptively revealed Himself through Scripture, of which Jesus Christ is the central focus; (2) acceptance of the cross of Christ is the only way to mitigate God's wrath, receive forgiveness, and attain eternal life; (3) biblical salvation focuses on humankind's deepest problem, which is spiritual rather than material; (4) salvation is ultimately realized in eternity, but it transforms human beings in the here and now and enables them to serve society. This outline of Kato's soteriological ideas clearly shows that the person of Christ was central to his thinking: it is only through the salvific ministry of Jesus Christ that a person can obtain salvation (in view of eternity) and inner transformation (already in the here and now). For Kato, these basic convictions were non-negotiable.

With his representation of what he called "biblical Christianity," Kato claimed to be in line with the central core of the biblical message (both the Old and New Testaments), the ecumenical creeds of early Christianity, and the basic theological tenets of the international evangelical world. Therefore, in his view, he did not present a new or contextualized interpretation of the Christian message but simply repeated what the church has professed and continues to profess since time immemorial. In Kato's view, special revelation (and its interpretation) is

complete; God has revealed himself once and for all through Jesus Christ, according to Scripture. Depicting general revelation as merely a yearning for the divine, he considered God's special revelation through Christ to be the only source for theology. This was precisely his problem with contemporary culture-oriented and liberation-oriented trends in theology: by accepting other sources of revelation, they built theology on what he considered to be questionable foundations (e.g., ATR as a *praeparatio evangelica* or the struggle for political liberation), thereby running the risk of losing the centrality and finality of the Christian message: "Jesus Christ crucified!" According to Kato, the primary theological task of the church consisted of preserving this universal and timeless message, which was one of the AEA's main priorities when it was founded by North American missionary organizations in 1966.

Kato approached contextualization from a missiological perspective. As I argued, he was not opposed to the idea of contextualization as such but deeply concerned about the theological pitfalls involved in the process. In his writings, he recurrently underscored the need for contextualization to effectively proclaim the gospel. In Kato's view, one does not need to first become a Westerner in order to become a Christian; Africans can remain fully African (in terms of their socio-cultural background) while accepting Christ. In view of the missionary task of the church, African cultural expressions and forms (such as dress and music) are acceptable, provided that they are in line with historical Christianity, based on the Bible. However, according to Kato, where Bible and culture make contradictory claims, the Bible has the final say; the gospel should never be compromised. In his view, contextualization can only be properly conducted by first establishing a firm scriptural foundation. Otherwise, Christianity would relapse into pagan thinking—thus his famous saying "Let *African* Christians become *Christian* Africans!" (Kato 2010: 38; italics in the original). Therefore, contextualization, in Kato's approach, should start with knowing and acknowledging Christ through Scripture as God's normative revelation. It was his contention that only through a Scripture-centered focus can the gospel be adequately expressed in African contexts.

In conclusion, according to Kato, the non-negotiable core of Christianity is comprised of God's special revelation in Jesus Christ as the only source for theology, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only way to eternal salvation, and spiritual salvation as the heart of salvation and source of the inner transformation of human beings in the here and now (which means that sanctification follows justification). He regarded these convictions as normatively revealed in Scripture, summarized in the creeds of early Christianity, and confessed by evangelicals worldwide. With his propositional understanding of revelation, Kato did not allow the local context to affect this central message of Christianity. Missiologically, he fully acknowledged the challenges and necessity of contextualization, but, theologically, he was reluctant to accept and incorporate the value of cultures,

contexts, and situations. Contextualization was acceptable only when the unique focus of Christianity was not compromised. Therefore, situating his approach within the continuum of different understandings of contextualization as translation, he viewed contextualization as a missionary strategy rather than a theological method, with a distinct understanding of a non-negotiable core (although this was not specified due to Kato's untimely death). In this regard, Kato's understanding of contextualization seemed to reflect the main outcomes of Lausanne I, in which contextualization was primarily understood as a missionary strategy.[1]

Tokunboh Adeyemo

Whereas Kato posited a well-defined and non-negotiable *depositum fidei*, Adeyemo was less explicit about what he considered to be the central Christian message. It is clear from his writings that he did not intend to question some of the central evangelical categories, such as the authority of the Bible, the atoning death of Christ, forgiveness of sins, and personal conversion. He repeatedly underscored the universality of (evangelical) Christianity and its message, identifying himself with well-known protestant-evangelical concepts such as *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. However, unlike Kato, the principal quest in Adeyemo's thinking is not the defense of these evangelical convictions but rather how to make them relevant to African contexts. His priority was to seek ways to relate the gospel to African perceptions of life both past and present. It was his conviction that Christianity could only become relevant and thus an agent of transformation in African societies through a lively interaction with African worldviews and realities.

Thus, in his involvement in evangelical debates on salvation, Adeyemo emphasized that the gospel message will only speak to African people when expressed within their own worldviews. He maintained that, otherwise, the Christian faith would remain superficial, without changing people's hearts. Although he did not subscribe to the fulfillment theory as promoted by some inculturation theologians (ATR as Africa's Old Testament), he occasionally described ATR as a *praeparatio evangelica*. Accordingly, Adeyemo theologically valued ATR as an indispensable framework and an occasional source for contextualization. Although he ascribed to the Bible a *status aparte* in the theological enterprise (as God's "soteriological revelation"), ATR expressions and experiences were a prerequisite for meaningfully

[1] That being said, it seems appropriate to reiterate American missiologist Paul Bowers' warning: "*Pitfalls* is not Byang Kato's magnum opus. Kato was not yet forty when he died in a tragic drowning accident at Mombasa, Kenya, only months after the publication of this book. This was his first major publication, a reworking of his doctoral dissertation. Those who knew him best felt that a maturing of reflection, a sharpening of perception, a broadening of awareness, a mellowing of style, were all still very much in progress. This initial contribution should be judged, therefore, as precisely that, with all the freshness, the angularity, the limitations, which one should expect in a young man's first book […] *Pitfalls* is to taken not as a final word but as a first word, a promise of what might have come had Kato been spared" (Bowers 1980: 85).

expressing the Christian message in African settings. Depicting the concept of a cosmological equilibrium as the focal point of African religiosity, he foregrounded the biblical imaginary of spiritual battle as a contextualized interpretation of the gospel: through Christ's victory, the evil powers are overcome, and balance is restored.

Likewise, in his contributions to evangelical debates on mission, Adeyemo emphasized that the aim of the gospel was not theological reflection but rather the transformation of actual lives. The gospel first must be *lived* in specific contexts: "Yes, the Gospel is not only a creed to believe but a life to live!" (Adeyemo 1989: 6). "Not only" should be noted in this statement: Adeyemo held on to evangelical truths but foregrounded the importance of living out the gospel in concrete day-to-day situations. Disappointed with Lausanne II's preoccupation with evangelistic statistics and strategies ("saving souls") and identifying with the notion of integral mission as formulated by a number of "radical evangelicals," he called upon the African churches to holistically proclaim the gospel—that is, in words and deeds—to become agents of change in African societies. Although mass evangelism campaigns sometimes generated great success, Adeyemo argued that their long-term impact was minimal. Rather, he emphasized the missionary role of the church community as the embodiment of the gospel. Only in this way there is hope for Africa, when the church as a whole lives according to Christ's missionary program as formulated in Luke 4:18-19—one of Adeyemo's key reference texts that gained popularity in the 1980s as an alternative to the Great Commission found in Matthew 28 (Bosch 2011: 85).[2] Consequently, mission was by definition contextual. According to Adeyemo, African churches should focus on their own societal problems and challenges, not as a departure from the global evangelical movement but as a necessary contextualization of evangelical faith.

The contextual method that Adeyemo proposed was a lively interaction between the Bible and African realities both past and present. This does not mean that these other religious, cultural, and societal sources carried the same theological weight as the Bible—Scripture remained normative for Adeyemo as God's redemptive revelation. However, Adeyemo's conviction was that African people could only discover the true nature of Christianity as a transformational force in society through a deep interaction with Africa's past and present. Thus, in his contributions to the debates on salvation and mission, Adeyemo attributed a pivotal role to African contexts in the construction of a relevant evangelical theology for Africa. Therefore, for Adeyemo, it was not only entirely legitimate

[2] "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19, New International Version).

but also a necessity for African evangelical theology to follow its own theological agenda according to questions that arise in the interaction with African contexts.

With this approach of contextualization as genuine interaction between the Christian message and local worldviews and contexts, Adeyemo moved beyond Kato's missiological understanding of contextualization. For Adeyemo, contextualization was not merely a missionary strategy to convey a preconceived message but also a theological method that aimed to make the Christian message relevant (and thus transformative) in specific contexts by prioritizing African issues both past and present. However, Adeyemo did not elaborate on the criteria for this lively interaction between the Bible and African realities. He was primarily a church leader; in his view, the primary task of the theologian was not to systematically reflect on contextualization but to lead the church in such a way that the Christian faith would positively impact African nations and societies. In this respect, Adeyemo's theological priority was ethical rather than systematic-theological. In his approach, the contextualization of evangelical theology was primarily something to be *lived* in close relation to Africa's past and present and in view of shaping Africa's future.

Tite Tiénou

One of the main characteristics of Tiénou's thinking is that he questions forms of theology that claim general validity and make generic claims, such as "African" theology. In his discussion of the positions of Kato and Mbiti, he critiqued their tendency to generalize; the former seems to assume a homogeneous biblical message, while the latter seems to assume a homogeneous African culture. Both approaches, Tiénou argued, do not sufficiently account for the varieties and complexities of the Bible and African life. In response, he foregrounded difference, in the form of the local Christian community, which he considered to be the source and addressee of theology.[3] He argued that the primary focus of theology should be the local level, prioritizing the concrete questions and challenges of Christians in local communities. Thus, all theology is contextual; his conclusion was that theology should be done in what he called the prescriptive mode. If necessary at all, generalizations are always a derivative of local theology.

Tiénou used the same line of reasoning in his engagement with Mazrui's ideas. He critically interrogated Mazrui's assumption of an undisturbed religious harmony within Africa before the arrival of missionary Christianity. In the same way, he questioned Mazrui's reductionistic proposal for a synthesis of religions. According to Tiénou, Mazrui's synthetic proposals inevitably lead to syncretism, which has

[3] In light of this, Tiénou seems to prefer the word "dimensions" over "sources"—hence the term "three-dimensional method." The church community is a theological "source" in that it brings in local questions and issues that need to be addressed but not in terms of providing answers. In Tiénou's thinking, the latter remains reserved for the Bible as a source of divine revelation.

little to no connection to or relevance for the pluralistic African situation. Again, he emphasized the primacy of the local level. African Christians, according to Tiénou, have every right to differentiate themselves both from Western cultural domination and Africa's pre-Christian past as they seek to obey Christ amid the challenges of their daily lives in a plural religious landscape. For Tiénou, contextualization of the Christian faith entails, above all, the right to be different. He described this right to difference as a twofold necessity: the right to adhere to a specific religious tradition (as a response to Mazrui's synthesis of Africa's major religions) and, within that religion, the right and necessity to theologize locally and contextually (as a response to Western hegemony in theology).

With his critical assessment of generalizations in theology and his emphasis on the local community of believers as the source and addressee of theology, it seems understandable that Tiénou was not guided by a key reference text, as was the case with Kato and Adeyemo. After all, theology emerges in and is drawn from the local church and is therefore always in the plural: "theologies." The primary function of theology (and theologians) is to guide local Christians in the challenges of their day-to-day lives. Within this communal process, the theologian comes only secondarily and contributes critical and systematic reflection (to avoid sectarism).

Yet, it would be a misinterpretation of Tiénou to suggest that he denied the universality of the Christian faith. His point was primarily to critically assess the limitations of attempts to formulate a comprehensive framework for theology (whether "biblical," "African," or "ancestral"). According to Tiénou, only theologies that actually originate from and respond to the situation of local communities can make a difference in Africa. This does not exclude but rather includes the catholicity of Christianity. Tiénou held that there must be a creative tension between the universality and particularity of the Christian faith. He maintains that only through local expressions of the Christian faith can Christianity become truly universal. This premise legitimizes the theological priority of the local situation, as the universally confessed faith must become tangible in the lives of concrete Christians. Therefore, the theologian should also prioritize context-specific questions and struggles as they guide local communities to follow Christ in their everyday lives.

According to Tiénou, the Bible is normative in this process of theologizing at the grassroots level. He conceded that his three-dimensional contextual method is not without risks. Therefore, contextualization cannot be performed without trained theologians to ensure that local theologies are in accordance with the Bible's central message. Within the three-dimensional method, the Bible plays a distinct, guiding, and corrective role. The theologian finds authority in the Bible as the normative framework for theology; thus, not every locally formulated theology is automatically acceptable. In this regard, Tiénou used the metaphor of disease-cure as a way to describe the theologian's task: like a doctor, the theologian should

study both the local situation and the wider context to biblically prescribe a cure for a local problem.

In his assessment of Mazrui's synthetic method, Tiénou emphasized the distinctiveness of the Christian faith, which he epitomized (in contrast to Kato's clearly Christo-centric and salvation-centric approach) as a theocentric worldview characterized by love for God and for one's neighbor, translated into social action. For Tiénou, these three elements are non-negotiable. However, this distinctive theocentric feature of Christianity (compared to anthropocentric worldviews in ATR) must be translated again and again to the level of concrete local Christians in close relation to their daily questions and challenges.

In conclusion, Tiénou emphasized that much more is needed than simply repackaging a timeless message. Like Adeyemo, he argued that contextualization can only be realized through a deep and ongoing interaction between the Bible and African realities. For both Adeyemo and Tiénou, both dimensions are important but do not hold the same authority; in case of a conflict, the Bible prevails. However, Tiénou foregrounded a third dimension that already appeared in Adeyemo's thinking, albeit less emphatically: the local Christian community. He argued that African theologians should abandon their attempts to formulate a continent-wide framework for theology; instead, they should engage with the specificities of a local church in a local context. He proposed a three-dimensional method in which three dimensions are brought into dialogue: the local community, the wider socio-cultural context, and the Bible (in this order). For Tiénou, these dimensions are constitutive for contextualization. Theology can only be done in the prescriptive mode—that is, with a focus on the context-specific questions of a local community. This means that theological priorities, choices, and accents can vary from place to place. Furthermore, whereas Adeyemo focused on Africa's leadership (theologians and politicians), Tiénou prioritized the grassroots level of local Christians. This is fundamental to his thinking. Contextualization is less an academic discipline and more a process undertaken by the local church as a hermeneutic community and guided by a theologian.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, nine conclusions can be drawn. First, within the prevalent paradigm of contextualization as translation, all three AEA theologians (Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou) affirmed the need for contextualization. Therefore, the critique by theologians such as Bediako, Ezigbo, Mbiti, Ngong, and Mercy Oduyoye that AEA theologians ignored or neglected the challenges of contextualization is not born out by the research findings. All three AEA theologians argued on multiple occasions and in different ways that theology must come to terms with the challenges and struggles of the peoples of the African continent. In fact, the

research showed that their works are deeply contextual and can only be properly understood when read against the background of the discussions, questions, and problems of their own time. In Kato's work, this is evident in his critique of contemporary theologies and political trends and his emphasis on Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation and transformation. In Adeyemo's work, this is apparent from his engagement with debates on salvation and his insistence that church leaders have a responsibility for the future of Africa. Finally, in Tiénou's work, this manifests in how he addresses questions of inculturation and postcolonialism.

Second, although Kato's theological emphases were strongly guided by the debates in which he was involved, his conception of contextualization should be regarded as missiological rather than theological. As demonstrated, the concept of contextualization as translation comprises a wide variety of approaches. Within this spectrum, Kato called upon African evangelicals not to avoid contemporary theological debates but to engage with the challenges of contextualization. However, he felt particularly compelled to warn against developments to use other sources for theologizing in addition to the Bible. Fearing that the biblical foundation and framework of theology would be jeopardized, he drew a sharp line between the content and context of the gospel and did not allow the latter to deeply affect the former. Because of his reactionary stance, there seems to be minimal room for a nuanced discussion of hermeneutical and methodical questions related to contextualization. For Kato, theology and missiology seemed to be two separate disciplines; theological content is exclusively determined by the Bible and Christian tradition, the contexts come into play in the reflection how this theological content needs to be proclaimed. Therefore, I conclude that Kato practiced contextualization as a missionary strategy rather than a theological method. How his position would have developed if he had not prematurely died remains an open question.

Third, each in their own way, Adeyemo and Tiénou carefully moved beyond Kato's position by promoting contextualization as a *theological method*. For them, the theologian's task entails much more than carefully preserving inherited theological truths; theology emerges in the interaction between the Bible and African worlds. Only when the Bible and African contexts are brought into dialogue can the gospel message become relevant. Otherwise, the Christian faith will remain alien to African people. With their understanding of contextualization as a theological necessity, they both advocated for a dialogue between the Bible and contemporary contexts, with both having attention for elements of discontinuity and continuity between the biblical message and African worlds. The Bible remains God's ultimate and normative revelation, but Adeyemo and Tiénou additionally pointed to other sources as relevant for theologizing. Therefore, African realities are not only valuable for conveying a message (Kato) but also have intrinsic theological meaning, although not with the same weight as the Bible. In this regard, both theologians creatively

incorporated the challenges of the inculturation enterprise: Adeyemo by adopting the idea of ATR as a context and framework for theology and insisting on the pivotal of traditional leaders and Tiénou by applying postcolonial analysis and critique as a response to Western hegemony and foregrounding the centrality of the local Christian community. According to them, contextualization should be practiced as a theological method for making the Christian faith relevant in African contexts. In this way, they showed that the process of contextualization involves more than attention to culture; it also includes the entirety of life in all of its diversity.

Fourth, whereas Kato and Adeyemo sought to develop a theology for all of Africa, perhaps because of their position as AEA general secretary, Tiénou emphatically underscored the local community as a constitutive for contextualization. Whereas Kato insisted that theology should be universal (e.g., biblical) and Adeyemo stressed that it should be transformational (e.g., African), Tiénou asserted that all theology is *local*; he chose to theologize at the grassroots level. I regard this choice as a gradual (rather than fundamental) difference between Adeyemo and Tiénou since both practiced contextualization as a theological method by promoting a lively dialogue between the Bible and African contexts, questions, and challenges, albeit with different emphases and foci. In this regard, Tiénou's ideas about contextualization reflect a development toward growing diversification and particularization within African theology (e.g., Black theology, women's theology, theology of reconstruction, contextual hermeneutics, and so on) with special attention for ordinary Christians.[4]

Fifth, in close relation to the foregoing, there seems to be a correlation between one's approach to contextualization and one's understanding of the kernel of Christianity. In other words, it makes a difference for one's interpretation of the central Christian message whether contextualization is considered from a missiological or theological perspective. Kato presupposed a supra-contextual core of the Christian message, which he clearly delineated. In Adeyemo's thinking, this (evangelical) core is undoubtedly present but much less explicit. Indeed, he suggested a contextual interpretation of the gospel in view of African perceptions of life ("Christ as the only one who is able to restore the distorted cosmological balance"). Furthermore, Tiénou, by adding the third element of the local community as source and addressee of all theology, did not clearly delineate what he believed belongs to the core of Christianity; instead, he found the kernel of the gospel in a theocentric worldview and lifestyle.

Sixth, the theological contributions of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou with regard to contextualization also seemed to reflect developments in the international evangelical movement. In line with the outcomes of Lausanne I, Kato approached

[4] On recent developments in African theology, see Mugambi 2024.

contextualization primarily from a missiological perspective: contextualization was a missionary strategy for translating a timeless message to other contexts. Adeyemo, in line with post-Lausanne I developments, primarily regarded contextualization as a theological method: an in-depth interaction with Africa's pre-Christian heritage and contemporary problems was necessary for Christianity to have a real impact in modern Africa. Tiénou, with his hermeneutical approach to contextualization, resonated with diversifying tendencies in the international evangelical world, which, by the turn of the century, increasingly developed into a multi-faceted polycentric movement (see Dahle, Dahle, Jørgensen 2014).

Seventh, the academic criticism that African evangelical theologians, especially those within the orbit of the AEA, propagated a Western, neo-colonial form of Christianity and ignored the challenges of contextualization seems to be unfounded. African evangelical theology, like any theological current, has been heavily influenced by theological developments elsewhere, particularly North American evangelical thought in the case of African evangelical theology due to its historical moorings. However, African evangelical theology quickly developed into a movement that increasingly sought its own ways and defined its own priorities within Africa. Therefore, it seems unjustified to state that African evangelical theologians affiliated with the AEA movement endorsed a form of neo-colonialism or that they ignored the theological and hermeneutical challenges of their time. Furthermore, this study of the works of Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou shows that African evangelical theology should not be considered a monolithic entity; rather, it comprises a great diversity that cannot be reduced to one viewpoint. African evangelicalism must be studied on its own terms and in all its diversity, not merely as an adept of (North American) evangelicalism but as a "new world" that undoubtedly bears traces of the "old world" but addresses local African contexts and encompasses an endless variety of beliefs and practices—of which Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou are examples.

Eighth, although Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou approached contextualization in different ways, they all emphasized *transformation* as its intended outcome. As shown, Kato's problem with inculturation- and liberation-oriented theologies was not only that they build on a questionable foundation but also that they are ultimately unable to effect real change in society. His works demonstrate a strong commitment to the African continent; it was his conviction that only Jesus Christ could bring about salvation and transformation in Africa. This transformational line in Kato's thinking was echoed by Adeyemo and Tiénou's emphasis on the prophetic role of the church and its leaders (Adeyemo) and the distinctive witness of the local community (Tiénou). Within the dominant paradigm of contextualization as translation, both Adeyemo and Tiénou, following Kato, insisted on transformation (personal, communal, and societal) as the ultimate goal of contextualizing. Contextualization is much broader than cultural sensitivity; its goal is to radically

change Africa. With their insistence on transformation, each of these three AEA theologians made distinct contributions to debates about contextualization in their own manner.[5]

Ninth, the conclusions formulated in the preceding critically interrogate the culture-dominated paradigm of contextualization that is commonly used to criticize African evangelical theology. Critics of the AEA's theological position seem to mainly assess its theology through the lens of the inculturation paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s, which considers the "Africanness" of theology through a narrow lens in terms of whether or not it accounts for traditional cultures. However, since the emergence of African theology in the 1950s, the field of African theology—and African contextual theology more generally—has developed into a spectrum of varying approaches and methods that not only prioritize the study of culture but also engage politics, economics, racism, gender issues, and so on. As demonstrated at length by Stephen Bevans, one form of contextualization is not necessarily better than another; contextualization can (and should) be done in many different ways. After all, who determines what is truly African and what is not? In Bevans' words: "It depends on the context" (Bevans 2002: 140; see also Bosch 2011: 523–32). Thus, Kato's position (and that of others who theologize along the same lines) demonstrates the plurality of approaches to contextualization within Africa. Considering the rich tapestry of African Christianity, it is hardly surprising that there are different approaches to and different foci in contextualization.

To summarize, the research findings, as outlined and evaluated in the foregoing, contest the claim that African evangelical theology is merely a copy of Western theology and fails to address the issue of contextualization. Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou intensively engaged with and practiced contextualization, albeit in different ways. Kato saw the theological need for contextualization but feared that, with the preoccupations of inculturation and liberation, the normative biblical foundation of theology would be lost. Therefore, he practiced contextualization as a missionary strategy. While building on Kato's legacy, Adeyemo and Tiénou also moved away from his position by embracing the concept of contextualization as a theological method. In their view, it is only through a deep and ongoing interaction between the Bible and Africa's past and present (Adeyemo) and local communities (Tiénou) that the gospel can be contextualized. Together, these three theologians presented divergent ways to contextualize evangelical theology in view of the transformation of Africa.

[5] The idea of transformation as the ultimate goal of the church as God's agent of change remains very common in AEA circles, as evidenced by the following slogan on the organization's website: "To mobilize and empower the church for the holistic transformation of communities and societies in Africa." See https://aeafrica.org/ [accessed 9 May 2024].

Contributions and Recommendations of the Study

The present study demonstrates the breadth and depth of African evangelical theology, an African theological movement that seems to be largely overlooked in studies on African Christian theology. As explained in the introductory chapter, significant research has already been conducted on ATR, AICs, and African Pentecostalism. This dissertation fills a gap by presenting the works of three leading theologians of a movement that has so far received relatively little attention in academic circles.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates the theological diversity among African evangelical theologians. It shows that African evangelical theology cannot be described as a monolithic entity; rather, African evangelical theology has had different voices and different emphases from its early days onward. Therefore, generic categories that are commonly used to describe African (evangelical) Christianity, such as "evangelical," "ecumenical," "conservative" or "liberal," are problematic. These generic concepts do not account for the plethora of complexities and different expressions within African Christianity or African evangelical theology. Already in 1985, Tiénou argued that "[c]ategories such as evangelical, ecumenical, or even African independent will become less and less helpful in understanding African Christianity […] Evangelicalism in Africa, generally identified with the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, also includes churches with diverse dynamics" (Tiénou 1985: 152). Moreover, Augustine Musopole rejected the use of "inherited" theological demarcations. He argued that African evangelical theology must not be "either liberal or conservative, but theologically responsive to the reality of Jesus in the lives of believers" (Musopole 1995: 21). This study undergirds their claim.

As stated in the introductory chapter, the aim of this dissertation was not to offer a comprehensive study of African evangelical thought. Indeed, considerably more investigation is needed in several areas. For instance, there appears to be a resurgence of Katonian thought within the AEA. Recently, the AEA's former general secretary, Aiah Dorkuh Foday-Khabenje, among others, called for a reassessment of Kato's theological position (Foday-Khabenje 2021, 2024, see also Bowers 2009).[6] According to Foday-Khabenje, the same questions that Kato addressed in the 1970s have re-emerged in 21st century Africa. He urged African evangelical scholars and leaders to re-evaluate Kato's concerns in light of present-day evangelicalism. Foday-Khabenje's re-evaluation of Kato's work would be worth studying, as would be a more general investigation of how African evangelical theology has developed after the first generation of AEA theologians and in light of contemporary African and global challenges. In this respect, mention should be made of the recent focus on apologetics in African evangelical contexts (Kunhiyop 2012, Muriithi 2024).

[6] Unfortunately, his study of Katonian theology (Foday-Khabenje 2023) was published after my article on Kato.

Another topic that merits further research would be the contributions of female theologians, gender issues, and women's theologies within the African evangelical movement. The AEA's leadership has been (and continues to be) primarily comprised of men, although there have been publications by female theologians who self-identify as evangelical in recent years. Moreover, as is well known, women constitute a majority in many Christian communities in Africa. How do they self-identify as Christian, evangelical, African, and woman? What is their impact on current questions and issues facing the African evangelical world? It might be interesting to conduct empirical research on the self-understanding of African evangelical women. Furthermore, the influence of African evangelical thinkers within the international Lausanne movement deserves attention. Since its inception in 1974, African theologians and church leaders have been very active within Lausanne. What contributions have they made? How has their involvement shaped the direction of the Lausanne movement? There is considerable potential for further research on African evangelical theology.

General Conclusion

The last paragraph of this thesis briefly recapitulates the main outcomes of this research. This study focused on the following central research question: *Do African evangelical theologians associated with the AEA, particularly Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo, and Tite Tiénou, practice contextualization as a theological method and, if so, in what ways?* This thesis demonstrates that, rather than being a copy of Western (North American) Christianity, the first-generation African evangelical theologians, Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo, and Tite Tiénou, practiced contextualization from the beginning of the AEA movement. Based on the research material presented in this dissertation, it cannot be maintained that African evangelical theologians uncritically embraced a Western form theology and failed to address African context-specific issues. In different ways, Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou sought pathways for a contextual Christianity that is genuinely biblical and African at the same time. Although they had a shared concern for a biblical basis of theology, their approaches to contextualization differ. While Kato drew a sharp line between the content and context of the central Christian message from fear that the biblical foundation of theology would be lost, Adeyemo and Tiénou practiced contextualization as a theological method. Their ideas on contextualization resonate with ongoing trends and currents within African theological circles and the international evangelical movement. Through their profound engagement with the topic of contextualization (albeit in different ways), Kato, Adeyemo, and Tiénou challenged interpretations of the inculturation paradigm that remains dominant in (some) African theological circles. Thus, their search for a theology that is biblical, African, contextual, and transformational deserves academic attention and appreciation.

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Samenvatting in het Nederlands

Vergeleken met andere christelijke stromingen op het Afrikaanse continent, heeft de evangelische beweging in Afrika tot dusverre relatief weinig aandacht gekregen in wetenschappelijke studies. In de afgelopen decennia is veel onderzoek gedaan naar Afrikaanse onafhankelijke kerken en, recenter, de Afrikaanse pinksterbeweging, maar er zijn weinig studies die zich richten op de Afrikaanse evangelische beweging.[1] Deze dissertatie beoogt in een leemte te voorzien door het werk van drie Afrikaanse evangelische theologen te bespreken: Byang Henry Kato (1936–1975), Tokunboh Adeyemo (1944–2010) en Tite Tiénou (1949–).

De evangelische beweging in Afrika wordt doorgaans geassocieerd met de Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), een koepelorganisatie van 40 nationale evangelische allianties, die onderdeel is van de World Evangelical Alliance. De AEA werd in 1966 opgericht door Noord-Amerikaanse zendingsorganisaties, uit bezorgdheid over 'liberale' tendensen binnen het Afrikaanse christendom. Parallel aan het proces van dekolonisatie (globaal genomen in de jaren zestig en zeventig van de vorige eeuw) lanceerden Afrikaanse katholieke en protestantse theologen, zoals John Agbeti, Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti en Vincent Mulago, een zoektocht naar zowel kerkelijke als theologische onafhankelijkheid. Ze zochten naar manieren om het evangelie binnen een eigen, Afrikaans (niet-Westers) kader te kunnen verwoorden; als onderdeel van deze 'inculturatie' pleitten zij voor een herwaardering van Afrikaanse traditionele religies (ATR). De AEA werd opgericht vanwege bezorgdheid over de implicaties van deze zoektocht van inculturatietheologen naar wat al snel 'Afrikaanse theologie' heette voor de uniciteit van het christendom. De doelstelling van de AEA was evangelische kerken op het continent te verenigen en het evangelische geluid te versterken. In dit opzicht zag de AEA zich als de tegenhanger van de in 1963 opgerichte All Africa Conference of Churches, die naar de mening van de evangelische beweging een te liberale te koers voer.

Sinds de oprichting in de jaren zestig van de vorige eeuw is de AEA regelmatig verweten dat evangelische theologen de uitdagingen van contextualisatie – de noodzaak om het christelijk geloof uit te drukken in en met oog op een specifieke context – veronachtzaamden. Onderzoekers en beoefenaars van Afrikaanse theologie, zoals Victor Ezigbo, Kwame Bediako, Mercy Oduyoye, David Ngong en John Parratt, suggereren dat AEA-theologen vanwege hun nadruk op de Bijbel als gezaghebbend Woord van God en de uniciteit van Jezus Christus, een Westerse (lees: neokoloniale) theologie uitdragen en de vragen die opkomen

[1] Ik gebruik de woorden 'evangelisch' en 'evangelische beweging' als vertaling van de Engelse termen 'evangelical' en 'evangelicalism'.

vanuit de Afrikaanse context negeren. Door categorisch vast te houden aan de Bijbel als enige en absolute bron van openbaring, zo luidt de kritiek, hebben Afrikaanse evangelische theologen die verbonden zijn aan de AEA te weinig oog voor Afrikaanse realiteiten, zowel in het verleden (ATR) als in het heden (sociaal-politieke kwesties). Deze critici kwalificeren de theologische positie van de AEA als een vorm van Noord-Amerikaans biblicisme dat weinig tot geen relevantie heeft voor postkoloniaal Afrika.

Deze dissertatie onderzoekt de validiteit van deze kritiek door het werk te bestuderen van drie theologen die een belangrijke rol hebben gespeeld in de eerste decennia van de AEA en breed gezien worden als vertegenwoordigers van Afrikaanse evangelische theologie: Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo en Tite Tiénou. De Nigeriaanse theoloog Byang Kato was van 1973 tot zijn vroegtijdige dood in 1975 de eerste Afrikaanse secretaris-generaal van de AEA, en wordt beschouwd als de grondlegger van het Afrikaanse evangelische denken. Kato werd opgevolgd door de Nigeriaan Tokunboh Adeyemo, die tussen 1978 en 2002 leiding gaf aan de AEA. Onder Adeyemo's leiderschap ontstonden veel AEA-organisaties en breidde het netwerk zich aanzienlijk uit. Tite Tiénou, afkomstig uit Burkina Faso, speelde ook een prominente rol binnen de AEA. Hij volgde Kato op als uitvoerend secretaris van de theologische commissie (1977–1980) en was in de jaren tachtig voorzitter van de door de AEA opgerichte Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa.

De term 'contextualisatie' is een belangrijk analytisch concept in deze studie. De literatuur schrijft de formulering en stipulering van contextualisatie toe aan Shoki Coe, directeur van het Theological Education Fund van de Wereldraad van Kerken. Dit concept, dat begin jaren zeventig werd bedacht, geeft uitdrukking aan een groeiend inzicht dat vanaf halverwege de 20e eeuw ontstond in bepaalde kringen, namelijk dat alle theologie contextueel van aard is, de Westerse theologie niet uitgezonderd. De koloniale periode was ook een periode van grote zendingsactiviteit en Westerse zendelingen verspreidden hun eigen interpretatie van het christelijke geloof wereldwijd. Om het christelijke geloof relevant en begrijpelijk te maken en de katholiciteit van het christelijk geloof te waarborgen, was een vertaalslag naar andere contexten en culturen onontbeerlijk. Contextualisatie onderstreept de waarde en de noodzaak van lokale expressies van het christelijk geloof binnen het wereldchristendom. Theologie ontstaat immers binnen een specifieke historische context en adresseert de vragen van die context. Hiermee werd de lokale context een belangrijke bron voor theologiseren. Deze nieuwe aandacht voor het contextuele karakter van theologie betekende een epistemologische breuk met traditionele theologische benaderingen die de Bijbel en/of traditie als enige uitgangspunt nemen: contextuele theologie ontstaat 'van onderop' en prioriteert de vragen, uitdagingen en worstelingen van lokale christelijke gemeenschappen wereldwijd.

Aanvankelijk stond de internationale evangelische beweging wantrouwend tegenover het concept van contextualisatie, en de inculturatiebenadering in het bijzonder. Betekende de aandacht voor de lokale context niet automatisch een ondermijning van het gezag van de Schrift, waardoor de deur wagenwijd werd opengezet voor syncretisme? Toch werd op het beroemde Internationale Congres over Wereldevangelisatie in Lausanne, Zwitserland, in 1974 (Lausanne I), waar evangelische kerkleiders vanuit de hele wereld onder leiding van Billy Graham samenkwamen, contextualisatie omarmd als een missionaire strategie om het evangelie te vertalen naar andere, niet-Westerse, contexten. Vanaf Lausanne I werd contextualisatie als vertaling (*translation*) het dominante contextualisatie-paradigma binnen de evangelische wereld: uitgangspunt daarbij was dat er een context-overstijgende kern van het evangelie (*kernel* of pit) bestaat, die voor alle christenen wereldwijd hetzelfde is, en een de culturele verpakking (*husk* of schil), die van plaats tot plaats kan variëren. Grondige kennis van andere talen, culturen en contexten was derhalve nodig, en zelfs onontbeerlijk, om het evangelie adequaat te kunnen vertalen. Deze erkenning van het belang van de lokale context als essentieel voor evangelieverkondiging zorgde voor veel controverse binnen de evangelische beweging. Wat is precies de verhouding tussen evangelie en cultuur? In hoeverre mag de context de inhoud van de evangelieboodschap beïnvloeden? Hoe kan syncretisme voorkomen worden? En bovenal: wat moest beschouwd worden als de niet-onderhandelbare kern van het evangelie? Binnen het breed gedragen paradigma van contextualisatie als vertaling ontstond een spectrum van benaderingen en methodes. Waar sommigen vasthielden aan een universeel en tijdloos evangelie dat weliswaar cross-cultureel vertaald moet worden, maar in de kern onveranderlijk is (contextualisatie als missionaire strategie), zagen voornamelijk niet-Westerse evangelische theologen ruimte voor een dynamische interactie tussen de Bijbel en lokale contexten, waardoor het evangelie zelf opnieuw verstaan werd (contextualisatie als theologische methode).

In deze dissertatie wordt het werk van Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou besproken in relatie tot dit internationale en Afrikaanse contextualisatie-debat. Hoe gingen Kato en zijn opvolgers bij de AEA in op dit thema? Op welke gronden kan gesteld worden dat de eerste generatie AEA-theologen de uitdaging van contextualisatie heeft genegeerd? Waar bevinden deze theologen zich binnen het spectrum van contextualisatie als vertaling? De centrale onderzoeksvraag van deze dissertatie is als volgt: *Beoefenen Afrikaanse evangelische theologen die verbonden zijn aan de AEA, in het bijzonder Byang Kato, Tokunboh Adeyemo en Tite Tiénou, contextualisatie als theologische methode en, zo ja, op welke manieren?*

Deze studie is niet bedoeld om een uitgebreid overzicht te geven van contextualisatie in het Afrikaanse evangelische denken, maar richt zich specifiek op de theologische benadering van Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou als drie eerste generatie

AEA-theologen die een vooraanstaande rol hebben gespeeld binnen de AEA; betrokkenheid bij de AEA is derhalve een afbakeningscriterium voor dit onderzoek. De belangrijkste methode die in deze studie wordt toegepast is literatuurstudie. Dit proefschrift bestudeert de geschreven theologische output (d.w.z. monografieën, artikelen en meditaties) van Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou in relatie tot contextualisatie. Middels *close reading* worden hun bijdragen aan het debat over contextualisatie uiteengezet en geanalyseerd. Hierbij maak ik gebruik van het 'oecumenische perspectief' zoals beschreven door de Nigeriaanse onderzoeker Ogbu U. Kalu. Zijn dialogische benadering stelt me in staat om actief te participeren in debatten over Afrikaanse theologie, indachtig mijn positie als buitenstaander die bewust of onbewust wordt gezien als vertegenwoordiger van het dominante Westen.

De dissertatie bestaat uit een bundeling van vijf artikelen die gepubliceerd zijn (of nog zullen worden) in peer-reviewed tijdschriften over interculturele theologie, wereldchristendom en missiologie, plus een inleiding en een conclusie. In de inleiding wordt de vraagstelling afgebakend en gesitueerd in de literatuur, wordt het theoretische framework en de methode van dit onderzoek uiteengezet en wordt kort de historische context geschetst. Elk van de artikelen, hieronder in meer detail besproken, onderzoekt hoe het onderwerp contextualisatie wordt geadresseerd in het oeuvre van één van de drie theologen. In de conclusie worden de bevindingen uit de vijf artikelen met elkaar in gesprek gebracht en wordt de onderzoeksvraag beantwoord.

Het eerste artikel, dat werd gepubliceerd in *Exchange* Volume 50, Issue 1 (2021), onderzoekt Kato's bijdrage aan het debat over redding (*salvation*) in de vroege jaren zeventig. Vanwege zijn radicale standpunt en soms compromisloze toon zijn Kato's soteriologische standpunten dikwijls gekarakteriseerd als een reproductie van Westerse theologie. Dit artikel laat zien dat Kato's benadering van de heilsleer niet zozeer een specifiek Noord-Amerikaans of Westers theologisch concept herhaalt, maar eerder gelezen moet worden als een *contextuele evangelische reactie* op de theologische debatten van zijn tijd. In zijn boek *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975) bekritiseerde Kato de posities van bekende inculturatie-theologen als Mbiti en Idowu en de aandacht voor politieke bevrijding binnen de Afrikaanse oecumenische beweging. Kato vreesde dat de theologische prioriteiten van inculturatie en bevrijding, twee populaire thema's binnen de theologie in Afrika in de jaren zeventig, het gezag van de Schrift zouden ondermijnen. Ook enkele maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen in zijn tijd voedden zijn bezorgdheid (o.a. de vervolging van christenen door regeringen die vanuit antikoloniale gevoelens een rehabilitatie van de voorchristelijke traditie propageerden); deze ontwikkelingen wezen volgens hem op een verregaande politisering van het evangelie, waardoor de unieke christelijke heilsboodschap – 'Jezus Christus, en die gekruisigd' – op losse schroeven kwam te staan. Het artikel concludeert dat Kato niet tegen

contextualisatie als zodanig was, maar dat hij zich geroepen voelde om de mogelijke risico's van het contextualisatie-proces onder de aandacht te brengen en te waarschuwen voor theologische naïviteit. Het was in die context dat hij pleitte voor een stevige fundering van de theologie in de Bijbelse boodschap.

Het tweede artikel, dat werd gepubliceerd in *Exchange* Volume 50, Issue 2 (2021), analyseert Adeyemo's houding ten opzichte van ATR. In de jaren zeventig en tachtig was ook Adeyemo betrokken bij het debat over *salvation* in evangelische kringen. Dit artikel betoogt dat Adeyemo weliswaar het gezag van de Schrift en de uniciteit van het heil in Christus bevestigde, zoals ook onderstreept door Kato en erkend binnen de internationale evangelische beweging, maar dat zijn houding ten opzichte van voorchristelijke religiositeit genuanceerder was dan die van Kato. In tegenstelling tot Kato beschouwde hij ATR niet uitsluitend als een vorm van afgoderij, maar in bepaalde omstandigheden ook als een *praeparatio evangelica*, een voorbereiding op de verkondiging van het evangelie. Zo introduceerde hij het Afrikaanse concept 'kosmologisch evenwicht' (*cosmological balance*), dat hij beschouwde als een geschikt framework voor een authentieke expressie van evangelische overtuigingen in de Afrikaanse belevingswereld: door Christus wordt het kosmologische evenwicht hersteld. Op andere plaatsen in zijn oeuvre gebruikte hij mythen, voorbeelden en concepten uit ATR om het evangelie in een Afrikaanse context te articuleren. Met zijn meer genuanceerde benadering van ATR, zo concludeert het artikel, laveerde Adeyemo tussen afwijzing en revitalisering van ATR en kende hij aan ATR (en andere Afrikaanse werkelijkheden) een prominente rol toe in het ontwikkelen van een evangelische theologie voor het Afrikaanse continent.

Het derde artikel, dat werd gepubliceerd in *Mission Studies* Volume 40, Issue 1 (2023), analyseert Adeyemo's bijdrage aan de debatten in evangelische kringen over zending na Lausanne I. Een belangrijke vraag die na Lausanne I opkwam was, wat het primaat van zending is: evangelieverkondiging of sociale actie? Het artikel laat zien dat, hoewel Adeyemo beïnvloed was door het Noord-Amerikaanse dualisme, hij zich steeds meer begon te identificeren met de prioriteiten van een groep niet-Westerse theologen, die 'radicale evangelischen' (*radical evangelicals*) genoemd werden. Vanuit zijn betrokkenheid bij deze groep pleitte hij voor een brede, holistische, contextuele en op transformatie gerichte interpretatie van het zendingsmandaat: het evangelie moet weliswaar verkondigd worden, maar eerst en vooral *geleefd* worden. Dit missiologische standpunt leidde er ook toe dat hij in zijn denken prioriteit gaf aan Afrikaanse kwesties. Teleurgesteld over het tweede Internationale Congres over Wereldevangelisatie in 1989, dat volgens hem gedomineerd werd door evangelisatiestrategieën om de 'onbereikten' van de wereld te winnen, en in toenemende mate bezorgd over de toestand van het Afrikaanse continent (Apartheid, HIV/Aidsepidemie, Rwandese genocide), raakte Adeyemo ervan overtuigd dat alleen Afrikanen de Afrikaanse kwesties adequaat konden

adresseren. Hij pleitte voor het recht en de verantwoordelijkheid van Afrikaanse christelijke leiders om hun eigen contextuele theologische agenda te formuleren en na te streven. Zo riep hij Afrikaanse kerkleiders op om een profetische rol te vervullen in de strijd tegen alle vormen van zonde en onrecht (zowel persoonlijk als structureel) om zo de transformatie van Afrika te realiseren. Het artikel concludeert dat, hoewel Adeyemo niet direct reageerde op critici van Afrikaanse evangelische theologie, zijn bijdragen aan het evangelische debat over zending de kritiek ontkrachten dat Afrikaanse evangelisten slechts een Westerse vorm van christendom promoten die zich niet bezighoudt met Afrikaanse aangelegenheden.

Het vierde artikel, dat in het najaar van 2024 gepubliceerd zal worden in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, onderzoekt Tite Tiénou's hermeneutische bijdragen aan de Afrikaanse evangelische theologie. In zijn werk bekritiseerde Tiénou zowel Kato als John Mbiti (die wel als de vader van Afrikaanse theologie wordt beschouwd) en stelde hij dat beide theologen in dezelfde valkuil vallen, namelijk dat zij een overkoepelend conceptueel kader voor theologie in Afrika willen formuleren, of het nu gaat om de Bijbel (opgevat als één samenhangende boodschap) of Afrikaanse culturen (opgevat als één samenhangend systeem). In Tiénou's analyse schoten beide theologische benaderingen tekort; beide theologen negeerden volgens hem de eindeloze variëteit en complexiteit van het Afrikaanse leven in hun zoektocht naar een continent-brede theologie. Tiénou beargumenteerde op zijn beurt dat alle theologie plaatselijk is en stelde een driedimensionale methode voor om contextuele theologie te bedrijven. Daarbij staan de lokale gemeente (als het primaire aandachtspunt van theologie), de bredere sociaal-culturele context en de Bijbel met elkaar in gesprek. Zo kende hij de lokale gemeenschap van christenen een beslissende rol toe in het contextualiseren van evangelische theologie. Hij spreekt daarom van een 'derde weg': in plaats van een overkoepelende theologie voor heel Afrika, zou Afrikaanse evangelische theologie moeten worden bedreven in wat Tiénou 'de prescriptieve modus' noemde: lokale christenen moeten worden toegerust om het christelijk geloof te interpreteren en uit te leven in overeenstemming met hun eigen situatie. Het artikel concludeert dat Tiénou, met zijn focus op de lokale kerk als bron en focus van theologie, Afrikaanse evangelische theologen actief aanspoorde om het initiatief te nemen in het theologische debat over contextualisatie in Afrikaanse contexten.

Het vijfde artikel, dat begin 2025 zal verschijnen in *Studies in World Christianity*, bestudeert Tiénou's overwegingen bij Ali Mazrui's pleidooi voor een synthese van religies. Mazrui, één van de belangrijkste twintigste-eeuwse Afrikaanse denkers, betoogde dat het christendom zoals dat door Westerse missionarissen en zendelingen in Afrika werd geïntroduceerd ten diepste vreemd is aan de Afrikaanse cultuur. Het artikel analyseert Tiénou's bespreking van Mazrui's these dat kolonialisme en christelijke missies samen, culturele vervreemding onder Afrikanen

hebben veroorzaakt. Tiénou bekritiseerde de ideeën van Mazrui, waaronder diens stelling dat de toekomst van Afrika ligt in het revitaliseren van het voor-koloniale verleden en zijn voorstel om te komen tot een synthese van de belangrijkste religies van Afrika. Tegelijkertijd omarmde hij Mazrui's postkoloniale perspectief als kader voor kritische reflectie. Evenals Mazrui verweet Tiénou de Westerse koloniale machten en christelijke zendingsorganisaties dat zij hun eigen waardesystemen aan de Afrikanen hebben opgelegd, waardoor het hart van de Afrikaanse samenlevingen vernietigd werd. Gebruikmakend van Mazrui's uitdrukking 'de dialoog van de doven' (*the dialogue of the deaf*), stelde Tiénou vragen bij de aanhoudende Westerse dominantie in de theologie. In reactie op Mazrui's postkoloniale kritiek en de aanspraak van de Westerse theologie op universaliteit, stelde Tiénou de term 'verschil' (*difference*) voor als een centrale en beslissende categorie voor theologiseren, waar ook ter wereld. Alleen door een proces van differentiatie kan de katholiciteit van het christendom behouden blijven; anders blijft het christelijk geloof provinciaal. Daarom deed Tiénou een beroep op Afrikaanse christenen om hun recht op 'anders zijn' uit te oefenen wanneer ze Christus proberen te volgen binnen hun eigen context. Het artikel concludeert dat Tiénou's genuanceerde postkoloniale positie waardevolle inzichten biedt voor christenen die op zoek zijn naar manieren om het geloof binnen hun eigen context op een onderscheidende manier tot uitdrukking te brengen.

De dissertatie sluit af met een uiteenzetting en bespreking van de onderzoeksresultaten. Aan de hand van het evangelische paradigma van contextualisatie als vertaling worden de posities van Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou ten opzichte van contextualisatie geanalyseerd. Wat is voor hen de kern van het evangelie? In hoeverre mag de context de inhoud van het evangelie beïnvloeden? De volgende negen conclusies kunnen getrokken worden.

Ten eerste, binnen de benadering van contextualisatie als vertaling, bevestigden Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou de noodzaak van contextualisatie. De academische kritiek dat AEA-theologen de uitdagingen van contextualisatie verwaarloosden of zelfs negeerden, wordt niet door de onderzoeksresultaten gestaafd. Zowel Kato, Adeyemo als Tiénou betoogden bij meerdere gelegenheden en op verschillende manieren dat theologie zich zal moeten verhouden tot de vragen van de Afrikaanse context. Hun theologische bijdragen zijn zeer contextueel van aard en kunnen alleen goed begrepen kunnen worden tegen de achtergrond van de discussies, vragen en problemen van hun eigen tijd.

Ten tweede, hoewel Kato's theologische speerpunten werden bepaald door de theologische debatten waarin hij betrokken was, moet zijn opvatting over contextualisatie eerder als missiologisch dan als theologisch worden getypeerd. Uit vrees dat het Bijbelse fundament van theologie bedreigd zou worden, trok hij een scherpe lijn tussen de inhoud en de context van het evangelie. Kato stond niet toe

dat de lokale context de inhoud van het evangelie diepgaand zou beïnvloeden. Voor Kato lijken theologie en missiologie gescheiden disciplines te zijn; de theologische inhoud wordt uitsluitend bepaald door de Bijbel en de christelijke traditie, de contexten spelen slechts een rol in de reflectie over hoe deze inhoud verkondigd moet worden. Daarom kan geconcludeerd worden dat Kato contextualisatie praktiseerde als een *missionaire strategie*, in plaats van een theologische methode. Hierbij moet benadrukt worden dat Kato, vanwege zijn vroegtijdig overlijden, slechts aan het begin van zijn theologische carrière stond. Of en zo ja, in welke richting zijn denken zich zou hebben ontwikkeld, blijft een open vraag.

Ten derde, terwijl Adeyemo en Tiénou voortbouwden op Kato's theologische erfenis gingen ze tegelijkertijd een eigen weg door contextualisatie te omarmen als *theologische methode*. Volgens beiden bestaat de taak van de theoloog uit meer dan het verdedigen en doorgeven van eeuwenoude theologische waarheden: theologie ontstaat in de interactie tussen de Bijbelse en lokale contexten. Beiden waren ervan overtuigd dat alleen wanneer de Bijbel en de Afrikaanse context met elkaar in dialoog worden gebracht, de boodschap van het evangelie relevant kan worden. Anders zal het christelijk geloof uiteindelijk 'vreemd' blijven voor Afrikaanse christenen. Beide theologen pleitten daarom voor een dynamische en voortdurende interactie tussen de Bijbel en Afrikaanse contexten, waarbij het evangelie in en met oog op een specifieke context doordacht en geformuleerd wordt. Daarmee zijn Afrikaanse realiteiten niet alleen waardevol als instrument voor het verkondigen van een boodschap (Kato), maar een onmisbare bron voor theologiseren met een intrinsieke theologische betekenis, zij het niet van hetzelfde gewicht hebben als de Bijbel.

Ten vierde, terwijl Kato en Adeyemo ernaar streefden een theologie voor het hele Afrikaanse continent te ontwikkelen, benadrukte Tiénou nadrukkelijk de rol van de lokale gemeenschap van christenen als constitutief voor contextualisatie. Hij stelde dat alle theologie plaatselijk bepaald is en beschreef contextualisatie als een trialoog tussen de lokale gemeenschap, de sociaal-culturele context en de Bijbel. Ik beschouw deze nadruk op de plaatselijke gemeenschap als een gradueel (niet fundamenteel) verschil tussen Adeyemo en Tiénou, omdat beiden contextualisatie als theologische methode praktiseerden door een levendige dialoog te bevorderen tussen de Bijbel en Afrikaanse contexten, vragen en uitdagingen, zij het met verschillende accenten en aandachtspunten. In dit opzicht weerspiegelen Tiénou's ideeën over contextualisatie een ontwikkeling naar toenemende diversificatie en verbijzondering binnen de theologie in Afrika (feministische theologie, *grassroots* theologieën enz.).

Ten vijfde lijkt er, in nauw verband met het voorgaande, een correlatie te bestaan tussen een bepaalde opvatting van contextualisatie en het begrip van de kern van het christendom. Met andere woorden, het maakt verschil voor

iemands interpretatie van de centrale christelijke boodschap of contextualisatie wordt beschouwd vanuit een missiologisch of een theologisch perspectief. Kato veronderstelde een context-overstijgende kern van de christelijke boodschap, die hij theologisch afbakende. In Adeyemo's denken is deze (evangelische) kern ook aanwezig, maar veel minder expliciet. Tiénou, door het toevoegen van het derde element van de lokale gemeenschap als bron en focus van alle theologie, beschrijft niet duidelijk wat volgens hem tot de kern van het christendom behoort; in plaats daarvan ziet hij de kern van het evangelie weergegeven in het hebben een theocentrisch wereldbeeld en levensstijl.

Ten zesde, de theologische bijdragen van Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou met betrekking tot contextualisatie lijken eveneens de ontwikkelingen in de internationale evangelische beweging te weerspiegelen. In lijn met de uitkomsten van Lausanne I benaderde Kato contextualisatie voornamelijk vanuit een missiologisch perspectief: contextualisatie was een missionaire strategie om een tijdloze boodschap te vertalen naar andere contexten. Adeyemo, in lijn met de ontwikkelingen na Lausanne I, beschouwde contextualisatie vooral als een theologische methode: een diepgaande interactie met het voorchristelijke erfgoed en de hedendaagse problemen van Afrika was nodig om het christendom een werkelijke impact te laten hebben in het moderne Afrika. Tiénou, met zijn benadering van de lokale kerk als hermeneutische gemeenschap, sloot aan bij diversifiërende tendensen in de internationale evangelische wereld, die zich rond de eeuwwisseling steeds meer ontwikkelde tot een veelzijdige, polycentrische beweging.

Ten zevende, op basis van de onderzoeksresultaten blijkt de academische kritiek ongegrond dat Afrikaanse evangelische theologen binnen de kring van de AEA een Westerse, neokoloniale vorm van theologie propageerden en de uitdagingen van contextualisatie hebben genegeerd. Zowel Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou hebben zich diepgaand met contextualisatie beziggehouden. Evenals elke andere theologische stroming is de Afrikaanse evangelische theologie sterk beïnvloed door theologische ontwikkelingen elders, in dit geval het Noord-Amerikaanse evangelische gedachtegoed. De Afrikaanse evangelische theologie ontwikkelde zich echter al snel tot een beweging die steeds meer haar eigen wegen zocht en haar eigen prioriteiten stelde binnen Afrika. Deze dissertatie concludeert daarom dat de kritiek dat Afrikaanse evangelische theologen die aangesloten waren bij de AEA-beweging een vorm van neokolonialisme promootten of dat zij de theologische vragen van hun tijd negeerden, ongefundeerd is. Afrikaanse evangelische theologie moet op eigen merites beoordeeld worden, niet als een adept van Noord-Amerikaans evangelisch denken; het is een diverse en dynamische theologische stroming die gekenmerkt wordt door voortdurende interactie tussen het evangelisch gedachtegoed en Afrikaanse realiteiten.

Ten achtste, ondanks het feit dat Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou contextualisatie op uiteenlopende manieren benaderden, legden ze alle drie de nadruk op transformatie als het uiteindelijke doel van contextualisatie. Kato's probleem met inculturatie- en bevrijdingsgerichte theologieën was niet alleen dat ze voortbouwen op wat hij beschouwde als een twijfelachtig fundament, maar ook dat ze uiteindelijk niet in staat zijn om echte verandering in de samenleving teweeg te brengen. Uit zijn werk blijkt een sterke betrokkenheid bij het Afrikaanse continent; het was zijn overtuiging dat alleen Jezus Christus redding en transformatie in Afrika kan bewerkstelligen. Deze transformationele lijn in Kato's denken resoneert in het werk van Adeyemo en Tiénou. Adeyemo riep de kerk en haar leiders op om een profetische rol op te nemen; Tiénou benadrukte het onderscheidende getuigenis in woord en leven van de lokale gemeenschap (Tiénou). Binnen het dominante paradigma van contextualisatie als vertaling benadrukten zowel Adeyemo als Tiénou, in navolging van Kato, transformatie als het doel van contextualisatie.

Ten negende, er zijn kritische vragen te stellen bij het eenzijdig op cultuur-georiënteerde paradigma van contextualisatie dat vaak wordt gebruikt om de Afrikaanse evangelische theologie te bekritiseren. Critici van de theologische positie van de AEA lijken de AEA-theologie voornamelijk te beoordelen via het inculturatie-paradigma van de jaren zeventig en tachtig van de vorige eeuw, dat de 'Afrikaansheid' van theologie door een smalle lens bekijkt in termen van het al dan niet rekening houden met voorchristelijke culturen. Kato's positie (en die van anderen die op vergelijkbare manier theologiseren) onderstreept de pluraliteit van benaderingen van contextualisatie binnen Afrika. Gezien de rijke schakering van het Afrikaanse christendom is het niet verwonderlijk dat er verschillende visies op en vormen van contextualisatie bestaan.

Kortom, deze dissertatie toont aan dat de eerste generatie Afrikaanse evangelische theologen, in het bijzonder Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou, vanaf het begin van de AEA-beweging diepgaand reflecteerden op vragen rond contextualisatie, zij het op verschillende manieren. Kato zag de theologische noodzaak van contextualisatie, maar vreesde dat met de preoccupaties van inculturatie en bevrijding het normatieve Bijbelse fundament van de theologie verloren zou gaan. Daarom beoefende hij contextualisatie als een missionaire strategie. Voortbouwend op Kato's nalatenschap, namen Adeyemo en Tiénou tegelijkertijd afstand van zijn positie, door het concept van contextualisatie als theologische methode te omarmen. In hun ogen kan het evangelie alleen gecontextualiseerd worden door een diepe en voortdurende interactie tussen de Bijbel en het verleden en heden van Afrika (Adeyemo) en lokale gemeenschappen (Tiénou).

Tot slot laat deze dissertatie de theologische diversiteit onder Afrikaanse evangelische theologen zien. De Afrikaanse evangelische theologie kan niet beschreven worden als een monolithische entiteit; in plaats daarvan heeft de

Afrikaanse evangelische theologie binnen de kring van de AEA vanaf het begin verschillende stemmen en verschillende accenten gehad. Daarom onderstreept mijn onderzoek dat algemene categorieën die vaak gebruikt worden om het Afrikaanse (evangelische) christendom te beschrijven, zoals 'evangelisch', 'oecumenisch', 'conservatief' of 'liberaal', problematisch zijn. De zoektocht van Kato, Adeyemo en Tiénou naar een theologie die Bijbels, Afrikaans, contextueel en op transformatie gericht is, verdient academische aandacht en waardering.

Curriculum Vitae

W.T. (Wouter) van Veelen MA (born 1982) studied theology at Utrecht University and Kampen Theological University (now located at Utrecht). For his master's thesis at Utrecht University, he researched approaches to and interpretations of the Bible by Congolese pastors in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo. After his studies, he served as a minister in Loenen aan de Vecht, near Amsterdam. He then emigrated with his family to France to serve the Evangelical–Protestant churches in and around Anduze, the Cevennes. Currently serving as pastor at the Magnificatkerk in Tiel, the Netherlands, he is also a guest lecturer at the Faculté Internationale de Théologie Evangélique et Protestante in Côte d'Ivoire and Bénin.