From theology in Africa to African theology (historical notes); impact of the Council on new generation African theologians

(Celebrating 50 Years of Vatican II: Challenges/Contributions of African Church)

(28 & 29 Sept 2012)

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The topic of my presentation might at first glance give a few wrong impressions which I think must be cleared up before we can proceed. The first possible wrong impression is that African theology properly so called began only when theologians of African descent started to put thought to paper and in that formal way to reflect on the data of the faith as it pertains to or as it is lived in Africa. If this assumption is true, then we have a problem of immense proportions. I would contend to the contrary that sentiments which date the start of African theology to that famous encounter between Tshibangu and Canon Vaneste in 1960 or to the publication of, Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent in 1956¹ are correct only to a point. Modern African theology has a longer pedigree which must be acknowledged so as to properly assess the history of theological thought in Africa and to give proper credit to the true pioneers of African theology. These pioneers include both the missionaries to Africa, their local catechists and the many teachers of the faith who worked very collaboratively with foreign missionaries to Africa to interpret and teach the

¹ Léonard Santiedi Kinkupu et al, Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent: Cinquante ans après (Karthala Editions, 1956)
faith in various African contexts. The point here is that theology as done in the academy is only one theology. The work of these other teachers is also a legitimate type of theology which African theology can no longer ignore or which it continues to ignore at great disadvantage to itself. For let us face it, the impact of the theological insights which many of us African theologians gained from our local catechists and teachers continue to be an important aspect of the worldview which inform our works today. Take the Igbo church for example; long before I knew of Tshibangu, I had already begun to feel the impact of the work of Catechist Anthony Modebelu, catechist Maduforkwa, Catechist Nwabugwu or Nnayi Mathew Onwuzuruike, among many others. These people studied the catechism, appropriated it and became the interpreters of the faith to millions and to many generations. I wonder whether anyone has considered the impact of the compilers and composers of Igbo hymn book on generations of Igbo Catholics, an impact which is palpable in all Igbo Catholic communities today all around the world? In fact, I dare to insist that we cannot understand why Igbo Catholics are the way they are, for good or for ill, unless one has taken time to study MMeri Nne Jesu, Igbo Catechism, Igbo hymn book, etc. The carryover from these sources is so fundamental to understanding and renewal of Catholicism among the Igbo because they constitute the well-spring from which the previous generation of Igbo Catholics drew and which they fed their children on. These children have now become priests, sisters, mothers, fathers, grandparents and bishops. And, even though they all have the trappings of modernity, and in some instances carry long theological degrees after their names, they are still children of their Church, the church founded by missionaries and brought to life by the teaching and theological work of the pioneers whom I have spoken about. This brings me to a second point.
Theological discourse in Africa today often seems to pretend that missionaries to Africa did not do theology or much of it anyway. The fact is that they did. They had a theology of mission. They had theologies of church, of non-Christian religions. They operated out of a type of Christology. Some of these were written down others were not. If African theology would claim Augustine and Cyprian and others as ancestors, it must also include these more recent pioneers in the canon, whether we feel comfortable with what they said and did or not. I dare to say that they did a lot of good work. Even more explicitly, we must recall that many bishops and non-African theologians also left records and practice’s in Africa borne of their theological reflections and understanding of the African reality. Consider the Igbo church again as example. Long before the second Vatican council talked about pastoral or parish councils the missionaries in that part had already had station and parish councils or committees. Long before the decree on the Laity of Vatican II lay involvement in the teaching of the faith and the running of the church and Catholic schools was the norm. Long before people in the west started to reflect on the role of women in the Church the church in that part had managed to allow women be visible in the church in a way that is still not possible in the churches of the west today. Whether these initiatives arose out of necessity is out of the question. For after all, many of the advances in the church arise like that and are subsequently given the necessary theological grounding that they need when it is necessary to do so. I am yet to understand why the missionaries to that part of the world were unable to influence their local churches at home in the west on these matters. I am not saying that all was well in the African missions. I am simply saying that the African churches were already operating full scale on very interesting and sometimes clear theological assumptions which must be part of the cannon in the study of African theology. Let me be a bit cheeky here: If I want to understand Uzukwu or Cardinal Arinze as theologians I would have to
return to these sources I have been talking about. My starting point is neither what Tshibangu said or even what Vatican II decreed, important as these may be.

II

The Impact of Vatican II on Catholic Theology

None of what has been said so far can be construed to imply a denial of the importance of the second Vatican Council to the modern church or of its impact on the modern world and church. To the contrary, in spite of what I have already stated the second Vatican Council has had a huge impact on the Catholic Church and in the world beyond anyone's wildest imagination. In addressing the impact of the Council on African theology and African theologians we must first consider, even if briefly, the impact of that Council on Catholic theology in general. In doing this I will not attempt to be comprehensive or exhaustive since to do so would not only take us beyond our brief in this paper but would in fact be an impossible task given the enormity of such an undertaking. In choosing the areas of the greatest impact of the Council on Christian Catholic theology I have an eye on the African theological situation. That is to say, that the choices I make with regard to the impact of Vatican II on recent Catholic theology are made mostly with regard to those aspects of theology which have felt this impact the most in Africa.

There are two aspects to the conciliar contribution to the development of theology in the Catholic tradition in recent times. “One contribution is in the tone that was set by the Council to theological discourse and to pastoral practice. The other contribution has to do with specifics that
is, with the actual teaching and directives from the Council.”\(^2\) A lot has been written about the Council’s general affirmation of the world as a created reality and its invitation to Christians to take the world seriously. “The Council took seriously the hopes and anxieties of all peoples, including very basic interests that have no obvious religious content. The *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, for example emphasizes that the church can learn from the world and must help in critically evaluating what the world has to offer. The important thing is that this critique must be made from a positive understanding of the values under discussion.”\(^3\) The Council as well showed much regard for particular cultures and situations and for the historicity of human institutions and laws.

Catholic theology since the Council has in imitation of the Council shown a much greater appreciation of and openness to the human situation, to the fact of the historicity of human institutions and an appreciation of the importance of the cultural matrix as a locus of God’s ongoing revelation of himself in human history. In addition to and arising from the conciliar openness we just spoke of, Catholic theology in response to specific injunctions, directives and or impetus from the Council itself has probed, investigated, examined, dug into very specific aspects of human life in the effort to be taught, to teach, to challenge, to be challenged by all these in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I dare say that when future generations of Christians and others look back on our theological times they cannot ever accuse us of being lazy or quiet or unproductive, whatever else they say about our efforts. The theological efforts of our times have been marked by a sense of optimism about the world as a created order, in spite of the evident evil and sinfulness which is obvious to us everywhere we turn. This sense of optimism


\(^3\) Paulinus Odozor, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal*, p.18.
which contrasts with an earlier one which was a carryover from the church’s struggle with modernism was very evident even in the opening statement of Pope John XXIII at the council when he said: “In the daily exercise of Our pastoral office, it sometimes happens that We hear certain opinions which disturb Us—opinions expressed by people who, though fired with a commendable zeal for religion, are lacking in sufficient prudence and judgment in their evaluation of events. They can see nothing but calamity and disaster in the present state of the world. They say over and over that this modern age of ours, in comparison with past ages, is definitely deteriorating. One would think from their attitude that history, that great teacher of life, had taught them nothing. They seem to imagine that in the days of the earlier councils everything was as it should be so far as doctrine and morality and the Church's rightful liberty were concerned. We feel that we must disagree with these prophets of doom, who are always forecasting worse disasters, as though the end of the world were at hand.” The pope went on to assert that “Present indications are that the human family is on the threshold of a new era. We must recognize here the hand of God, who, as the years roll by, is ever directing men's efforts, whether they realize it or not, towards the fulfillment of the inscrutable designs of His providence, wisely arranging everything, even adverse human fortune, for the Church's good.”

The two points which John XXIII passed on to the Council and which in turn has become an accepted characteristic of the council are the acceptance of the goodness of the earthly order and faith in history as field of God’s action. This faith is a realistic one and not an utopic faith. It is faith which comes from the understanding that the God who brought us this far is not about to abandon us to our fate despite our sinfulness and our ineptitude as a human community. I may add here that Pope John’s optimism in these two aspects of our lives has not always found full

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resonance in our theology and in our pastoral praxis even after the Council and in spite of all that the Council taught

The Council also left very specific imprints on many aspects of Catholic theology including the following: the importance of Scripture to theology; an insistence on the return to the sources of theology; an expanded and more inclusive notion of church; respect for the autonomy of the earthly order; respect for non-Christian religions as sources of truth about the divine reality; interreligious dialogue; the importance of the laity in the life of the church; greater appreciation of the various charisms which make up the church; attention to human experience and to the signs of the times as possible sources of theology and for theological truth; attention to the human person integrally and adequately considered as center of Christian morality; women; the ecumenical nature of Christian theology; an appreciation of theology as an integrated discipline; the importance of the liturgy as summit and center of the Christian life; a new and deeper theology of the religious life; a fresh understanding of the nature of ministries in the Christian community; etc. Someone else making this presentation will undoubtedly come up with a different kind of list. Whatever list anyone comes up with, and however this list is configured, the one truth is that Christian theology in every aspect of the Christian life has been tremendously influenced by the second Vatican Council in ways hitherto unknown and unheard of perhaps in the entire church's history.

III

African Theology since Vatican II.
In the spirit of Vatican II African theology since the Council has tried to be open to the world around it. Thus one of its main characteristics as theology has been its dialogical nature. African Catholic theology since the Council is in dialogue with African traditional religion, the theologies of other Christian churches, with Islam, and with other theologies of the West. Virtually every African theologian writing to today has had to or will in the cause of his or her theological career have to engage African traditional religion. As Adrian Hastings puts it, “The African theologian finds that the chief non-biblical reality with which he must struggle is the non-Christian religious tradition of his own people, and African theology in its present stage is shaping as something of a dialogue between the African Christians, and that any other religions and spiritualties of Africa. These religions were immensely rich and significantly varied – just as the kinship and marriage systems of Africa were highly varied.”\(^5\) African theologians in general have undertaken to reinterpret African primal religions both on its own terms but also with a view to appropriating its riches for their lives and the community as Christians. By investigating African traditional religions theologically, “African theology may have been charting a new course in theological method. It is not that discourse has no parallel in the totality of Christian scholarship… Rather, this new theological approach has no counterpart in the more recent Western theological thought forged within the context of Christendom.”\(^6\)

The value of this engagement with African primal religions varies greatly among African theologians. For some theologians like Laurenti Magesa, for example, to engage with African religion is to engage with moral traditions of abundant life. \(^7\) African religion defines in total how people ultimately live and as such is equal in every way to Christianity and Islam. Magesa

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has made it part of his life’s project to show that African Traditional religion should get more respect than it normally does within Christianity and indeed with regard to the discussion on religions in general. Magesa argues strongly that “Missionary theology and missionary Christianity were misled by the antiquity and concreteness of the forms of belief of African religion into thinking that Christianity revealed meanings and worlds not available to African religion.” On the other hand, there are African theologians who argue for African religion as a preparation for the gospel – not quite the gospel itself, and not without the light of truth or even in some cases a salvific dimension. In whatever way African theologians have engaged African traditional religion and for whatever reason they do so, they have one reason in common - they do so out of necessity in that as Kwame Bediako has put it, every African theologian is aware that in dealing with African traditional religion he or she is dealing with his own and his people’s past and present- that is to say, with his own life and that of his people.

A second aspect of the impact of Vatican II on African Catholic theology which follows from the greater attention to African Traditional Religion is evident in the discussion on inculturation. In fact, *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II’s exhortation on the church in Africa, considers inculturation to be “one of the greatest challenges for the church on the Continent on the eve of the Third Millennium.” The insistence on inculturation is to a considerable extent motivated by what Africans perceive to be a situation of imbalance in the contact between Africa

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8 This debate is much more complex than I am reporting it here. For although, there are African theologians who argue for continuity between ATR and Christianity on some key issues, e.g. God they do not always mean to say that everything is therefore the same between the two faiths and that Christianity is totally irrelevant for the African. Be that as it may, there are still those African scholars who believe that not only have all the same God, Christianity’s presence in Africa adds nothing new and is in fact an irrelevant disruption of an otherwise cohesive and coherent system of ‘salvation’, however, that is construed. See for example, Mazi Mbonu Ojike, “…..”


10 Kwame Bediako…..

and the Christianity introduced into Africa by missionaries from the West. In the words of one prominent African theologian, “contact between Christianity and African religion has historically been predominantly a monologue, bedeviled by assumptions prejudicial to the latter, with Christianity culturally more vocal and ideologically more aggressive.”

Another African theologian, himself a European, opines that “In the colonial period Africans were made to feel ashamed of their culture. They were made to accept alien values and alien ways. They were completely passive. Their very being was conferred on them from outside. Today, there must be a complete break with the mentality of the past, with the inferiority complex of Africans in the colonial period. A deep decolonization must take place at the level of culture.”

African theologians have been motivated by the conciliar openness to and appreciation of cultures and religions to investigate ways of making Christianity take on an African face and coloration by incorporating into their theological reflections and research the beauty and insights of African traditions and cultures. African theologians have done this in various ways and according to their various disciplines. Thus for example, while African biblical scholars have sought to provide interpretations of the bible based on African interpretive models; their liturgical counterparts are seeking ways African Christians can continue to worship God as Africans using the best in African ritual process, music, song, dance, etc. As in the case of the relationship of African theology to African Traditional Religion, approaches to inculturation in African theology differ widely from theologian to theologian and from theological subspecialty to theological subspecialty. In the latter case, for example, the demands and meaning of inculturation in matters dogmatic would be different in some ways from the demands in liturgy or ethics. The approaches among theologians are also different among theologians. While a few might want African

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cultures and traditions to be the starting point for any discussions on inculturation, others would want to have the Gospel interrogate African cultures and traditions, where and when necessary and to the extent needed to make them truly Christian. A third group, who see little difference in the two would argue for a near seamless interaction between the two in a symbiotic existence. Christianity and African Traditional Religion for this group are two aspects of the same coin bringing complementary strengths to the table for the enrichment and salvation of the African person. Whatever the approach there is one shared motivation for African theologians as regards the discourse on inculturation – to bring gospel and culture in conversation for the good of God’s people in Africa and to the greater glory and honor of God on the continent. Perhaps the greatest achievement of African theology in this regard since Vatican II has been to remind the Church of a somewhat forgotten truth, namely that all theologies are contextual and the product of the circumstances within which they arise, or as Bénézet Bujo would say, we all speak from our various cultural caves as we open our mouths to theologize. God speaks to people in their various contexts. While these divine manifestations cannot be equated to the definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, they are not nothing. On the contrary, without this prior appreciation of what God is doing in the world through the particular cultures and histories of various peoples it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the believer to appreciate what God is doing or has done in Jesus Christ. Inculturation discourse in African theology comes from a very deep place in the African psyche- a memory of gratitude for God’s abiding presence and abundant gifts. Like ancient Israel which because of its living and deep memory in the abiding love of God had gratuitousness enshrined in its laws and commandments, African theologians in their inculturation work are making a simple but profound statement: God is good, God has been with us all this while; God has left God’s imprints in our cultures and traditions through our

14 Bénézet Bujo, Foundations of African Christian Ethics....
creative geniuses and those of our peoples. Our job as theologians is to honor this presence and to get our people to do the same. One of the reasons inculturation is no longer much of an issue in European theologies seems to be that European cultures which once had this sense of God’s presence in the world are now struggling under the weight of a secularist culture which has robed it of the memory of or the capacity for appreciating the guiding hand of God at work in human history and cultures.

Liturgy

When in Sacrosanctum Concilium, the second Vatican Council opened up the liturgy to the vernacular and to adaptation to local riches it opened up the soul of the African Church and of African theology. It is hard to imagine what the African Church would be like today or to imagine that we would be having this conference to discuss African theology without the impact of this document on African Christian religious life even beyond the Catholic Church. For, this is the one conciliar document whose impact was immediate and whose spirit unknowingly and unwittingly permeated all the Christian churches of Africa. It is true that many of the African Initiated Churches had long ago started the use of the vernacular and to employ African instruments in church music, etc. The truth was that the generality of African Christians from the mainline churches tended to look down on people from these faith communities as less than Christian in the way they wiggled their hips in ecstasy like David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant. Sacrosanctum Concilium made all that movement of body acceptable among not only Catholics but by extension Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, etc., and more to our purposes here, it made it respectable to theologize about the way to do these things. There are at least four ways the Constitution saved African worship and theology. First, it made it possible for the African Catholic to do something which is in the genes of every African- to celebrate
ritualistically. Faith becomes a celebration, a celebration which engages the totality of the human person. Elochukwu Uzukwu’s magisterial work, Worship as Body Language succinctly captures this fact.\(^{15}\) Secondly, it freed the African Christian aesthetic imagination. African Art made its way into the sanctuaries of African churches and chapel, and African musical creativity was let lose. Fourthly I dare to say that African liturgical musicians have been in the forefront of a catechetical renewal in Africa. Through the music melodiously rendered in the various African languages and in ways that touch the African soul they have also been able to transit profound theological truths about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Mother of God, the Church, the various sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as well as taught moral truths about how to live well as a human beings and especially as Christians in this world. Fifth, for many years African theology was nearly totally synonymous with liturgical inculturation. Through the discussion on adaptation, indigenization, and ultimately inculturation – discussions which basically began in the liturgical area, thanks to the decree on the liturgy, the second Vatican Council opened up the African theological space for further explorations in all aspects of theology. Perhaps the one word which best describes the Impact of Sacrosanctum Concilium on African theology is “revolutionary”. Why has this document had so much impact on African theology? Aside from its specific directives, this text touches on something which is so central to most religions – worship. As Joseph Cardinal Cordeiro points out, worship is something which of its very nature “touches life, springs from life, and flows into the rumble and tumble of life. Life and worship are so inseparable and intimately connected that “freshness and newness in the mode of worship was bound to send ripple effects into the lives of the faithful.”\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) See Elochukwu Uzukwu, Worship as Body Language.....

\(^{16}\) Joseph cardinal Cordeiro, Vatican II Revisited: By those who were there, ed. Don Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis, MN.: Winston Press, 1986), p.188
The Council did not devote any special text to theology as such. Beside the fact that everything it says has theological implications its directives concerning the renewal of theological studies in the church are contained in *Optatam Totius*. Numbers 13 to 18 of this document deal with the review of ecclesiastical studies in general. Here it insists, among other things, that students in preparation for the priesthood must be trained in Latin and philosophy and be exposed to sound scholarly methods and to a coherent knowledge of the world, nature, and God, guided by the philosophical tradition of lasting value (presumably Scholasticism in general and Thomism in particular as previously decreed by Pope Leo XIII in *Aeterni Patris*). Then the decree goes on to say: “Students are to be trained most diligently in the study of scripture which ought to be the very soul of theology.” In addition, the council insists that attention ought to be paid to the study of the Fathers, the medievals, especially Thomas Aquinas and to moral theology which itself ought to be renewed through a lively and intimate contact with scripture and other aspects of theology. Students should also be introduced to “fuller knowledge of the churches and ecclesiastical communions separated from the Holy See, and to knowledge of whatever other religions are most commonly found in the particular religion of interest to them or wherein they are located or most conversant with. The aim is to help them recognize “what, by God’s grace is good and true” in these religions, and “to learn and reject what is false (in them) in order “to share the full light of truth with those who lack it.”17

There are three quick points to draw about the impact of *Optatam Totius* on African Theology. The first is that it has drawn African Catholic Theology to a deeper engagement with the scriptures. The late Justin Ukpong has divided the history of African biblical interpretation/studies into three: the 1930s to the 1970s; the 1970s through the 1990s; 1990s to

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17 Vatican II: Optatam Totius, 16.
the present. Whereas the first phase was one in which African scriptural studies was reactive and apologetic and was founded on a desire to legitimize African religions and cultures through the comparative method of the study of religions, the second phase from 1970 to 1990s was one in which scholars paid attention to the African context as resource for biblical interpretation. This was a period dominated by interests in inculturation and liberation. Ukpong states that the period from 1990 was a proactive period which recognized the African reader as subject of biblical interpretation. As he puts it, in this period, “the African context is used asked this resource in the hermeneutic encounter with the Bible. The two main approaches which he identifies as inculturation and liberation crystallize. The inculturation approach is expressed in two models...all Africa-in-the bible studies and the evaluative studies... The liberation approach is expressed in liberation hermeneutics, black theology and feminist hermeneutics.”

In the third phase from the 1990s, African biblical interpretation was more confident, more proactive, seeking to make an original contribution to the discipline of Biblical studies at large by reading the Bible in terms of specific African contexts such as racial oppression in South Africa all over the throughout the continent. Within this period African biblical interpretation sought to integrate the perspective of the ordinary reader in the interpretation it offers the meaning of the biblical text.

Two things have to be noted with regard to the discussion on the question of the Bible in African theology. The first is that there are a great many other incidences which were impacting the growth of biblical studies other than the directives of the second Vatican Council. As Ukpong rightly shows interest in the Bible in Africa predates the second Vatican Council. This interest

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was originally located in the protestant churches for historical reasons which also predate the arrival of Christianity to Africa in the modern era. A second noteworthy point is that even within the Catholic church the rise in biblical studies as is well known owes its origin in modern times to the great renewal of biblical studies which started in the 1930s but which was given a decisive push and direction by Pope Pius XII in his famous encyclical, *Divino Aflante Spiritu*. The directives of the second Vatican Council in *Optatam Totius* and in *Dei Verbum* for the renewal of biblical studies in some ways merely ratified what was already afoot within the church. Even so, we cannot underestimate the impact of the conciliar directive on the development of Scripture studies and subsequently on the impact it has had on African theology. With the Council's blessing biblical studies in Africa has been one of the areas of African theology which has shown the greatest ecumenical bent in African theology.

The impact of the second Vatican Council on Biblical studies in African Catholic theology extends much more beyond biblical interpretation and into all aspects of the understanding of the Bible as word of God. In the first place, the general revision of the lectionary and that arrangement which provides more biblical texts in the liturgy over certain cycles has been a boost for biblical awareness on the continent. In many parts of the continent people turned biblical passages into hymns and recited or sung the Psalms in their own local languages. Partly in response to the Council and partly in response to the challenge from the Pentecostal movement, Catholic biblical studies groups have sprung up and are flourishing in many parishes throughout the continent. This general openness to the Bible as word of God has in turn led many more Catholic priests, sisters and lay people into getting specialized degrees in the Bible from universities in Europe, North America and sometimes within Africa. In the latter
case when the degrees are obtained within religious studies departments in Africa there appears to be greater ecumenical openness to the influence or impact of Protestant biblical scholars.

The impact of the second Vatican Council on Biblical studies in Africa especially in the areas of the pastoral formation of the clergy and on of higher education is also noteworthy. As a seminarian at Bigard Memorial seminary in Enugu Nigeria I witnessed firsthand the reality I am talking about here. We were required to take at least two years of intensive Hebrew and Greek in addition to classes in general and particular aspects of the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament exegesis, etc. In our second year of theological studies we had to have oral examinations on Old Testament exegesis in which we were required to translate and to parse passages from the book of Isaiah. For final examinations in biblical exegesis we were given whole passages from the book of Jonah. I mention this to show how even at that level of ministerial training African seminaries tended to take seriously the injunction from the second Vatican Council on the importance of Scripture for theological education in a way that is hardly the case with their peers at that level of education in other parts of the world. But even as we were being taught the latest in biblical exegesis we were still stuck in other areas of theology in the manualist tradition which had been the hallmark of theological education in the Catholic Church before the second Vatican Council. In moral theology for example we were still debating in one of my classes how many drops of water would invalidate the sacramental matter.

Since my former days as Academic dean at SIST and in my current role as President of the Governing Council of SIST I have developed a keen interest in curricular matters. So, in whatever theological institute I visit, I try to get hold of the program of studies there especially in religious studies/theology. In preparing this paper, I took a look at a number of programs of study of African theological institutes. I will mention a number of them here- in no particular
order of importance: Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), Enugu, Nigeria; Tangaza College, Nairobi Kenya; Facultes Catholiques de Kinshasa, DRC; and St Augustine’s College, Johannesburg, South Africa. Let us consider the programs of SIST and Kinshasa for a while. SIST offers a joint BA in religious studies with University of Nigeria Nsukka and An MA in Theology with Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. The BA Religious studies taken in the third year of theological studies is a step to obtaining the MA in theology in the fourth year of theological studies. The beauty of this program is that it incorporates the best in theological studies with the best in religious studies all at once. My interest in this program at this point is with regard to the offerings in the area of scriptural studies. In the first year of study at SIST the student is required to take about 23 credit hours of classes in the first of the two semesters which make up the year and another 21 credit hours in the second semester of the same year. This is the general distribution of work for the entire four years of study in this Institute. In the first semester of the first year students take two credit hours of biblical Greek three credit hours of biblical Hebrew; two credit hours in a course called “the peoples of the Old Testament: the history,” and two credit hours on the Pentateuch. Thus, in this first semester nine hours credits are devoted to biblical studies of the studies related to it. This represents over one third of the whole course offerings in this one segment of the year. In the second semester of the same year five more hours are devoted to courses on the background to the New Testament and biblical Greek leaving the rest of the space to other theological and ancillary courses. In the first semester of the second year of study students return to the study of the synoptic Gospels – Mark and Matthew. In the second semester they take up the gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. Courses on Hebrew poetry, the theology of the Old Testament, and prophets in the religion of the Old Testament, the close of the New Testament era, wisdom literature and Paul take up quite a
considerable amount of space in the second and third years of study. In the final year of study there are courses on themes in biblical theology and on the community of the beloved disciple. All of these courses are remarkably situated within a very busy program which incorporates the usual and expected aspects of theological studies at this level in areas such as systematic theology, moral theology, pastoral theology, liturgy and practical theology, administration and music, etc.

In Kinshasa we see another heavy emphasis on Biblical studies in the curriculum of studies. In considering its program of studies for the 2007 to 2009 academic year we observe that like the one at SIST this program is very mulch multifaceted. In the first year of theological studies at Kinshasa there are courses in the Old Testament, on initiation into biblical exegetical methods, in the socioeconomic context of the New Testament, introduction to New Testament Greek and to the Hebrew Bible. In the remaining parts of this program there are studies in various biblical languages, the gospel of John, the works of St. Paul and various biblical themes as well as courses the Synoptics and other New Testament and Old Testament works. The same emphasis on biblical studies is observable in the published handbook of Tangaza College in Nairobi Kenya. Here, there are courses on biblical methodology, the song of songs the parables the shorter works of the Old Testament, biblical foundations for world Mission; the epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians, biblical foundations of charismatic movement, apocalyptic literature in the Bible, the historical books of the Old Testament, medical traditions in the New Testament, Hebrews, biblical hermeneutics etc. Of course there are as well many courses on various biblical languages.

The discussion in this section was not meant to be exhaustive. The intention was rather to show that the second Vatican Council's injunction on the renewal of theological studies in a
Scripture centered way has had tremendous impact on theological education and training in much of Africa's theological schools. To round off this section on the impact of Vatican II on theological developments in Africa we need to say a word or two concerning two other aspects of theological studies – moral theology and mission studies. The emphasis on the renewal of moral theology in the Catholic Church from the second Vatican Council is too well known to detain us here. As one who himself has devoted a considerable amount of my theological life to the issues concerning moral theology I would just make a quick point or two. As already indicated above moral theology was one of the last areas on the curriculum of African theological institutes to be affected by developments from the second Vatican Council. And even when it did catch up in some ways the interests of this discipline in Africa has been mostly with regard to applied aspects of the discipline. Thus for example the have been a lot written with regard to issues of poverty and development, marriage and the ethics of governance and of course AIDS/HIV, etc. What has been lacking for the most part has been a sustained discussion on foundational and methodological aspects of the discipline. In this regard one has to reckon with the pioneering work of Bénézet Bujo, Laurenti Magesa, and Lucius Ugorji, to name a few. Mission studies on the other hand has had a tremendous revival since the second Vatican Council on the continent. The reason is not hard to imagine. First of all, international missionary groups on the continent had to reassess the very basis for their existence in light of the mission orientation coming out of the second Vatican Council. Secondly, African theologians themselves in the years following the Council devoted a considerable amount of energy to assessing the impact of the missionary enterprise on the continents life and future. Third, African religious communities and even dioceses found themselves sending missionaries to other parts of the continent and of the Christian world in the years after the second Vatican Council. Therefore
they had to think through some of the things they were doing, what reasons they did them, whether they would continue to do them and how best to do them in light of the teachings and orientations of the Council on mission.

In summary, therefore, some of the issues which have preoccupied African theologians and African theology for some time now re “the need to develop an African theology that is African and Christian at the same time; a theology that respects and takes the African reality seriously; a theology which is both anchored in solid scriptural and ecclesial moorings but which is also independent and culturally distinct as an African contribution to the Church and to religious thought in general.”

II

Impact of Vatican II on New Generation of Catholic Theologians

At the start of this segment of my paper, I need to make another brief remark about the topic of the presentation itself, namely that given the history of the contemporary African Church with regard to Academic it must be borne in mind that many African academic theologians of note in Africa today grew up or became theologically conscious either immediately before, during, and or after Vatican II. Thus, it may well be that Vatican II by itself is no longer a sufficient demarcation point for evaluating the work of the generations of African theologian now working African theology. In any case, it should be easy from what has been said up to this point to infer the impact of the second Vatican Council on Catholic theologians on the continent. What is not easy to do however is to indicate who precisely constitute the new generation of Catholic theologians on the continent. The reason as already indicated is that nearly all theologians who became prominent in the African scene in recent times or since the Council

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20 Paulinus Odozor, “Continuing the Search for Foundations in African Moral Theology, .......
were products of the institutes and programs I have been describing so far. That is why I chose instead to speak initially of the impact of Vatican II on African theology in general. By so doing, I intended to indicate from what source the theologians in Africa have been drinking since the Council. Having said so, it is still possible to show even if in very cursory manner the way Vatican II has impacted the work of some theologians in Africa. In doing this, I intend to divide this group into two – a first group which knew something of the world and church of pre-Vatican II in Africa even if they themselves were young people in primary or secondary schools at the time of the Council. A second group would be made up of theologians who had no idea of the world of the pre-Vatican II church in Africa and who themselves had been taught either by the first group I mentioned, in institutions administered by them or to their peers whether locally in Africa or abroad. I do not aim to be exhaustive in this matter given the time and resources currently at my disposal.

A lot of the written history of African theology in the modern era has traced the start of African theology in the contemporary era to the famous debate between Alfred Vanesste and Tharcisse Tshibangu in Kinshasa in 1960 and to another slightly earlier text, published in 1956, Des Prêtres noirs s’interrogent which is an effort by some African and Haitian priests to make their voices clearly heard on the issue of mission and Church in Africa. In addition to this there were also scatterings of African attempts by many African students who had been sent to study in Rome and in other European universities to take the African reality seriously as basis for theologizing. For example, in 1956, Vincent Mulago submitted a dissertation on Rome on L’Union Vitale Bantu, ou le Principle de cohesion de la Communauté chez les bashi, les banyarwanda et les Burundi, a work which took inspiration from the famous work by Placide Tempels on Bantu Philosophy. The same year, Stephen Ezeanya, Mulago’s contemporary at the
Pontifical Urban University in Rome submitted a dissertation on *The Method of Adaptation in the Evangelization of Igbo-speaking of Southern Nigeria*. Not too long after that, a compatriot of Ezeanya’s, Francis Arinze, also defended a thesis in Rome, a work which was later published as *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*. It is remarkable that these works were done or appeared before Vatican II. One thing they had in common was that they anticipated in very serious ways the openness of the Second Vatican Council to the African/local reality as a source of theology. Ezeanya started a crusade which he was to continue for much of his life as an academic later about the value of local African names both in themselves and as basis for inculturation. Arinze’s work on sacrifice in Igbo religion is an anthropological work undertaken by a theologian in the study of the notion of sacrifice in an African community with a view to helping understand the religious substratum that informed the average Igbo and the sensibilities they bring to their faith as Christians.

In 2003 Juvénal Ilunga Muya and Bénézet Bujo published a book on African theology in which they discussed the work of some of the pioneers of African theology. They list these pioneers as Vincent Mulago, Engelbert Mveng, Tharcisse Tshibangu, Alphonse Ngindu Mushete, Sidbe Sepmporé Oscar Bimwenyi; Bénézet Bujo, Bathélelemy Adoukonou and Elochukwu Uzukwu. In the second volume of this series they include the following as pioneers of African theology-Francois Mizeka, Meinrad Hebga, Laurent Mpongo, Charles Nyamiti, Jean-Marc Ela, and John Walligo. I think that quite a few important contributors to the development of African theology as we know it today are missing from these lists. For example, no mention of the pioneers of African theology would ignore the work of Charles Brian Hearne, who for

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many years edited *AFER* the theological review from the GABA Institute in Kenya. Under Brian Hearne’s editorship that review came to a prominence it never had and has not been able to retain since as a source of new theological thinking in Africa. He himself made significant contributions to in the work of ecclesiology and the theology of the Basic Christian communities. As a seminarian in Nigeria *AFER* was essential reading for many of us. On the pages of this review we got to know of the works of other pioneers like Aylward Shorter, Eugene Hillman, and Adrian Hastings etc. The list of pioneers would have to include such names as Vincent Donovan, Theresa Okure, Justin Ukpong, Ukachukwu Manus, John Onaiyekan, Laurent Mosengwo, Kabasele, Alex Chima P.K. Sarpong, etc. What do all these have in common? They took the Second Vatican council seriously and in their various ways and according to their various academic interests tried to find ways to make it respond to the realities of the African world. The second Vatican Council thus provided some of the agenda and much of the impetus for their work. This period also witnessed a spate of graduate dissertations by African students in religion and theology all around the world. It has always been a dream of mine to find some endowment to help me repatriate these theses from wherever they are and house them in some institute on the continent for posterity. This would be one of the greatest contributions to African theology ever, in light of the Second Vatican council. Many of the authors of these works often went back to Africa and never were heard from again despite the sometimes cutting edge work they had already started in their days as students abroad.
Just as it is correct to say that African theology had in many ways started to come alive before Vatican II, I believe it is equally correct to assert that in spite of the impetus provided by the Council, African theology has in many ways gone beyond Vatican II. This theology while trying to stay open to or even to understand the spirit of Vatican II has also become more and more open to many other impulses. Since Vatican II many more nations have become independent in Africa, many wars have been fought on the continent, various experiments at governance have happened on the continent, two African synods have taken place, AIDS/HIV has become an issue. Many African countries have become severely indebted, Islam has become more a challenge than it ever was, the internet has been invented, globalization has accelerated, the sexual revolution has taken new turns and twists, the clergy sex-abuse has become an issue of international concern, John Paul II has become pope and so has Benedict XVI, the seminaries and religious houses of many countries in the West have shrunk considerably, the Churches of the Southern hemisphere have become missionary churches in a serious way, women have found a voice in the Church and in the world as never before- the list goes on and on. It is therefore a bit unrealistic to imagine that the Council could have foreseen all of these events or even been able to supply the guidelines for our theologizing about them. It needs to be said as well that in addition to inspiration from the Council we must not forget that African theology owes a lot of its current vibrancy to another magisterial act- the Kampala declaration of Pope Paul VI where he insisted that the African Church must develop its own brand of Christianity and even goes on to suggest how this can happen:
The expression, that is, the language and mode of manifesting this one Faith, may be manifold; hence, it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius, and the culture, of the one who professes this one Faith. From this point of view, a certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable. An adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not only possible, it is even favored by the Church. The liturgical renewal is a living example of this. And in this sense you may, and you must, have an African Christianity. Indeed, you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection such as to find in Christianity, and for Christianity, a true superior fullness, and prove to be capable of a richness of expression all its own, and genuinely African. This may take time. It will require that your African soul become imbued to its depths with the secret charisms of Christianity, so that these charisms may then overflow freely, in beauty and wisdom, in the true African manner. It will require from your culture that it should not refuse, but rather eagerly desire, to draw, from the patrimony of the patristic, exegetical, and theological tradition of the Catholic Church, those treasures of wisdom which can rightly be considered universal, above all, those which can be most easily assimilated by the African mind. The Church of the West did not hesitate to make use of the resources of African writers, such as Tertullian, Optatus of Milevis, Origen, Cyprian and Augustine (cf. Optatam Totius, No. 16). Such an exchange of the highest expressions of Christian thought nourishes, without altering the originality, of any particular culture. It will require an incubation of the Christian “mystery” in the genius of your people in order that its native voice, more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of the other voices in the Universal Church. Do We need to remind you, in this regard, how useful it will be for the African Church to possess centers of contemplative and monastic life, centers of religious studies, centers of pastoral training? If you are able to avoid the possible dangers of religious pluralism, the danger of making your Christian profession into a kind of local folklore, or into exclusivist racism, or into egoistic tribalism or arbitrary separatism, then you will be able to remain sincerely African even in your own interpretation of the Christian life; you will be able to formulate Catholicism in terms congenial to your own culture; you will be capable of bringing to the Catholic Church the precious and original contribution of “negritude”, which she needs particularly in this historic hour.  

In the current African scene, there have arisen many active younger theologians who in their training and historically have known no other church but the church of the times after Vatican II. Even when we appreciate the fact that African theology as is the case with other theologies in the church is still grappling with the impact of Vatican II we must as well remember that these younger theologians have many interests and labor under a lot more influences than that which comes directly from the Council. For example, these younger theologians have shown interest in the question of HIV/AIDS pandemic from various points of

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view. Some of these theologians, like Bede Ukwuije at SIST are involved in rethinking the very notion of God in African theology. Bonaventure Ugwu, his colleague at SIST has shown considerable interest in pneumatology. Sylvia Nwachukwu has devoted attention to the issue of creation; Ernest Ezeogu has spent a considerable amount of time researching and arguing for the African origins of Jesus. Anthony Akinwale has been working on ways to retrieve Aquinas for African theology while Francis Oborji has continued the study African religion from his location in Rome while Patrick Chibuko continues the work of liturgical inculturation with a focus on the various sacraments. Leonard Santiedi from the DRC continues the work of inculturation from a dogmatic point of view while several women- Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike continue the work of theologizing from a feminist standpoint of the critique of African and ecclesial structures as does her compatriot Teresia Hinge who teaches currently at Santa Clara University. The list is indeed very long. The point here is to show that African theology is alive and well after Vatican II.

I want also to stress the fact that it owes its vitality to quite a few other factors in addition to Vatican II. This is not to say that Vatican II is not important. Quite the contrary. I am only saying that it does not seem to me to be able by itself to bear the weight of the difference in theological interests and tastes which may be evident in work of the various generations of African theologians who have been active since the conciliar era. I must make a point here about the council. This point must not be understood to imply that I am trying to minimize the impact of the council. By no means, I am intending to do this. For, no matter how one looks at it, the council was and is a monumental achievement not only of the faith but of the human spirit in general. What I want to say here, though, is that there is sometimes a tendency in certain

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24 See for example, the works of Orobator.......
Catholic quarters to look at the council as the last word on everything. Thus, whatever came before the council was wrong or at best ugly and archaic in contradistinction to what came from and after the council. There is also a type of conciliar fundamentalism at work in the church today to which all sides on any given issue in the church sometimes fall prey, much like scriptural fundamentalism. The council is often invoked in defense of or as refutation for all sorts of causes and ideas or as having provided guidance on everything about the faith. It is good to remember that the council has not abrogated all other aspects of the tradition and teaching of the church. Thus, as Joseph Ratzinger reminds us, “despite all the good to be found in the text it produced, the last word about the historical value of Vatican Council II has yet to be spoken. If in the end it will be numbered among the highlights of Church history depends on those who will transform its words into the life of the Church.”

What is implied here is that 50 years is still too short a time to gauge the impact of such a monumental undertaking as the Second Vatican Council. This is not surprising, for after all we are still trying to grapple with Nicaea Chalcedon, and Trent. This is a point to bear in mind even as we celebrate the great contributions of this monumental council.

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