

**THEOLOGY IN AFRICA**, by Kwesi A. Dickson. *Darton, Longman and Todd*, London and *Orbis Books*, New York, 1984. Pp. 243. PG. £6.95, \$9.95.

**AFRICAN THEOLOGIES NOW: A PROFILE**, by Justin K. Ukpogon. *Spearhead no 80*, Gaba Publications, Eldoret, Kenya, 1984. Booklet, Pp. 64. \$2.40.

**THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF MEN: AN AFRO-ASIATIC INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1 – 11.** by Modupe Oduyoye. *Orbis Books*, New York; *Daystar*, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1984. Pp. 132. PG. \$12.95

“Certainly, in African society culture and religion are not easily separated. religion is a regular accompaniment in a person’s life; the chief’s role, the relations between members of a society, morality, the stages in a person’s life (birth, puberty and marriage, and death), the practice of medicine, architecture, warfare, traditional education etc.: all these areas are not dissociated from religion in traditional African society”. So writes Prof. Dickson on p. 47 of *Theology in Africa*.

Well, in this respect African society is hardly exceptional. It might be said to be almost the universal rule for societies, to which modern secular societies provide a rather singular exception. Wherever a people’s religion makes no claim to universality, but is simply that people’s religion, then it will form an integral and inseparable element in their culture.

But when a religion like Christianity claims universal validity and has a strong missionary energy, then the relationship between religion and culture necessarily becomes problematic. Broadly speaking, three solutions to the problem have been followed in history. The first has been to present the religion to alien peoples together with its parent culture – i.e. the culture of its missionaries or apostles. This was the line of the judaizing Christians against whom St Paul battled; it seems to have been the general policy of Islam; and by and large it was the practice of European and American missionaries, and of all the main Churches, in the 19th century and up to about 1950. Not a deliberately chosen policy, I think, in most cases; it was just assumed, more or less uncritically, that the religious message proclaimed carried with it the cultural forms the missionaries were familiar with.

The second solution was St. Paul’s, a much more deliberate choice. But here, while there is a deliberate attempt to distinguish the gospel of Christ from its parent judaic culture, there is no consciously thought out strategy for transposing it into other cultures. The attitude to the receptor culture was a mixture of indifference and firm intolerance – to its religious manifestations. In this respect the second solution does not differ very much from the first.

The third solution presupposes the highest degree of self-awareness and ‘cultural detachment’, and for that reason has never in fact been put into practice on a wide scale. It is to start from the receptor culture, study it, enter into it as sympathetically as possible, and then, as it were, to draw the gospel into it from within, instead of proclaiming it to the receptor culture from outside. This was the policy of the great 16th century Jesuits, Roberto De Nobili in India and Matteo Ricci in China. It is – more or less – the method recently adopted by Fr Vincent Donovan in preaching the gospel to the Masai in Tanzania (see his fascinating book *Christianity Rediscovered*, SCM, London, 1978).

In the missionary context of carrying the gospel to peoples who have not yet heard it, it is easy as an armchair missionary to give the palm to the third solution. But that missionary context does not exist anymore – not at least in Africa. The situation here is post-missionary in a very complex, highly volatile cultural cauldron. The relationship between Christianity and culture remains problematic in this post-missionary situation, but there cannot now be any neat or simple solution; quite certainly there cannot be just one solution. There is without a doubt a need for African theology in Africa. But would it be absurd to aim at only one kind of African theology, or to regard as legitimate only one approach to it. A common requirement, though, for good African theology (like

good European theology) would be a capacity for what I call cultural detachment—a *critical* awareness in theologians of their own cultural standpoint.

The kinds of theology in Africa which come closest—in the post-missionary situation, of course—to advocating what I called the first solution are black theology and liberation theology (African brand). Their proponents will not be pleased at my saying such a thing, but I think it is true, and not necessarily an adverse criticism. Their concern is not the cultural reception of the gospel, but its socio-political implications and the socio-political context in which it is being proclaimed now. Black theology is more or less confined to South Africa, liberation theology has a wider field and is concerned with a Christian response to neo-colonialism on the one hand and to the corruption and oppression so rife in many African countries on the other. Both are clearly imported from the Americas, the one from the North, the other from the South. Fr Ukpong gives a succinct account of them in his excellent little booklet. Some African liberation theologians, he tells us, are trying to develop authentically African versions. Thus Fr Mbinda in Kenya writes an article “Towards a Theology of *Harambee*” (means ‘pull together’), and in Tanzania another author works “Towards an *Ujamaa* Theology”, *ujamaa* meaning ‘family’, and being a key slogan in Julius Nyerere’s African socialism. But for the most part the sociological and political categories used by these theologians are not specifically African.

Prof. Dickson quotes a number of black theologians from South Africa who are very critical of African theology as an attempt to indigenise or ‘inculturate’ Christianity in Africa (p. 124–137). The main line of their objections is that this concern for traditional culture is irrelevant to the pressing political and social injustices they suffer from in South Africa—as well as often being rather out of date. It must be remembered that the South African National party, the great oppressor, has always laid stress on the proper cultures of different ethnic groups, so the suspicion of black theologians for any African cultural theology is easy to understand. But all the same, seen from anywhere else in Africa, this suspicion of African cultural theology exemplifies a narrowness of outlook that is really more characteristic of a Western than an African mentality.

In the rest of Africa it is what Fr Ukpong calls African inculturation theology that leads the field. He distinguishes two approaches: “the moderate expressed by the terms *adaptation*, *christianization* and *accommodation*; and the radical expressed by the terms *inculturation*, *interculturalism*, *incarnation* and *africanization*” (p. 27). Of the first he says that it seems to assume the Western format for theology as normative, while the second is characterized by its general departure from the format of the western theological pattern. What he appears to mean by this is that these radical inculturators depart from the format of *modern* Western theological text-book theology, since he goes on to say that they lay stress on scripture and tradition, and aim to relate the spirit and faith of early Christianity, which they thus try to recapture, to African traditional religion and culture as a whole. An interest, even a predominant interest in scripture and tradition, is not however something that is essentially alien (one would hope) to ‘Western’ theology.

Perhaps the greatest merit of Fr. Ukpong’s Spearhead booklet is that it gives us a survey of African theology actually being done, with the names of the writers and the books and the periodicals.

Prof. Dickson’s book is not in itself an exercise in African theology—if it were, it would I suppose be classified as representing a moderate approach. Instead it gives a very thorough, and it must be confessed a rather dull introduction to the subject: a *status quaestionis* setting out all the factors involved. Prof. Dickson is an extremely distinguished and learned scholar, a Ghanaian Methodist academic, and his book will be very useful for anyone who has never thought much before about the need for special African theologies. But he lacks the snappy, businesslike style of the Nigerian Catholic Fr Ukpong.

Our third writer is also a Nigerian. There is certainly nothing dull about what he

says or the way he says it, even though his text is larded with transliterated Hebrew words and sentences, not to mention words and sentences in Yoruba, Igbo, Fon, Ga, Ewe, Mwaghavul, Fulani, Swahili, Zulu and Tswana. Mr Oduyoye is a philologist, and like most enthusiastic and learned philologists he is just a little crazy—well, certainly eccentric. But his madness is of the exciting and positive variety. His book, he tells us is the substance of bible studies he led for the Clergy School of the Anglican diocese of Ijebu. The Anglican clergy of Ijebu must have come away from their bible studies with reeling heads. But at any rate they can have had no excuse for not being thoroughly stimulated. The author sees linguistic connections between Hebrew and all those West African languages I have mentioned, as well as the Bantu languages of central and southern Africa. This is where one naturally suspects that much learning has made him a little mad. But the connecting link is the so called Hamitic languages. It is now philologically established that these are related to the Semitic group. And among the Hamitic languages are the Chadic ones, and Chad is not very far, as words fly, from West Africa.

Philology is only Mr Oduyoye's instrument, however, for linking the interpretation of Genesis texts with African myth and cultural history. This is what makes his short book a genuine piece of African cultural theology. One of the most intriguing connections he states (he would use the word 'establishes', and I would be delighted if he were right) is between Yahweh (which we are assured is pre-Hebrew Kenite) and the Fon word *Yehwe* (Ewe *Yèwè*) meaning a spirit. And this gives us a clue to what Eve really said in Gen.4.1; "I have gotten a man, a Yhwh", i.e. one who is both man and spirit.

More power to Modupe Oduyoye's elbow; may there be many more like him, and just a few who can give a slightly more sober representation of his insights.

EDMUND HILL OP

**FAITH AND IDEOLOGIES** by Juan Luis Segundo. *Sheed and Ward Ltd., London, 1964. Pp. 362. £13.50.*

This book, elegantly translated from the Spanish by the Dean of King's College, Cambridge, is the first in Segundo's five-volume series, *Jesus of Nazareth, Yesterday and Today*. The need to define terms and establish methodology makes this volume necessarily theoretical and at times demanding on the reader, yet it becomes not only absorbing but exciting as the arguments unfold.

In a Tillichian manner, the author sets about identifying the question which calls for an answer. The question is not itself rarified or theoretical, but the world we inhabit in all its complexity. By being thus 'concretely situated', Segundo's sustained and rigorous analysis serves not only as a preparation for later volumes, but is invaluable in its own right for the light it sheds on the religious, social, and political phenomena that embrace and threaten us.

At the start Segundo creates what he acknowledges might seem to be an unnecessary problem, by defining both faith and ideology in his own special way. His justification is the need for terms to express what he wants to say, which in turn will be justified if his approach can be seen to work.

Faith, then, is represented as an anthropological dimension; it has to do with the values implicit in all satisfaction-seeking conduct. Such values—transcendent data—are self-validating insofar as they precede empirical investigation and are not established through it.

Ideology is also an anthropological dimension. It is the realm of instrumentality through which values are put into effect. In these senses faith and ideology are necessary to each other—faith without ideology is dead.

On the basis of his definitions, Segundo is able to embark on a critique of misconceptions afflicting religion (Christianity in particular) and Marxism. Religion, for