



18 | CHARTING ON AFRICAN FEMINIST PASTORAL BEARINGS OF ESTHER ACOLATSE

Agnes Ini Solomon

Abstract

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians' (Circle) Sankofa 2024 celebration warrants the highlight of the theological contribution of Circle matriarchs. In her several publications, Esther Acolatse's discusses her view of African pastors' style of pastoral counselling in Africa, especially in Ghana, thus making a tacit contribution to African Women Liberation theology. Pastoral care-giving is central in Acolatse's discussions as seen in most publications. Using several theories and scholars, she argues that in order to meet the needs of the counselee maximally, the counsellor needs to face the person holistically, rather than treat only the spiritual aspect of the individual. Acolatse's works opens up a whole lot of possibilities for future challenge and discoveries in Africa in the area of pastoral counselling and care-giving. This paper sets out to unveil some of the issues by answering these research questions: What informs Acolatse's work? What are its theological sources and contexts? What does her theology seek to achieve? What is the main strength and contribution of Acolatse's work to the world of knowledge?

Keywords: Pastor, pastoral, psychology, counselling

Introduction

Prof Esther Acolatse was among the sixty-nine women who gathered in Legon, Ghana in 1989 and launched the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle). Acolatse is therefore a founding member of the Circle, a graduate of the University of Ghana (BA Hons); Harvard Divinity School (MTS) and Princeton Theology Seminary (PhD). Before, she taught Pastoral Theology and World Christianity at Duke Divinity School at Durham, North Carolina. She is also a preacher, public speaker, retreat leader, educator. In 2017 she joined Knox College (Toronto School

of Theology) as Associate Professor and on 19th May 2021 she was promoted to the rank of full professor (<https://knox.utoronto.ca>). Acolatse is currently a Professor of Pastoral Theology and Intercultural Studies at the Knox College. Esther Acolatse is an African Christian who uses her gifts and experiences in pastoral theology to give care to care seekers and to instruct promising care givers. In her study, research and practice Acolatse applies her own Ghanaian culture as a stepping stone to open to the worldview of the African in different aspects of life. Her contribution to Liberation theology is worth celebrating, and this paper seeks to do this using the following outline: Awards and Academic Achievements; Academic Contribution; Views on African Christian and Pastoral Counseling; Main Theological Contribution; And Conclusion.

Awards and Academic Achievements

Esther Acolatse is an accomplished writer who has won several awards: the Carnegie Africa Diaspora Fellowship, Duke University's Julian Abele Mentor of the Year-First Runner-up, a Duke Global Health Initiative Grant, American Association of University Women-International Fellow Award, and the World Council of Churches-theological Education Scholarship. Her scholarship that earned these awards includes several books and articles. Some of her publications include: Acolatse EEE (2011) Christian Divorce Counselling in West Africa: Seeking Wholeness through Reformed Theology and Jungian Dreamwork. In *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 21(1), 2-18; Acolatse EEE (2011) All in the Family: Recasting Religious Pluralism Through African Contextuality. *Religious Diversity and Conflict* (15), 261-271; Acolatse EEE (2013) Hope and God as Good-Enough Mother: The Development of Hope in Job. *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 23(2) 1-22; Acolatse EEE (2014a) *For Freedom or Bondage? A Critique of African Pastoral Practices*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans; Acolatse EEE (2014b) What is Theological About Practical Theology? Towards a Pastoral Hermeneutic of Primal Speech. *Practical Theology* 7(3), 205-220; Acolatse EEE (2014) Culture of War, Violence, and Sexual Assault in the Military: An Ethic of Compromise? *Journal of Pastoral Theology*. Taylor and Francis, 24(1), 4-29, (<http://doi.org/10.1179/jpt.2014.24/1.004>); Acolatse EEE (2018) *Powers, Principalities and the Spirit: Biblical Realism in Africa*

and the West. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans; Acolatse EEE (2020) Interview of Dr Emmanuel Evans-Anfom. *Journal of African Christian Biography* 5(3), 39-45. The list is not exhaustive however, her passion for soul-care runs through all her writings, and other themes with which she is concerned are examined in the next section. Acolatse also serves in numerous academic guilds, publications and organizations including: the council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa College of Mentors and the Association of Theological Schools Board of Commissioners; Advisory council for the Journal and Dictionary of African Christian Biography; International Academy of Practical theology; American Academy of Religion, Society for Pastoral Theology; Yale -Edinburgh Group for the Study of Christianity in a Non-Western World, Associate Fellow at the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University.

Esther Acolatse's Academic Contributions

This work seeks to give a brief chart on the African feminist pastoral bearings of Esther Acolatse. All scripture references used are from the New Revised Standard Version. Among the books Acolatse has written and published the theme of pastoral care and counselling dominates. This is seen in the application of her methods in all writings including articles and books some of which are discussed below.

Dynamic Exclusivism as the Basis for Soul-Care

In an essay titled, "All in the Family: Recasting Religious Pluralism Through African Contextuality," Acolatse seeks to address the issue of continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and other forms of religion. Using John Hick and Karl Barth as Christian scholars standing on the opposite side of the debate she argues from the point of pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism. According to Acolatse, pluralists like John Hick propose a 're-evaluation of the main tenets of Christian beliefs' that serve as blockages to inter-religious dialogue. On the other hand, Barth representing orthodox theologians advocate for discontinuity between Christianity and other forms of religion. Acolatse seeks to solve this dichotomy, by offering a 'means of healing the bifurcation between Christian exclusivism and pluralism by a dynamic exclusivism that seeks to

overcome both the triumphalism of current exclusivism and the extreme universalism' that attends Christian pluralism (Acolatse, 2011:261).

Acolatse (2011:262-263) divides her paper into five parts, first she offers a description of the African (particularly West African) context highlighting examples of its multi-religious existence; second, she assesses the proposed solutions for accommodating religious plurality (framed primarily within Western culture), especially John Hick's call to pluralism; third she critiques the Hickian position showing the inadequacies in addressing the practical issues of religious believers (especially in West Africa); in the fourth part Acolatse proposes both a re-evaluation of religious dialogue and the adoption of the Barthian exclusivist view as a more viable avenue not only for inter-and intra-religious dialogue, but also for a soul-care, and lastly, she examines from a Christian perspective examples of how this soul-care works within and across religious traditions.

Acolatse (2011:262) submits that pluralism is a reality of African lives, thus a need for religious co-existence. Using Ghana and Nigeria as examples, she cites those conflicts arise when one religion tradition, (Christianity, Islam, or Indigenous) is privileged over others (Acolatse, 2011:263). She argues that Christian exclusivism is a mutually inclusive means of respecting other religious traditions and embracing one's own. In this light, various traditions should be conflated and each invited to the larger anthropological question which leads everyone to creation which marks the beginning of "our common humanity, rather than salvation (the end). She underscores that the African context is particularly inviting of analysis for two reasons; first, it approaches the pluralism question as one of soteriology, a matter of ends, and thus of means, and second, it approaches the issue from an anthropological perspective, seeking to understand what it means to be human.

Acolatse does not just seek to show the conflict between pluralistic and exclusivist theologians, she critiques Hick's Knitter's and Smith's proposed solutions for accommodating religious plurality. She notes that these theologians challenge Christianity to "desist from claiming that Christ is the definitive and normative revelation in whom all truth and ultimate salvation resides, and to shift from a Christocentric to a theocentric mode which allows all religions to be equidistant to God.". (Acolatse, 2011:266). Acolatse critiques this position arguing that Hick and Knitter's

(1987: vii-xii) position has serious implications for pastoral theology of ministry. Showing through her experience she demonstrates that inter-religious encounter, uncertainty about what one believes provide more opportunities for inter-religious conflict than an “unshakeable knowledge tinged with personal and communal experience of the *Real*” (Acolatse, 2011:266).

Acolatse draws on Barthian perspective of pluralism (Barth 1975, 1/11:326) and proposes the concept of dynamic exclusivism to advocate for an appropriate stance towards other religions and acts in a pastorally responsible way across denominational and religious backgrounds (Acolatse, 2011:267). Acolatse (2011:269) argues further dynamic exclusivism is the basis for soul-care in a multi and iner-religious situation. She expounds thus:

Dynamic exclusivism allows each religious tradition to maintain its truth claim. What transpires, if the Christian claim is true, is that the epistemological pitting of truth against truth is undercut by the encounter with truth as a person, who is then invited into the space of our common need and embraces us. If the scriptural attestation is true, and Bath’s explication is on target- which I believe to be the case-the pastors in the scenarios do not need to require the care-seekers to exit their religious beliefscapes to be encountered by the Truth.

Acolatse’s soul-care therapy suggests that care-givers must understand the religious context of the care seeker and in care-giving, they do not need to alienate the care-seeker from this background. She thus suggests an appropriate pastoral formation in divinity and Seminaries as crucial to disciple Christians for witness and life in a pluralistic world. She notes that “dynamic exclusivism allows one to hold the truth of the ultimate revelation of God in Christ via the church or Christianity, as explained in Barth’s Church Dogmatics (17, 18 & 69) which demonstrates the importance of the “neighbor” as our priority to the real “neighbor” who is Jesus in whom God and people become eternal “neighbors” (Acolatse, 2011:268). In this light care-givers can administer soul-care without any religious bias, and soul-care seekers can approach givers with no fear. This is tenable so that people from all religious background can receive soul-care when soul-care

givers transcend their various religious tenets in the face of the claim of God made through the neighbor, the God-man on their lives.

Counselling in Marital Conflicts and its Effects on Men and Women

In her publication titled “Christian Divorce Counselling in West Africa: Seeking Wholeness through Reformed Theology and Jungian Dreamwork in the *Journal of Pastoral Theology*,

Acolatse is concerned with pastoral counselling in marital conflicts and its effects on men and women. She uses the stories of two West African women to interrogate the sociological background and current Christian theology used in marital counselling through a reformed lens, giving attention to Jungian psychology as it pertains to individual formation and empowerment (Acolatse, 2011:1). She divides her paper into three parts: part 1 deals with the sociocultural issues associated with marriage, family, and divorce in West Africa; Part 2 examines the theological dimension of marriage and divorce in Reformed Perspective; and the third part discusses psychodynamic issues related to ambivalence and disengagement from unhealthy relational commitments.

In the first part Acolatse opines that in Africa as opposed to the West, marital commitments and how they are perceived and lived out are constricted by cultural norms and expectations. The contractual value given to marriage is seen in the deep involvement of extended family in the marriage processes since marriage is not about two individuals joining together but extended families coming together (Acolatse, 2011:2). She notes that the rituals performed whether at the civil ceremonies, church blessing/wedding or traditional marriage ceremonies carry a psycho-spiritual binding commitment that transcends the two individuals extending to ancestors, the spiritual guardians of the families (Acolatse, 2011:3). Acolatse is acutely aware of the disadvantages women face in relation to men when the marriages are failing, and they are constraints to stay with negligent or even abusive partners. This is due to the gendered face of the sources, and assumed reasons for marital conflict (Acolatse, 2011:3). She laments that women in Ghana, Nigeria and Togo bear the covert expectation that wives are the custodians and sustainers of the relationship, and thus are often counselled to endure, live up to scriptural mandate claiming from a theological perspective that God will honour the

woman's unquestioned obedience and turn the marriage around. She concludes that no substantive spiritual growth has been derived from service and submission to a nonreciprocal relationship has been found to be theologically adequate and psychologically functional (Acolatse, 2011:3).

Hope and its Implications for Pastoral Theology Care and Counselling

In her article titled Hope and God as Good-Enough Mother: The Development of Hope in Job, Acolatse discusses the development of hope in Job (primordial human) through his trials as identified with the development strides of an infant who navigates the tensions of trust vs mistrust and finds hope rather than despair due to the environment creates by God as a "good-enough mother." She examines the dynamics at play in Job and God's relationship, and necessity of hope and suggests the implications for pastoral theology care and counselling (Acolatse, 2013:1). In the paper, Acolatse applies the Object Relations theory (ORT) in interpreting the book of Job with a view of exposing the psychological and theological issues raised in the book with regard to hope, and with the formation of the self in relation to the "primary other." Object Relation Theory is a useful psychological theory that allows for an exploration of parallels between Job's view of God and an infant's conception of mother or primary care giver. It sees the development of the self as occurring in three phases; the infant-mother/primary caregiver dyad/symbiosis; the second stage is the separation and individuation stage characterised by relative independence and the building up of hope (Acolatse, 2013:6-7). Acolatse notes that "in fact, the dynamics at play in the dyadic relationship between the infant and the good-enough mother is one that corresponds to Job's relationship with God. At the end of Job's story, we observe the epitome of hope, which is the litmus test, if you will of good-enough mothering. Applying this to pastoral care, Acolatse states that hope is central to the life and particularly the task of faithful Christian living and care-giving (Acolatse, 2013:10).

Holistic Pastoral Counselling

In her 2014 book, *For Freedom or Bondage? A Critique of African Pastoral Practices*, published by William B. Eerdmans in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Acolatse makes a critique of African pastoral practices. She argues that

Christian pastoral practices in many African churches include Western perspectives from Barth's theological anthropology and Jung's analytical psychology. She interrogates problematic cultural narratives and analyses how they play on both care seekers and care givers. She advises that in order to heal holistically the pastoral counsellor has to pay attention to all the components of the human person.

Pastoral Diagnosis

Acolatse's second major book is *Powers, Principalities and the Spirit: Biblical Realism in Africa and the West* also published by William B. Eerdmans, in 2018. It is a follow up on her book on *For Freedom or Bondage* (2014). Acolatse explores the West and African perspectives, using the case of Ghana. She analyses views on attitudes towards supernatural powers and principalities and the difference between the church of the West and the South. In this work, Acolatse tries to bridge the gap between hermeneutics between the West and its theological heritage. The book tries to construct a Christian therapeutic model which draws from the worldview and life experiences of the Africans and yet transcends its context.

Acolatse's understanding of pastoral diagnosis for care and counselling is situated withing the Independent Evangelical/ Charismatic Churches (IECC). She uses this as a base to study current pastoral practice in Ghana Independent Charismatic Churches. Acolatse posits that methods of healing are from African Traditional Religion (ATR) rather than from the Word of God. Using special theological intervention, pastors do everything with the influence of the spirit world. These overlooks hidden psychological issues and as such does not help the care seekers. It distracts people's psyche as they are dismissed as either do not have enough faith or God has failed them. In the work Acolatse examines Ghanaian pastoral counselling from a theological and pastoral perspective (and argues that) its basic assumptions about human beings and its methods are inadequate from a Christian perspective. She explores the ATR and its effects on African Christological Anthropology. African cosmology she says affects African theology a lot (Acolatse, 2014:20).

Acolatse (2014:3) uses the Church in Ghana as a window into contemporary African pastoral practice. She identifies three main church denominations in order of age: the oldest is historic/missionary churches

tied to colonisation, firstly, the Anglican, Basel mission, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and the Roman Catholic. They proclaimed a gospel in Western garb with a foreign worship experience to Africans. Emphasis was more cerebral and verbal rather than celebrative and symbolic. In times of crisis these Africans fall back on African Traditional Religions. Eventually groups formed and broke away to form African Independent Churches (AIC) in the 20th century. Secondly, this gradually produced syncretism of Christianity and African Traditional Religions. These Christians are baptised and confirmed in the church but daily are far from doctrine and sacred scriptures. Thirdly, the Independent Evangelical/Charismatic Churches (late 1960s). These were developed from house fellowships in order to study the scriptures more. They believe a lot in and love to practice speaking in tongues. Lamin Sanneh concurs with this sequence of the development of churches in Ghana (Sanneh, 1983:107). Acolatse (2014:20) focuses on them because first, they are growing more rapidly than the historic churches. Also, Pobee observed that the AIC represented an indigenizing moment in African Christianity (Pobee, 1991:10). Acolatse (2014:7-8) observes that the cosmology of African Traditional Religion influences these churches' practices more than the saving grace of Jesus Christ; they mistake youthful exuberance for the presence of the spirit-given that during prayer people jump, shout and fall. Second, the historic churches are losing members to them because it is believed that the African Independent Churches are the future of the country (and continent). Bediako affirms that they are in fact indicating the trend and direction of African Christianity (1995:113).

For methodology, Acolatse applied questionnaire to pastors and attended church services (participant observation) and had conversations with pastors. She noted who and how the pastor selected people for counselling and deliverance. Fifty pastors were interviewed: eight from historic churches; while thirty-eight from Evangelical Churches and four from parachurch organisations. In her findings, she discovered that "Christian anthropology is sufficient to accurately discern the complexity of needs that parishioner bring to their pastors" (Acolatse, 2014:20). In addition, these pastors need medical, psychological, spiritual training, for themselves and their assistants. During counselling sessions, counselees

are asked detailed questions which lay them almost nude before the pastor-counsellor. It then becomes very easy for anyone listening to the counselee to come to some assistance, let alone a pastor. She realised that all cases were considered spiritual. This gave the impression that spiritual forces exist outside the rule and there is power struggle between God and spiritual forces. These ideas are false, blasphemous and do not distinguish between God as Creator and spiritual powers as creatures. This gives the idea that Christianity in Ghana has yet to transcend its cultural moment. Acolatse applied Barthian theological anthropology. Using Barthian theology and Jungian psychology, Acolatse (2014:20) makes a distinction for theological issues to be treated theologically; while emotional issues should be handled psychologically. In addition, she tries to marry the two perspectives in addressing the complexity of spirituality.

One interesting finding is captured in Acolatse remarks that a lot of care seekers are women; why is it so? (Acolatse, 2014:21). Women are mostly observed to be the care seekers. In finding answers why. One need to realize that some African cultures and church traditions have placed more burdens on women that they are faced with so many challenges which include their physical and spiritual wellbeing. In this case the pastor or counsellor should connect both the theology and psychology in helping women who seek care. The Pastor should develop a Christianity that transcends cultural moments, especially for the Ghanaian community.

Acolatse seems to decolonize the Ghanaian community against Western traditional church. She acknowledges the African Independent churches which requires critical analysis to avoid syncretism. She upholds contextuality as a means to make meaning of the gospel. Whereas the Pastor should merge African cosmology and Christian theology to understand people's way of life. In this regard, I suggest Ghanaian Pastors and Theologians should find ways to understand the psychological and spiritual challenges of African women as related to African cosmology that seems to burden women and provide the necessary help they seek.

Pastors and counsellors should provide Christian theology that's against what the Western churches and African Traditional religion believes about God. What women require is a Christian theology that emphasizes relationship with the Trinitarian God and not just seeking God for healing, protection, provision, and so on. But the significance of the

power and message of the Cross should be brought to light and that the finished work of the crucified Christ covers all the help that African women seek.

Why are things explained spiritually, even clinical cases? This makes Acolatse ask further questions: In all this, where is the place of the sovereignty of God? What role does the efficacy of the cross play? What is the meaning of Christian discipleship, and so on? In response, Acolatse diagnosed people's need for freedom, whose gotten through group prayers with efficacy coming from God and not from any person or the group. Conclusions drawn are that Jesus has power over Satan and will always do. Anyone who believes and keeps his word will heal in his name. Acolatse (2018:5) makes strong statements like "African Christianity has yet to truly transcend its cultural moment." She notes further that to attain/achieve this, one needs "a more complete biblical anthropology that reflects a more Christological approach". She finds Christological theology in Karl Barth, since his approach meets her African notions properly lived. She notes that Barth takes three dimensions: God, self and others and relates to one another and to God who created us in the divine image of Father, Son and Spirit.

Applying her findings to Pastoral care pervades Acolatse's writings. As a pastoral counsellor, Acolatse (2014:81) describes that Ghanaian pastoral counselling today is a mixture of African Traditional Religions (ATR), cosmology from the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT), which authenticates the people's worldview. The world is portrayed as full of evil and Jesus comes with overwhelming power to subdue it. A pertinent question could then be asked: How can Ghanaians be set free from this fear and get the hope Jesus offers? Acolatse uses Karl Barth to present handy responses: **a)** African Christians seek to understand self through the scriptures. This understanding has to strip itself of the fear that comes from the ATR. **b)** Barth has ordered a relationship between theology and culture and his theology is closely allied with the practices of the Church (Acolatse, 2014:81). His discussion on human's true nature has important implications for pastoral counselling in the African context. The blend of theology and culture has to be smooth before the pastoral counselling could be effective.

Analytical Psychology

Acolatse begins her understanding of analytical psychology by defining cosmology as the worldview and way of responding to crises. She analyses psychical aspects of the causes of bondage. Africa has a high religious worldview. In order for the gospel to be meaningful it must be contextualised. African cosmology should go hand in hand with its Christian theology. That is when the African can truly live out its Christian life in the context of Africa and as an African (Acolatse, 2014:38).

Ghanaian Cosmology is seen vis-à-vis the Gospel. Here Acolatse uses worldview and cosmology interchangeably to mean “the deep underlying structure and logic of a people’s way of living in the world” (Acolatse, 2014:38). The Anlo and Akan people of Ghana make her main focus here. How does their worldview affect pastoral theology, analytical psychology and consequently counselling? The pastor needs first of all to be inserted in the culture and then with the understanding of the people’s way of life and psyche h/she will be able to give the necessary care needed.

The Anlo and Akan Cosmology as Basis for Pastoral Care

Acolatse traces the Anlo and Akan Cosmology to ascertain the similarities and differences in their worldviews. The Ewe (Anlo) are about seven million in population; and they could be found in Ghana, Togo and Benin. They believe in a hierarchy of beings: “a personal Supreme-Creator- personal spirit powers- human ancestral spirits and an impersonal all-pervasive power” (Acolatse, 2018:39). She compares this world view to that of the Akan. This covers Ghana and Ivory Coast. There are about fifteen subgroups but they have a common ancestry. The Akan believe in a Supreme Being-Creator and a universe full of spirits. The Supreme Being is so far out that could only be reached by intermediaries – the pantheon of gods or sons of the Supreme Being or minor deities (Acolatse, 2014:57). The Ewe and Akan have different names for God, Mawu Lisa and Nyame, respectively, however, the Ewe supreme being is both male and female (Acolatse, 2018:39). The Supreme Being is so far out that could only be reached by intermediaries – the pantheon of gods or sons of the Supreme Being or minor deities (Acolatse, 2014:57). Acolatse (2018:40) avers that both the Ewe and Akan believe in spirit beings that are

active and infiltrate the life of the community. This way, they affect individual and community lives. Worship in the community is communal and ritualistic; while sacrifice and prayer are important. Similarly, the Ghanaian-Christian bath is carried out at the beach at dawn for individual members of the community (Independent Churches). Acolatse sees salvation as material wellbeing, with peace as a sure sign of salvation: *nnut*; (*anlo*) *fafa* and *ahuntor* (*akan*)- ‘cool, calm body’ whose quietude spills over. To counter the malevolent spirits, Acolatse (2014:48) notes that there is belief in forces that shows up in magic, medicine, sorcery and witchcraft. Prevalent is the belief that witches need a family member in order to attack the family as the saying goes, “something that bites you must come from your cloth”. Acolatse (2014:48) relates that these beliefs influence pastoral counselling making it purely psychic or somatic issues are treated spiritually. This can be and is often detrimental to the care seeker. She further state that the great preaching of prosperity gospel makes “Christians attribute any failure to possible demonic activity” (Acolatse, 2014:57). The people seek antidotes to witchcraft in the form of herbal medicines. There is also the ‘Christian version’ of these antidotes in anointing. Prayer and fasting are accompanied by anointing in severe cases.

Acolatse (2014:145) opines that a Jungian perspective of the African theological anthropology discloses that it is not every problem that is in the psychic. This analytical psychological theory is guided by the understanding of the archetype. Dreams can manifest patterns in myths and fairy tales in diverse cultures. They are fairly universal and Jung calls them collective unconscious. Acolatse cites Jung who says further “that the psyche in its natural state tends toward wholeness...each individual strives toward becoming whole, individuated, undivided” (Acolatse, 2014:145).

Jung’s Paradigm for Wholeness of the Self within Christianity

Acolatse (2014:161-162) addresses African anthropology in the light of Jungian analytical psychology stating that therapy is to help one maintain a balance necessary for wholeness. She argues that when an emotion is suppressed consciously or unconsciously, it manifests in some other way. That could be why some counselees do not get immediate solution to their problems, or at all. It is pertinent therefore that problems be

properly diagnosed so an appropriate solution could be rendered. Psychology and religion are to bring wholeness to people but they approach this wholeness through different methods and manners, African pastoral theology should bring about this collaboration (Acolatse, 2014:160). Acolatse argues further that when we offer only theological explanations for paranormal behaviors then parishioners naturally expect a spiritual cure. In the present African context, where pastors address paranormal phenomena from a theological perspective, pain, doubt and sometimes confusion arise when prayers for a cure go unanswered. This pain grows more acute when people assume that the individuals seeking a cure do not have enough faith to receive the required healing or that sin in their lives causes their ailment (Acolatse, 2014:155).

Possession States and Other Paranormal Behaviour

Acolatse identifies that “Some of the phenomena generally termed possession are actually altered state of consciousness” (as Acolatse quotes Shuster, 2014:187). Different churches approach demon possession differently: Independent Evangelical Churches perform rhythmic dancing, drugs, drumming, hyperventilation to heal the possessed; while Roman Catholic, Anglican, African Independent Churches burn incense (with hallucinogenic properties). Apart from interventions in churches, Acolatse identifies that some Ghanaian meals contain spices which, when inhaled can induce the brain to manifest signs of possession. She adds that loud music could result in extreme forms of behavior; some people by mere watching can tend to behave like the possessed (Acolatse, 2014:188). Acolatse further observes that “Sometimes the suggestion of an individual that he may be possessed by a demon seems to induce the possession state” (Acolatse, 2014:189). She also notes that at times “whether exorcism will work or not sometimes depends finally on whether the individual wants to be cured” (Acolatse, 2014:189). Thoughts are called into being and what people think are believed to happen (to them or to others).

Acolatse's Views on African Christian and Pastoral Counselling

At present pastoral counselling understands that humans are body, soul and spirit. Issues about humans pass through the spirit and pass to the body and soul. Independent Evangelical churches believe deeply in this and it plays on their interpretation of scripture. They believe that Jesus understood diseases as spiritual problems thus needing spiritual interventions (Acolatse, 2014:111). The pastor then sees the need to link biblical worldview to African worldview. But not all problems go away with exorcism and this makes the care seeker dependent and on intense search for the correct “man of God”. Care seekers then have to be careful to avoid evil spirits who seem to be everywhere. Since the Bible has not a single cosmology African Christians should rather see in it the liberating message for pastoral practice.

She laments that Evangelical Christians continue to believe that willingly and unwillingly Africans participate in the sins of their ancestors (Acolatse, 2014:142). Such beliefs assume that it takes a special grace by a special pastor to deliver one from this. One wonders if baptism in Jesus Christ is not enough to deal with and take care of this. These evangelical Christians misquote Mark 9:29 and Matthew 17:20, taking it out of context and using it as support. For Acolatse, Christians using Jeremiah 31:29-30 should rise to their individual responsibilities because each person has a personal question to answer (cf. Ezek. 18:1-32). If the New Testament Gentiles whose culture resembles the Africans’ did not have the same problem, why do the Africans have? Is their demon more powerful than the New Testament Gentiles’ demon?

Acolatse (2018:192) identifies similarities between Biblical and African worldviews, as believed by pastors and parishioners. Such affinities require that attention should be paid to each component of the human being in pastoral practice. Acolatse elucidates the point thus:

What the church in Africa needs therefore, is a conceptual framework with which to rene and sharpen its theological anthropology, so that instead of supporting a cosmology that perpetuates a climate of fear and bondage, pastoral theology might better bring the promised freedom and healing of Christ to ailing people (2018, 192-193).

Acolatse (2018:197) goes ahead to give a theoretical framework for counselling. She asserts that the efficacy of the redemptive work of Christ depends on the power and integrity of the God who redeems rather than on the faith of the care seeker/a parishioner (see Gal 3:29 and Eph 2:6-8). For her, God calls all believers to be in relationship with the Trinity. She notes that “If human beings are besouled bodies and embodied souls undergirded by God’s Spirit, then...it would be preposterous even to suggest that evil spiritual powers can affect human beings through their spirit”. Acolatse (2018:197) contests that if they understood this, pastoral counsellors would not base their diagnosis entirely on spiritual causes; they would search for psychic and somatic causes also. The finished work of Jesus shown forth in the Christ-event and its implication for our yesterday, today and tomorrow is manifest in Barth’s theological anthropology (see Matt. 5:45; Rom 5:8).

Main Theological Contribution of Acolatse

Professor Esther Acolatse’s main purpose in her works is to provide a guide towards pastoral counselling. From her experience of culture and case study she creates an aid and a dash board for present and future prospective pastoral counsellors. She advocates the awareness of the wholeness of the human person; not just the spiritual aspect. She advises that the pastoral counsellor should find out the current trends and apply an appropriate method in order to help better.

Also, Acolatse’s contribution can be relevant to the universal church that Christian theology should transcend culture in as much we all come from different cultures. The church is one and the goal for Christian theology should be centered on relationship with the Trinitarian God. It may be a difficult task but the meaning of the vicarious death of Christ on the Cross grants victory to relate with the Trinitarian God and to find help that Christians need in an oppressive world.

CONCLUSION

The work has attempted to show the contribution of Esther Acolatse to Liberation theology. It situates the Matriarch within the first generation of African Women theologians who came together to form the Circle. The paper

has established that the focused on Acolatse's diagnosis of pastoral counselling in Africa using Ghana as a case study. There is an in-depth study of theological and psychological perspectives of the situation. Looking at Acolatse's profile, it gets clear that she is truly African, Christian, with a wide experience especially in the United States of America. In her writings, Acolatse underscores that soul-care therapy suggests that care-givers must understand the religious context of the care seeker and in care-giving, they do not need to alienate the care-seeker from this background. Also, her research on pastoral care to men and women in marital conflict suggests that no substantive spiritual growth has been derived from service and submission to a nonreciprocal relationship. Such relationship is neither theologically adequate nor psychologically functional. Also, from the survey of different pastors and parishioners interviewed, Acolatse concluded that theological anthropology and analytical psychology placed side by side with the Bible and African Traditional Religions further disclose the African worldview. This is embedded in the culture and cosmology. Also, the faith of the individual, and the power of God together play a very important part in a counselee's wellbeing or not. One therefore, has to be truly African and Christian; be attuned to one's components of body, soul and spirit in order for the pastoral counselling to be effective. In this case, the fear of demons, other less powers like one's sins weighing one down and causing one's sickness are overpowered. Jesus Christ then becomes seen and affirmed as the only super power for one's needs. Acolatse suggests that every care-giver/counsellor should be armed with Barth's theological anthropology and Jung's analytical psychology, so as to meet the needs of care seekers. With these they have an indispensable conceptual map to diagnose and bring healing to troubled persons. Pastors should realise that diagnostic tools are mere guidelines and should be used as such.

REFERENCES

- Acolatse EEE (2002). *Cosmology and Pastoral Diagnoses: A Psycho-theological Anthropology for Pastoral Counselling in Ghana*. Princeton Theological Seminary.
- Acolatse EEE et al. (2010). *Pastoral Bearings: Lived Religion and Pastoral Theology*. Lexington: Lexington Books.

- Acolatse EEE (2011) Christian Divorce Counselling in West Africa: Seeking Wholeness through Reformed Theology and Jungian Dreamwork. In *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 21(1), 2-1-2-18.
- Acolatse EEE (2011). All in the Family: Recasting Religious Pluralism Through African Contextuality. *Religious Diversity and Conflict* 15, 261.
- Acolatse EEE (2013) Hope and God as Good-Enough Mother: The Development of Hope in Job. *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 23(2), 5-1-5-22. DOI: 10.117/jpt.2013.23.2.006.
- Acolatse EEE (2014a). *For Freedom or Bondage? A Critique of African Pastoral Practices*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans.
- Acolatse EEE (2014b). What is Theological About Practical Theology? Towards a Pastoral Hermeneutic of Primal Speech. *Practical Theology* 7(3), 205-220.
- Acolatse EEE (2014). Culture of War, Violence, and Sexual Assault in the Military: An Ethic of Compromise? *Journal of Pastoral Theology*. Taylor and Francis 24(1), 4-29 (<http://doi.org/10.1179/jpt.2014.24/1.004>).
- Acolatse EEE (2018). *Powers, Principalities and the Spirit: Biblical Realism in Africa and the West*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans.
- Acolatse EEE (2020). Interview of Dr Emmanuel Evans-Anfom. *Journal of African Christian Biography* 5(3), 39-45.
- Barth K (1975). *Church Dogmatics*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Bediako K (1995). *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hick J & Knitter PF (eds) (1987). *Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic theology of Religions*. Maryknoll/NY: Orbis Books.
- Pobee JS (1991). African instituted (Independent) Churches. In *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. World Council of Churches: W.M. Eerdmans.
- Sanneh L (1983). *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*. Maryknoll/NY: Orbis-Books.