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25 Triumphalist-futurity theologies in Africa

An essay in honour of Ezra Chitando

Julius Gathogo

Abstract

Triumphalist-futurity theologies in the twenty-first century cannot be viewed simply as American prosperity theologies of success and self-esteem, as the former goes beyond the concerns of the latter. Rather, they address the African agenda from an all-embracing perspective, a phenomenon that cuts across denominational divides. Seen as one of the leading African voices, Professor Ezra Chitando comes out as the proverbial Giraffe that is able to see far and caution the other bona fide members of the 'jungle' to escape the emerging 'fires' and keep hope buzzing with a triumphalist futurity in mind. In this treatise, I argue that despite the lack of 'confession', Chitando is within the paradigm of triumphalist-futurity perspective, as he addresses the African agenda with great urgency and confidence. A review of Chitando's works will demonstrate that the twenty-first century trajectory in theo-social discourses is hypothetically bending towards triumphalist-futurity motif. Is this an Afro-optimism trend that is informing the current trends, and is this the 'ideal' hour for this? Do they have the capacity to act contextually and eventually deliver the promise? Methodologically, this write-up does not focus on Chitando as a person, rather, it strives to survey the various trends that agree with his overall motif in order to understand triumphalist-futurity theologies in Africa.

Keywords: Ezra Chitando, Triumphant theologies, trends in African theologies

Introduction

Besides his gallant efforts to reconstruct masculinity, Chitando comes out strongly in other themes that demonstrate the African agenda of the twenty-first century, which revolves around futurity and triumphalism. In using the terms 'futurity and triumphalism', I am referring to the quality and prospects of Africa striving to remake itself; as in the case of the Psalmist (68:31) who looked forward to an "Ethiopia [Africa that would]

soon stretch forth her hands unto God” and usher in a better world. This agenda of remaking Africa, as seen in African scholarship, is consciously journeyed from a holistic perspective, a phenomenon that admits and identifies the challenges and prospects of the region. It means that African scholars in religion and theology, and other disciplines, are indicatively striving to convert African challenges into opportunities that will remake a better world. Within the triumphalist-futurity motif of remaking Africa, Chitando’s works addresses diverse concerns, ranging from history, culture, music, theology, to the phenomenology(ies) of religion. His role as a theology consultant with the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAA), of the World Council of Churches (WCC), is another major step in promoting the African agenda and its diverse concerns, that includes pandemics. Certainly, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) scare has demonstrated the magnitude of pandemics as serious concerns that will always need well-read and passionate consultants like Chitando (Gathogo, 2022a). Among the themes that are well captured in his works are: Women and leadership, Gospel music, pandemics and hope for Africa, religion and development, theology and religion in times of crisis, religion and inequality in Africa, value of African indigenous resources, sustainable development in Africa, health rights and religion, politics and music, religion and climate change, transformative masculinities, and Coronavirus in Africa (Chitando, 2023). Chitando (2023) also addresses the themes of sexuality and religion, ecology of human rights, human diversity in the face of HIV, Ubuntu theology, race and sexuality, Christianity and queer film, religion and security, healing and reconciliation, bible and gender troubles in Africa, Zimbabwe-African religions, Africanizing the discourses on homosexuality, multiplying in African initiated churches, theology of fruitfulness, Pentecostalism and masculinities, methodology in the study of religion, and reconstruction and identity among others (Chitando, 2023). Chitando has also authored and co-edited books on: *Redemptive masculinities* (2012), *Troubled but not destroyed* (2009), *Acting in Hope* (2007a), *Living with hope* (2007b), *Singing culture: A Study of Gospel music in Zimbabwe* (2002), *Politics and religion* (2020a), and *Religion and development in Africa* (2020b), among other futuristic themes. In all these works, he expresses his faith in overcoming Africa’s inherent challenges. Hence, like most of his contemporaries, he addresses the African agenda from a triumphalist-futurity perspective.

In Chitando's *Living with hope* (2007b) and *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV and AIDS* (2007a), he expresses his conviction that Africa will overcome the worst pandemic in human history. This promise will be delivered, as churches appreciate the significance of working with men as critical partners in addressing troubled masculinities. Can men use their masculinities in a manner that will help in erasing HIV & AIDS rather than worsen the situation? This afro-optimist approach is also reiterated in his other publications as in the case of his research article on: "A new man for a new era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, masculinities and HIV pandemic" (Chitando, 2007c). In this, he promotes his futuristic and/or triumphant approach when he strongly argues that mitigating factors such as patriarchy, demeaning ideologies against women – including stereotypes, poor language use, idiomatic and general references will give way to usher in promising and a healthy society. In his book chapter on "Religious Ethics, HIV and AIDS and Masculinities in Southern Africa," Chitando (2008) encourages men's solidarity with women as the panacea for transformation of troubling masculinities that threatens our co-existence. This he does by methodologically drawing from both the African indigenous religion and the Christian faith, a phenomenon where a dialogical approach is utilized in their bid to transform a given society.

An examination of the overall themes inherent in Chitando's (2023) works reveal that his approach is futuristic, hopeful, realistic, urgent, and sometimes radical. He views the envisaged change as necessarily demanding a radical approach, a phenomenon that is certainly triumphalist futurity in motif. This idea of radical approaches in African scholarship has been in the African market, albeit in different perspectives, since the early 1970s. For in as early as 1972, Samuel Gakuhi Kibicho (1932-2012) successfully demonstrated that "there is radical continuity in African religion even when it interacts with the Christian faith" (Gathogo, 2017:118). Chitando's (2023) uniqueness and originality however is in his emphasis on radical change in our handling of diverse concerns, as in the case of masculinity; and indeed, the radical deconstruction of masculinity in order to usher in a more progressive society. Another recurrent theme in Chitando's (2023) works is in reference to his belief that Africanization holds a future for better religio-cultural systems in Africa. This makes him an outstanding believer in African resources as critical raw materials for Christianity and general survival, just as John Mbiti (1969) saw it earlier. Chitando however goes beyond this with his triumphalist-futurity motif

that appears more urgent than in Mbiti's (1969) case. A reading of Chitando works, in some areas, especially in his passionate bid to deconstruct masculinity and usher in gender justice for societal health, makes him a 'radical reformer' of our times. It is like Chitando (2023) is telling his readers: "Look here fellow African scholars! Our house is on fire. Our masculinities are set on the wrong premise. Let us swing into action and change it today, we cannot afford to wait. Things are bad but transforming troubling masculinities will repair the damage now." This applies in most of his thematic write-ups. The urgency to fix the myriad of problems facing Africa are clearly enumerated in his works; a phenomenon that is largely seen in African scholarship in the twenty-first century.

In Chitando's (2023) works, Africa will overcome her present challenges; and is not at crossroads; neither is it suffering from ideological bankruptcy. In Chitando's (2023) view, Africa is not under confusion nor has it lost her direction. A major turning point for Africa is thus sounded in Chitando's works. Jesse Mugambi (1995:161) appears to express this triumphalist-futurity perspective when he noted thus:

In Africa today, we are in great need of hope. Despite all the very demoralizing and frustrating propaganda, we need to affirm that tomorrow need not be like yesterday. Today, in faith we can commit ourselves to work for a better tomorrow, knowing that with God nothing is impossible. ... We are witnessing events in Africa and elsewhere which we dared not anticipate only a few years ago. We dare affirm that since the God we worship is the creator and the director of all human history, tomorrow need not be like yesterday. In God's plan, there is nothing special about being powerful or being powerless. The most powerful can lose their power, and the powerless can be empowered by God's will. But this is possible only if love and hope are continually cemented by faith.

As with other scholars of religion and theology in Africa, Chitando (2023) begins by identifying the problem and/or spotting out the background of the problem. In learning from his works, Africa's triumphalist-futurity theologies begin by boldly accepting contextual needs and concerns (Gathogo, 2018; Mugambi, 1995), and subsequently employs local resources in their bid to address identifiable gaping holes. Mugambi (1995:160) pinpoints the African challenges when he states thus:

Africa today is portrayed in all the mass communication media in the whole world as a continent which is in deep crises, crises from which we are told, it cannot recover. It is faced with a food deficit;

it is the [hungriest] continent in the world. It is faced with a debt crisis; next to South America it is the most indebted continent. It has the highest level of illiteracy in the world and half of the world's refugees are Africans. Yet Africa is also portrayed as the most religious continent in the world. ... Is this religiosity authentic and genuine, or is it superstition arising from despair? ... Hope is a psychological necessity for the healthy maintenance of human community and individuality. Without hope, life cannot be sustained. Hope makes all the difference.

Beyond Africa, Martin Luther King Jr., (quoted in Gathogo, 2001:90), the African American Civil Rights leader of the 1960s, expressed his triumphalist-futurity approach to the black concerns of the time when he said, thus:

I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere [Africa inclusive] can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe what self-centred men [and women] have torn down, other centred men [and women] can build up. I still believe that one day humankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive good will proclaim the rule of the land. 'And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid' [Mic. 4:4]. I still believe we shall overcome.

Futurity and triumphalism as socio-ecclesial concepts have been in Africa since 1888 when the Rev. Dr. Mojola Agbedi (1860-1917) defected from the American Baptist Church. Out of his afro-optimist conviction, he immediately founded his Native Baptist Church (now the First Baptist Church) in Lagos, Nigeria, which then appeared like an impossible mission (Gathogo, 2022b). By 1914 however, his church had more than twice as many adherents as the European missionary-dominated church that he had defected from. Born as David Brown Vincent on 10 April 1860 in Western Nigeria, he had great faith in African resources as the panacea for the African woes (Gathogo, 2022b). As early as the late 1800s, he was a great believer in the so-called Ethiopian prophecy and/or Ethiopianism which is rooted in Psalm 68:31 (which says, "Princes shall come forth out of Egypt; Ethiopia [Africa] shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God"). In a nutshell, Ethiopianism advocated for an Afro-centric Christianity which prioritizes the African agenda holistically. This embrace of African culture, and the quest for an African agenda, drove him to change his

name from David Brown Vincent to Mojola Agbedi in the 1880s (Gathogo, 2001:75-76). Chitando's (2023) work is in continuum with the above trajectories.

Singing from one hymn book?

As noted in Isabel Phiri & Julius Gathogo (2010:1), Africa in the 21st century "appears to be theologically singing out of one hymn book despite their varied melodies," which expresses plurality as God's economy for the world. Additionally, with analogous "concerns for all African theologies (African Women's Theology, African Theology, Black Theology, Theology of Reconstruction), Africa is set to rebuild its many walls without further theological balkanization or fragmentation" (Phiri & Gathogo, 2010:10-11) and indeed triumphalist-futurity as the driving motif are visible in their respective articulations. Further,

African theologians in the twenty-first century have all united to address the common challenges that the continent is grappling with. These concerns include HIV and AIDS, xenophobia, gender injustice, tribalism, poverty, moral regeneration, corruption, re-emerging forms of dictatorship, and global warming among others (Phiri & Gathogo, 2010:10-11).

Certainly, Africa in the twenty-first century is characterized by triumphalist-futurity theologies that strive to contextually and effectively deliver the promise, despite heresies seen among some oral theologies. In the case of African Women's theologies, their triumphant goal of deconstructing patriarchy in order to build a two-winged society of men and women is a triumphant agenda (Phiri 2004). Similarly, the goal of reconstruction theology is to deconstruct afro-pessimism and usher in Afro-optimism that will be critical in Africa's quest to rebuild the many broken walls. These broken bulwarks are visible as in the cases of ethnic and xenophobic walls, economic meltdown, gender disparities, and theological marginalization, among others. Seen from this perspective, these triumphalist-futurity agendas are specific, achievable, measurable and relevant (Farisani, 2003; Gathogo, 2008a). In sociology, an agent is an individual who engages with the social structure. Hence in seeking to deconstruct the superstructure of patriarchy, for instance, African women theologians are engaging pa-

triarchy as a social construct rather than as a biologically determined phenomenon (Phiri, 2004). This means that the battle must be won by appreciating the triumphalist-futuristic agenda of postcolonial Africa.

In turn, triumphalist-futurity theologies seek to go beyond the pains that are evident in African historiographies (refer to slavery, conquests, negative portrayals and labelling, betrayals, colonialism, neocolonialism) in order to usher in a fulfilled society that is exultant across the various life domains (Farisani, 2003; Phiri, 2004; Gathogo, 2008a). It endeavors to usher in an all-rounded society that puts emphasis on our common humanity and shared prosperity among other pursuits. The emphasis on Ubuntu (humane and caring) theologies in the last part of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century is a clear pointer to this (Gathogo, 2008b). Further, Pentecostalization and secularization of ecclesiastical discourses, irrespective of denominational orientation, could be informed by the quest for futurity and the resultant triumphalism in the vicissitude of life. David Bosch captures the historical reality of shifting paradigms when he says:

Small wonder that, particularly in the nineteenth century, the adjective poor was increasingly used to qualify the noun heathen...The patent needs of the poor heathen became one of the strongest arguments in favour of mission. The glory of God as missionary motive had first been superseded by the emphasis on his love. Now there was yet another shift in motivation – from the depth of God’s love to the depth of fallen humanity’s pitiable state. Love has deteriorated into patronizing charity (cited in Küng and Tracy, 1989:12).

Seen from this perspective, the victory of the cross, and the passion of Christ in overcoming the odds becomes a critical inspiration in the triumphant-futurity theologies. St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 27 that everything will be put under Christ resonates with the Psalmist’s (24:1) words that the earth is the LORD’S and everything else in the world, including people who live in it. This means that the supremacy of God over creation must be stamped in our daily discourses triumphantly. In acknowledging the triumph of the Cross of Christ, our understanding of the broadness of the kingdom of God over earthly rulers, cosmos, aesthetics, politics, economics, kinship, ethics, and our religious affiliations becomes evident.

Another notable observation is that Africa of the twenty-first century is largely characterized by the calls for relevant theologies, reconstruction,

new curriculum, better infrastructures, better education systems, better teaching and assessments, better economies, and better health facilities and administration. It is also characterized by focus on rejuvenated political and social systems, new approaches to environmental preservation, triumphant ecclesiology, and above all triumphant theologies that are geared towards problem solving (Phiri & Gathogo, 2010:10-11). In turn, triumphant theology refers to a broad phrase that incorporates the diverse African theological agendas of the twenty-first century; and this includes the concern for prosperity, poverty, ecology, reconstruction, gender justice, education, theological revisionism, indigenous wealth, terrorism, afro-Pentecostalism, and moral-ethical challenges among other concerns. To an extent, triumphalist-futurity theologies in post-colonial Africa are Christological in the sense that they acknowledge the triumph of the Cross of Christ, the future hope as seen in the act of resurrection, as the real starting point. And as St. Paul says on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:14ff:

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

In other words, the triumph of the cross, and the passion of Christ in overcoming the odds becomes a critical inspiration in the triumphalist-futurity theologies.

Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Africa's triumphalist-futurity theologies may draw some inspiration from the triumphal entry of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on what Christians know today as Palm Sunday. It took place on a Sunday before the crucifixion (John 12:1, 12). Indeed, the story of the triumphant entry is one of the few incidents in the life of Jesus which appears in both the Fourth Gospel (John 12:12-29) and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-40). Christians celebrate Palm Sunday as a recollection of this momentous occasion. As triumphalist-futurity theologies in the twenty-first century seek to overcome Afro-pessimism that has existed in tropical Africa and as their respective scholars get overwhelmed when addressing the myriad of problems befogging the tropical Africa, Jesus's twin acts of the triumphal entry to the city of Jerusalem and the act of resurrection are the key selling points. As a theological motif, triumphalist-futurity perspective goes beyond the diverse paradigms noted earlier, as the African agenda is addressed more urgently and/or optimistically, or is it radically as Chitando (2023) implies? Put differently, while theologies of liberation in Africa insist on the urgency of liberation; and while feminist theologies insist on the need to dismantle the superstructure of patriarchy, triumphalist-futurity theologies go beyond one specific agenda and addresses the broader mission of the church in Africa. In other words, triumphalist-futurity theologies take the context as the determinant scope for theology. It is the context that determines the method and area of research, as the agenda embedded in triumphalist-futurity motif is more urgent and 'radical' (Chitando, 2008). As such, triumphalist-futurity theologians do not seek to be experts in specific areas such as the New Testament, Old Testament, Pauline theology, Johannine literature, gender theology and so on; but rather, context and/or societal needs dictates the theological trajectory. Seen in this way, triumphalist-futurity theologies can be historical, and oral historical. They can also be in the form of storytelling, case studies, individual research, and can also be in the form of reflection on critical continental 'generalities' that affects the mission of Christ in Africa.

In line with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst tensions and threats (Matthew 21:1-17), triumphalist-futurity theologies are treatises of courage. This courage is exemplified in the way they confront contextual concerns such as societal morality, violence, reconstruction, liberation, food security, gender justice, education, African historiographies, Afro-

Pentecostalism, HIV & AIDS, ecology, cosmos, reconciliation, culture, politics, economics, and race equation among other concerns.

Through exegesis, we draw several lessons regarding Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem as recorded in both the Fourth Gospel (John 12:12-29) and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11-1-11; Luke 19:29-40). First, courage is the norm of theologizing and not an option. One cannot theologize aptly if the inner courage is lacking; and to theologize means going beyond words by swimming into the broad oceans of ideas and practice. Hence Jesus himself was courageous. As a matter of fact, his three years of action-oriented ministry were punctuated by tensions that obtained, and which did not blur the vision of remaking the world for the better. These tensions mounted as a result of his methodology that ushered in unique teachings that differed significantly with those of the Jewish teachers of the law. His teachings were contextually sensitive, triumphalist-futuristic, eschatological (a hybrid of realized and unrealized eschatology), and intellectually stimulating. Jesus's theological trajectory was largely revolutionary and transformative, as opposed to the transactional approaches of the Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, and the teachers of the law, among other groups. Such methodological considerations put him in direct confrontation with the status quo.

Equally, Jesus's miraculous healings on the Sabbath, his communing with sinners, and his other unorthodox theo-social activities further helped in building more tensions and confrontations with the religious leaders in Jerusalem (Gathogo, 2015). In the nature of things, his triumphal entry was the match that pulled the trigger that eventually led to his crucifixion, death, and the more triumphal resurrection. In other words, his triumphant entry was a grand match to the proverbial Lion's Den, a phenomenon that required courage of purpose. Certainly, critiques would wonder whether this was genuine courage or miscalculation altogether. As in the case of Aristotle (Gathogo, 2018), Jesus demonstrated that a courageous person does not fear the most fearful, harmful things of which death is the greatest.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 3.6, Aristotle noted that courage is the virtue, which is the mean state with regard to fear, and to a lesser extent, confidence. In light of this, Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem during the daytime which was riskier, rather than coming under the dark of the night; hence more discrete. He could have come, lodge in the city, and eventually curb the tension and anger of the religious leaders. Nevertheless, his courage would not have allowed it in any other way. As he entered the city, he could

see and hear people shouting: “Praise God for the Son of David! Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God in highest heaven!” (Matthew 21:8-9). As he made this triumphant entry, some of the people were walking ahead of him; others walked behind him; and were excitedly appreciating his earthly mission. As they advanced, they were met by a fresh crowd pouring forth from Jerusalem. Of the latter, St. John (12:12-29) records that they came out with Palm branches in their hands, as if to salute a King with the symbols of his triumph (compare Revelation 7:9). In a courageous defiance to the Pharisees who wanted him to rebuke his highly spirited multitude, Jesus responded: “If they keep quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!” (Luke 19:40). This courage gave him confidence to acknowledge the praise of the people. Comparatively, the courageous aspect in the triumphalist-futurity theologies gives it confidence to address our contemporary concerns. Hence Christological inspiration is a critical factor in the progression of triumphalist-futurity theologies.

A second major lesson that we can draw from Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, for triumphalist-futurity theologies in Africa of the 21st century, is the fact that he appealed to the inner person, the heart. Considering that the horse was a symbol of a warrior ready for battle, Jesus contrasted this by demonstrating that some methodologies had lost fashion, and an appeal to the heart rather than the might was the vogue. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, 3:16, noted: “I pray that out of the riches of His glory, he may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.” He develops the theme of the inner person as opposed to the physical person further in Romans 7: 22 when he says thus: “For in my inner being, I delight in God’s Law.” In learning from the Christological appeal to the heart, service to creation becomes a critical area.

Afro-Pentecostalism

Perhaps, emphasis on triumphalist-futurity theological trajectory is more visible in Afro-Pentecostalism than in the so-called missionary churches and their theologians. In my view, the money and wealth factor are major items that makes afro-Pentecostalism theology, which is triumphalist-futuristic in motif, distinct from the ‘conventional’ African theologies. Characteristically, their teaching on giving is more elaborate than in the case

of the mainline churches (read Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists etc). Their emphasis is that giving, especially tithing is a sure way of getting one's socio-spiritual breakthrough. This breakthrough can be in the form of healing, finance, marital or promotion in the working places and other favours from God. Biblical verses, such as Malachi 2, are elaborately expounded to build the case for life breakthroughs.

In particular, the triumphalist-futurity theology of the Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) on matters regarding money, wealth, and general prosperity is well defined. A case in point is Bishop Wilfred Lai, its Secretary General, and pioneer Kenya televangelists. He noted their church's position on matters regarding prosperity, thus:

You were created to succeed in everything... The Word of God does not allow you to be sick. God never intended you to be sick...You should never continue the way you are; where you are today is not where you should be. I refuse to be a pastor of people that are going nowhere, of sick people. I refuse to pastor you when you are sickly, that's not where you belong. I refuse to be a pastor of poor people (shouted twice) ...Jesus came for the poor, but didn't come to leave the poor [more] poor. He came to get the poor out of poverty (Lai cited in Gathogo, 2011:147).

Characteristically, these Pentecostal churches are exuberant in their mode of worship – a phenomenon which is spiced by lively dancing, sophisticated music gadgets with melodies akin to contemporary 'secular' music. The mode of delivering sermons is such that the pulpit is avoided or removed from the church altogether. The poignant and/or alluring preacher in his or her 'tailor-made' sermon appeals to the psychological as well as the material needs of the assembly. Due to his or her beguiling presentation, the preacher holds the audience captive for more than an hour. In appealing to vulnerable people in search of fulfilment in their lives, the emphasis on "God doing a new thing in our lives" (Gathogo, 2022d:1) is clearly evident in Afro-Pentecostalism. This is clearly addressed by Philip Jenkins (2002:128) who cites Richard Shaull thus: "in Pentecostalism, poor and broken people discover that what they read in the Gospels is happening now in their midst."

In view of this, the Pentecostal approach reflects basic principles of market capitalism – a phenomenon that is driven by demand of popular consumerism. In this model, what sells best is produced, packaged, and supplied. Being associated with America's self-esteem and prosperity theologies without an African touch smack of weakness on their part, as their

alien tag has, at times, worked against them. An authentic African theology, as in the case of Chitando (2023), need not appear like a foreign tune that is called out by the one who meets the costs for it. A theology whose focus is on material well-being stands on a crossroad as a myriad of challenges in tropical Africa are beyond material poverty. Interestingly, Gideon Githiga (2023), in his book: *Ethnocracy as the pitfall of democracy in Kenya*, argues strongly that the main challenge in Africa is not poverty but ethnocracy. Ethnocracy is seen as the tendency for leaders to favour their own kinship in running the government and in the redistribution of material resources, a phenomenon that breeds protests, general discontentment, poverty, quests for democracy, and at worst, violence. Githiga (2023:311) ends his book thus: “the fight against ethnocratic leadership is the third liberation which all the stakeholder groups must be part of.” In working out a triumphalist-futurity theology of Afro-Pentecostalism, an appreciation of the root cause of poverty of both laity and the clergy is a critical step forward.

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies will always insist on traditional methods of theologizing and/or engaging academia, namely specialization. They will view triumphalist-futurity theologians as scholars who provide mixed bag of theologies rather than appreciating speciality in designated areas in academia as the way to go. Such critiques will easily tend to ignore the fact that John Mbiti graduated with a PhD in New Testament (in 1960s) only to discover that his many years of studies abroad and his academic discourses were risking irrelevance if he did not address himself to the African context and its futuristic concerns (Gathogo, 2022c). He wrote generic books such *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), *Prayers for African Religion* (1975a), *Introduction to African Religion* (1975b) among others in order to address the context. Besides that, Mbiti’s academic prowess would have nosedived or faded altogether if he failed to honour the context and situation in theologizing. John Mbiti then founded African theology and especially the inculturation strand and became an authority (Gathogo, 2022c).

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies will always insist on traditional methods of theologizing and/or engaging academia, namely strict

insistence on the area of specialty rather than multidisciplinary perspectives of the twenty-first century. Chitando (2023) reaches out to the world of scholarship from a multidisciplinary perspective. Critiques may find triumphalist-futurity theologians as providing a non-specialist approach to theology, with some non-trained ‘readers of the Bible’ insisting on ‘deliverance’ as the key. On that account, they can be accused of lacking the scholarly discipline.

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies will need to recall that Thomas Aquinas was dismissed as a modernist by traditionalist (Augustinian) theologians. He was later ‘understood and his theology became universally acceptable.’ As Hans Küng remarks:

[Aquinas] was recalled from Paris by his own Dominican Order, eventually subjected to a formal condemnation as a representative of a ‘new theology’ by the competent ecclesiastical authorities in Paris and Oxford, but then given protection by his Order. It was only just before the outbreak of the Reformation that his *Summa Theologiae* won acceptance outside his Order: the first commentary on the whole *Summa* was that of Cardinal Cajetan, classical interpreter of Aquinas and opponent of Luther; and it was only Francisco de Vittoria, Father of Spanish scholasticism, who in 1526 introduced the Thomistic *Summa* as a textbook at the University of Salamanca; Louvain followed later with two professorships in Aquinas’ theology and seven-year courses on the *Summa theologiae*. Up to the present century (1924) 90 commentaries on the whole *Summa* had been published and 218 on its first part (Küng cited in Küng & Tracy, 1989:12).

In dealing with the critiques of new approaches, methodologies, or ideologies, it is critically important to always take into account the words of Thomas Kuhn, the father of the paradigm shifts:

The invention of other new theories regularly, and appropriately, evokes the same response (i.e., resistance) from some of the specialists on whose area of special competence they impinge. For these men (sic) the new theory implies a change in the rules governing the prior practice of normal science (Kuhn, 1962:7).

Again, the idea of triumphant theologies, a phenomenon where our theological research is geared towards problem-solving, and is contextually sensitive, needs a global appeal as learning has to be sourced across the oceans. Ubuntu (humane and reaching out to others) philosophy is certainly the major concept that drives Africa to learn from the world, just as

the obvious reciprocity is based. Further, as noted in Hans Küng, ideas start from somewhere or someone, after which it reaches out to the rest of the larger community. Küng states:

Not only in theology, but in natural science, a new model at first has only a few and generally younger advocates: Copernicus was 34 when he worked out the heliocentric system. Newton, the founder of classical physics, formulated the law of gravity when he was 23. Lavoisier, founder of modern chemistry, was 26 when he deposited with the secretary of the Académie Française his famous sealed testimony expressing his doubts about the dominant phlogiston theory. Einstein presented the special theory of relativity at the age of 26. Among theologians: Origen, the first scholar in Christendom to undertake methodical research, at the age of 18 took over successfully the Christian education work among intellectuals in Alexandria, which had been neglected after Clement's departure. Augustine was 32 at the time of his 'last' conversion and Aquinas was not yet 30 when he began in Paris his commentary on the sentences in the spirit of Aristotle. Luther was 34 when he published his theses on indulgences (Küng in Küng & Tracy, 1989:26).

Generally, African theologies and African philosophies have been dismissed in some quarters as non-existent, yet it is ironically said that Africa is the cradle of humanity. Isn't this a contradiction? To argue on the catholicity of theology, as opposed to context as a starting point in theology, is an error that has ruled the global market for some time. As noted in Gathogo (2008b:44),

[This] takes us back to our introductory definition In other words, is there any philosophy in the concept of *Ubuntu*? Can we talk of 'African philosophy'? Are Africans capable of philosophizing quite in the same way as we talk of Greek philosophy or Indian philosophy or Chinese or even European philosophy? Is the traditional African mind capable of philosophizing [and/or thinking theologically]? ...This debate however started over 200 years ago when the renowned German idealist, G.F. Hegel (1770-1831), in his famous *Philosophy of History* ignored Africa, as he [wrongly] argued that Africans were incapable of philosophizing [and/or thinking through issues of concern]. [However] there is no tenable logical basis for his polemical position, which denied [indigenous] Africans, philosophy, culture, history or even religion.

Further, if triumphalism is naively taken to mean the tendency to celebrate in a proud manner that is insensitive to 'others' then it can be seen as anti-Ubuntu (humane and sensitive to others' welfare). Nonetheless, triumphalist-futurity theologies are not about celebration for 'achievements so far made' but about theological discourses where future hope of overcoming odds in Africa is the key. Its futuristic dimensions implies that Africa, and its scholarship, is not celebrating the present but looking forward to a triumphant future.

Conclusion

The chapter set out to celebrate Chitando as a theo-socio-philosophical think tank in modern day Africa and a scholar who has contributed immensely in triumphalist-futurity theologies of Africa. By triumphalist it means that these are hopeful theologies that strive to address myriad of missiological themes and concerns so as to build and rebuild Africa. 'Futurity' refers to the vision of a better day ahead. In other words, Chitando, like other key theologians, tackles African concerns and/or the African agenda with confidence (triumphantly) for a better future. Likewise, Mugambi (1995:160) has insisted that Africa, despite its negative portrayal by mainstream media, needs to focus on a theology of hope. More than ever before Africa must focus on her future as "hope makes all the difference" (Mugambi, 1995:160). With Chitando handling critical themes such as troubled masculinities, troubled but not yet destroyed Africa, patriarchal challenges, HIV & AIDS, the COVID-19 pandemic, insecurity, race relations, and bad politics among others from the triumphalist-futurity perspective, he becomes a major source of reference in a continent that is caught between a rock and a hard place. Nevertheless, critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies of Africa may view them as merely hopeful without a candid plan of addressing the myriad of African challenges, noted above. There is the danger of being seen as employing "prosperity gospel" a phenomenon where we blindly embrace the "feel good" experience that lacks genuine relationship with God and contextual realities. As noted above, Chitando comes out as a realistic theologian and/or scholar of religion and history who propounds the African agenda with clarity, intellect, and from a well-informed position, hence he can be relied upon. His pan-African agenda is worth celebrating.

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