

**CHRISTIAN SERVICE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY**



**SALVATION IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: A
CRITICAL COMPARISON OF THE VIEWS OF JOHN MBITI
AND MERCY AMBA ODUYOYE**

THESIS

BY

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**Salvation in African Christian Theology: A Critical Comparison of
the views of John Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye**

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the requirements for the award of degree of Master of Arts in Christian Ministry
with Management**

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DECLARATION

YAW SARPONG TAWIAH, do hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research, except for sections for which references have been duly made, and to the best of my knowledge, no part of it has been presented do the University College or any other institution for the award of a degree.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of work to my wife and children, Mrs. Dorcas Sarpong Tawiah,
Nana Boateng, Akwasi Frimpong, Ewurabena Adutwunwaa and Nana Akua
Anokyewaa.

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ABSTRACT

John S. Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye have contributed much to theology in Africa. Their immense contributions to the formation of academic African theology cannot be underestimated. The interest of this study is in their theological reflections on salvation in African Christianity as presented in their published works. Mbiti and Oduyoye approach salvation from inculturation and feminist perspective respectively. The study seeks to find out the key features of John Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye views of Salvation and in what forms do the two views converge and diverge. Textual and conceptual analysis was used for the study. Primary attention was given to their published works as well as the works of their critics.

The finding of the study is that Mbiti and Oduyoye agrees on most aspects of salvation. Their differences are basically Oduyoye's additions from feminist perspectives. The two share a view of salvation that embraces deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God as well as deliverance from the spiritual oppression. They also agree that God, the father of Jesus Christ, whom African Christians worship, is not different from the God they had known in their pre-Christian religion.

However, while Mbiti focuses more on spiritual deliverance Oduyoye focuses on material impediments. For her, the African understanding of salvation as rooted in human rescue from material impediments must be maintained. But some African indigenous religious beliefs and practices, including some church practices that undermine human material well-being, especially the well-being of women, must be criticized and rejected. Central to Oduyoye agenda as a feminist liberation theologian is the critique of patriarchal tendencies in African Traditional Religion and Christianity.

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1.1 Background

John S. Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye have contributed much to theology in Africa. Their immense contributions to the formation of academic African theology cannot be underestimated. The interest of this study is in their theological reflections on salvation in African Christianity as presented in their published works.

Three main types of African Christian theology are liberation theology, inculturation theology and African women's theology, although the latter is often included under the rubric of liberation theology. Liberation theology approaches African economic and political struggles from a theological perspective. The inculturation approach seeks to integrate the Christian faith with African cultural life and thought forms. Mbiti and Mercy approach salvation from inculturation and feminist perspective respectively.¹

Salvation is the ultimate concern of all religions. In western Christian tradition, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it means deliverance of humankind by religious means from sin or evil and the attainment of eternal blessedness. However, all religions also have a belief that people must be saved from something: it can be salvation from sin, hell, danger, poverty and anything that is unpalatable within life.

¹Robert J. Schreiter (ed). *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991). Pp. 4-10.

Salvation is a common theme in the Hebrew Bible. Etymologically, the principal Hebrew term translated as ‘salvation’ is *yash*¹. It connotes an idea of deliverance from factors which constrain and confine. It is used in the Old Testament (OT) to refer to deliverance from disease, troubles and enemies. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, used *soteria* for salvation. It means deliverance or preservation. The verb *sozein* in the NT means both to save a man in the eternal sense, and to heal a man in the physical sense.

Salvation can be approached from three perspectives namely; exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Briefly, *exclusivist* approaches argue that salvation and/or truth is found only through an explicit knowledge and confession of Christ; *inclusivist* approaches argue that salvation/truth is found only in Christ but may be mediated “through non-Christian religions or philosophies apart from any explicit knowledge of him; and *pluralist* approaches see Christ as simply one means of salvation and truth among many others.

Mbiti’s conception of salvation in African Christianity is that salvation is wholeness. Human being is created as a physical and spiritual being. He needs to be saved both physically and spiritually. He notes that the presentation of salvation in the hands of overseas missionaries has not always struck this balance, and in many places it has stressed the spiritual dimension to the neglect of the physical.²

Within the framework of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, Bediako’s approach to salvation tends towards inclusivism, the gospel is saving truth, but that truth was

² John Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*, (New York: Heinemann 1969) pp. 29, 30.

known partially and savingly in the pre-Christian worship of African traditional religion. This is parallel to Bediako's understanding of the approaches of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria toward Greek philosophy.

1. 2 Statement of problem

Many African people still see Christianity as a foreign religion; the reason for this could be attributed to the fact that, the early missionaries in their quest to convert the African people into Christianity imposed their theology on the African people.

The early missionaries in propagating Christian doctrines failed to contextualize those doctrines for the African people to be able to identify themselves with the Christian doctrines.

This has resulted in the situation whereby many African people still see Christianity as a foreign religion.

1.3 Research question

What are the key features of John Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye views on salvation and in what forms do the two views converged and diverged?

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

a) To make an analytical study of the doctrine of salvation base on John Mbiti's and Mercy Amba Oduyoye,s view on salvation.

b) To examine how the doctrine of salvation in African theological discourse interact with the concepts of salvation in Western missionary theology.

1.5 Scope of the study

The study will be limited to the exploration of John Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye views on salvation. The study aims only to find out the similarities and dissimilarities between the two.

1.6 Methodology

The study is a textual and conceptual analysis. This was used to analysis the dissimilarities and similarities of John Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye,s views on salvation. The sources of data are secondary data from journal publications, books as well as other internet sources.

The material is examined and presented in four steps. The first step gives an account and analysis of concepts of salvation from different faith traditions, focusing. This requires a brief introduction on salvation from world religions and a description of salvation in Western theological discourse. A somewhat more detailed description of salvation from liberation, feminist and inculturation perspectives is also provided. These aspects are addressed on the basis of an overview of the available literature on the topic.

Secondly, I describe and analyse the view of John Mbiti on Salvation. This is done on the basis of a critical reading and analysis of his writings, with specific reference to

his explicit treatment of salvation and his views on the relationship between God and human beings.

Thirdly, the teaching of Mercy Oduyoye on salvation within the wider context of African Christian theology is presented. Fourthly, it deals with a brief overview of the available literature on this topic, with specific reference to the contributions by John Mbiti.

The final step offers a critical comparison of the positions of Mbiti and Oduyoye based on the descriptions above

1.7 Significance of the study

1. Findings from this study will serve as a reference material to other students and theologians pursuing similar studies.
2. It will also help the Christian community or the church to understand the concept of salvation within the African context. This will help them to transmit the gospel properly for a better understanding

1.8 Organisation structure of the work

The study is organized in five main chapters. Chapter one is general overview of the study. This consists of the introduction into the study, problem statement, objectives, scope of study, review of relevant literature and methodology of the study. Chapter two discusses salvation in African theological discourses. Chapters three and four focus on John Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye views on salvation from the African

Christian Theological perspective respectively. The fifth chapter, which is the conclusion, compares the two views to find out the similarities and dissimilarities. In the same chapter, response to Mbiti and Oduyoye view of salvation is also offered.

1.9 Salvation in traditional (Akan) Africa context: A review

African theologians argue that a biblical understanding of salvation can only make sense if it embraces their total worldview, both physical and spiritual. In the Akan context, Asamoah-Gyadu and Larbi respectively have made analyses of Akan Christian identification of Jesus as the *agenkwa*. In Larbi's analysis of the cognate term *nkwagye* (salvation), he notes that the term is made up of two words: *nkwa* and *gye*. *Nkwa* means life, vitality, health and happiness. *Gye* has several meanings, but when used in the salvific sense it denotes "rescue, retake, recapture, redeem, ransom, buy out of servitude; to release, to free, to deliver, to liberate, and to save".³

The *agyenkwa* is a powerful being; otherwise he cannot rescue and protect one from the powerful malevolent spirit beings: the *abayifo* (witches) and *adutofo*(sorcerers). The *agyenkwa* saves from danger and all perilous conditions also. He does not only save but also offers *banbo* (security). The term *agyenkwa* and its cognates convey concrete realities.

Larbi also points out that the concept of *agyenkwa* (saviour) becomes more important in the Akan context because of its dualistic worldview. The Akan worldview is divided into "two inter-penetrating and inseparable, yet distinguishable, parts" namely; the world of spirits and that of humans

³ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi. African Cosmology. www.org/cyberj10/larbi.html August 15.

Amongst the Akan, there is a belief in the multiplicity of spirits within the universe. The idea of the cosmic struggle is strongly imbedded in the Akan understanding of the nature of the universe.⁴

Amongst the Akan, the central focus of the religious exercises of every member is to harness power inherent in the spirit force for his or her own advantage. To be able to fulfil his or her aspirations in life, each member requires the “balance of power” in favour of the supplicant. This “tilting of cosmic power” for one’s own benefit or for the benefit of one’s community Larbi dubs “maintaining the cosmological balance”. The survival of human beings and their communities is in this way dependent upon the help given by superior powers. Therefore the way in which a human being relates to spirit forces is crucial to his or her ultimate well-being.⁵

Abundant life can only become available to human beings through the various forms of mediation. The saviour who acts as mediator, both rescues from danger and continues to protect the “rescued one” from danger. Thereby he makes it possible for that one to experience *nkwa*, that is, life in all its fullness, which embodies prosperity (*ahonyade*) and peace (*asomdwei*).

In this instance the notion of Jesus as saviour (*agyenkwa*) becomes meaningful to Akan Christians. Jesus as saviour answers the need for a saviour who rescues human beings from the threat of these malevolent spirits. Jesus therefore, provides a proper sanctuary for those seeking to resist the evil spirits.

⁴ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi. *African Cosmology*.www.org/cyberj10/larbi.html August 15.

⁵ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi. *African Cosmology*.www.org/cyberj10/larbi.html August 15.

The dramatic nature of some of the conversion testimonies of those who “convert” to Christianity explains not only why such old ways of life are seen as driven by supernatural powers, but also why believers are keen to invite potential converts to taste the superior might of Christ.⁶

It has been observed that African Christian understanding salvation correlates with an African cosmology. Jesus as saviour becomes relevant in the Ghanaian context where salvation connotes deliverance from evil and all misfortunes. As one becomes a Christian, it is believed that Satan is defeated by Jesus; otherwise one could not have left the former master to Christ who is now the new master. Thus on the whole the soteriology among African Christian theologians is both physical and spiritual.

⁶Asamoah-Gyadu. *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. (Accra: Christian Press, 2005), p. 135.

CHAPTER 2

SALVATION IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

Salvation generally means the act of saving, protecting, or preserving from the difficult situation one find oneself in. It is being saved or protected from harm or being saved or delivered from some dire situation. Christians, simply refer salvation to the deliverance, freedom or rescue from sin: its penalty, power and presence. Among the Christian religion come various movements or groups that look at salvation from various angles.

The theological view from the western theologians on salvation is that, it is the deliverance from sin and death to forgiveness and life⁷. This is achieved through repentance from one's sin and accepting Christ to be Lord over one's life. The western theology understanding of salvation stems from the fact that mankind is sinful right from birth, what they term as "original" sin. This inherited sin could be traced to Adam, who is the first mankind to be created on earth. The first sin he committed has affected every humankind that comes to the earth.

Western theologians' position is that all humankind is under sin, separated from God and lost. Humanity is a fallen race. The entire human race is lost without hope except for God's intervention to penetrate barriers and to provide a way for people to come to Him. Every person is born into a race that is under sin.⁸ They believe that the

⁷ Darrell W. Robinson. *The Doctrine of Salvation*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1992). P8

⁸Robinson. *The Doctrine of Salvation*, p8-9

consequence of this sin is death. Hence mankind needs deliverance from this sin and its consequences which is death and receives forgiveness and life which is eternal, that is life beyond here and now.

We have from the Christians again, the liberation movement which propagates the liberation theology. This began in Latin America in 1968. Their way of understanding salvation includes deliverance from physical conditions and social exclusion as well as the spiritual aspect and focus on the poor. To them salvation is not primarily in terms of life after death for the individual, but it is in terms of bringing about the kingdom of God: a social order where there will be equality for all. This is not to deny eternal life per se but it is to emphasize that eternal and the temporal “intersect”.⁹

The feminist movement also propagates the feminist theology. This theology is influenced by the liberation theology. To them salvation is having social freedom, most especially social freedom for women.¹⁰

2.2 Concepts of salvation in World Religions

Other religious bodies also have their understanding as to what salvation is? For example in Hinduism, salvation is called *Moksha*. Moksha is when an enlightened human being is freed from the cycle of life-and-death (the endless cycle of death and reincarnation) and comes into a state of completeness. He then becomes one with God.

⁹ Ron Rhodes.home.earthlink.net\uronrhodes|liberation.html. 14-10-2014

¹⁰ Patricia Hawley. *Desperate for Authenticity: A Critical Analysis of the feminist theology of Virginia Ramey Mullenkoff*, (Maryland: University Press of America. 2010). P102

To the Hindu there are four ways for one to achieve salvation, that is Moksha, the way of action: which involves carrying out certain religious ceremonies, duties and rites, the way of knowledge: requires using one's mind and philosophy to come to a complete comprehension of the universe, the way of devotion: requires an act of worship that is based upon one's love for God. One must bear in mind that in Hindu there are thousands of gods, and the last but not the least is the royal road: the use of meditation and yoga techniques. The Hindu salvation is based on what the Hindu does. It is through human works. ¹¹

In Islam salvation simply refers to the eventual entrance to heaven or paradise and escaping hell. This can be achieved on the basis of good works alone.¹² These works include doing honorable deeds plus keeping five requirements which is widely known as the five "pillars" of Islam. These are witnessing that there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet, (*shahadat*) ritual prayers five times daily (*salat*), alms giving (*zakat*), fasting during Ramadan (*saum*) and a pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). They believe that on the Day of Judgment Allah will have a set of scale to weigh one's good deeds against his bad deeds. Salvation is achieved by having more "good" deeds on one's account than "bad" ones, thus hoping to win Allah's favour.

The word salvation is not commonly used in Buddhism. This is because it is not a religion through which one is saved from inherited and/or acquired sins and their consequences as in the case of most religions.

¹¹ www.evangelical.us/hinduism.html

¹² Radicaltruth.net/learn/radicaltruth:christianity

In Buddhism sin is not an unconditioned phenomenon.¹³ Buddhism prefers using *nibbana* or *nirvana* which implies extinction, freedom, emancipation, liberation, release, deliverance etc. Nirvana can be understood on the basis of the Buddhist understanding of what they term as the four noble truths. These are that life means suffering: birth is suffering, death is suffering illness is suffering, presence of objects we dislike is suffering and separation is suffering. Again the origin of suffering is attachment. The third of this noble truths is that the cessation of suffering is attainable and lastly the belief that the path to this cessation of suffering is the four truth mentioned above. To the Buddhist the definite problem is that of suffering and the definite goal is the attainment of a state of non-attachment which prevail in the eternal bliss. This state is nirvana or nibbana which is the Buddhist concept of salvation.¹⁴

2.3 Salvation in African theological discourses

a) Liberation Theology Perspective on salvation

Father Angelbert Mveng (father) a Cameroonian Roman Catholic priest, who died in 1995 was one of the proponent of the African liberation theology movement. He was a strong critic of those forces responsible for the pauperization of the Cameroonian people in particular and African in general. According to him these forces had confined Africans to what he termed anthropological poverty “the kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being essence, and dignity of the human person.”¹⁵

¹³Radha Banerjee Sarkar. ignca.nic.in.>....>Articles by IGNCA officials>

¹⁴Radha Banerjee Sarkar. ignca.nic.in.>....>Articles by IGNCA officials>

¹⁵ Engel Mveng. *Impoverishment and Libation: A theological Approach for Africa and Third World” in Paths of African Theology*. Ed RosiniGibellini (Maryknoll,NY: Orbis Books 1994), p156

To him this poverty way of life makes people hopeless and useless and destroys communities. Jean – Marc Ela a fellow Roman Catholic priest who partner Mveng in the African liberation theology movement, is also concerned with this poverty and this has led him to place so much stress on the material realm that it seems to have become an end in itself in his theology.

Ela, as a Roman Catholic priest was assigned to work in one of the rural areas of northern Cameroon. In his quest to present God to the people there, he realized that the question of God had to be reformulated so that it becomes relevant to the situation pertaining to the people in that community. The question of God had to be about the relevance of God in a situation of poverty, injustice, oppression, famine and drought that characterizes their way of life.

In the final analysis Ela concluded that, the question of God had to be removed from the realm of the abstractly theological to the realm of anthropological where the nitty-gritty of life is lived.¹⁶

Ela concluded, as a result of the fact that, after observing the people in his parish, he realized a strong western domination over them. The people endure a life of hunger and desperation due to the fact that, they have replaced the production of food crops with cash crops which are sold for foreign exchange, making money for the multinational companies. The peasants are therefore left in hunger and desperation.

Ela could not come into terms as to how the peasants could survive in a context in which even their ability to provide for themselves has been hijacked by the

¹⁶Ela Jean-Marc. *African Cry* (Maryknoll.NY : Orbis Books, 1988.) p5

international economic system that goes to enriched the few at the expense of the many.

This necessitated Ela to come out with a social advocacy ministry that sought to correct this anomaly in order for these deprived villagers not to die of starvation. He advocated through this ministry that the land of the people, as in the case of Northern Cameroon, the rural area that he was assigned to work, should be used to cultivate food crops because they were the lifeline of these villagers instead of cash crops like cotton.

Ela came out to say that, this supposed to be the work of the church, ensuring the liberation of the African people from the domination of the West. Ela revealed that it is only in participating in this ministry which he called “the ministry of the granary” that the church participates in the cross of Christ which is located in a hidden way, among the poor of the Third World. In fact “today, the oppressed is Jesus Christ,”¹⁷ he claims.

This clearly reveals the liberation character of the understanding of salvation. Ela came out with a view that the theology in Africa has to be rethought in such a way that the church’s existence will be for the well-being of the oppressed people in Africa. According to Ela, the church cannot play this role if it sees its life as that of providing “visas for eternity”

¹⁷Jean-Marc Ela. *African Cry*. P7

He continued to say that as a matter of fact, a church that sees itself as soul-saving organization is not only practicing the faith counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but is also acting counter to African anthropology which, like biblical anthropology, asserts the concrete unity of body and soul, the spiritual and the material.¹⁸

It is on this score that Ela believes that, the western theology that was bequitted to us by the western missionaries on soteriology traced to Saint Augustine should be abandoned. Saint Augustine view on salvation is based on the originality of sin. The emphasis under this view is the salvation of souls from eternal damnation in hell. Ela believes this view has influence the western theology of salvation.

Ela insist that “salvation does not exist outside the world and history and outside service to the other,” for the gospel does not simply preach an eternal rest but announces joy and happiness for today.”¹⁹ He concluded that when Jesus talks of salvation, joy and happiness, he is not talking about the future but the present.

From all that have been said concerning Ela, he seems to agree with those with the inculturational view on the subject under review but still feels that the African should go the extra mile to talk about the liberation of the African people from the domination of the west, if the salvation message will be complete. To him the African inculturation theology must be balanced with a theology of liberation.

¹⁸Jean-Marc Ela. *African Cry*. P90

¹⁹Jean-Marc Ela. *African Cry*. P78

b) Feminist perspective on salvation

As already hinted in my introduction, the feminist approach to African theology is often included under the rubric of liberation theology. Under this section I will seek to examine the work of a Ghanaian known feminist theologian called Mercy Amba Oduyoye.

Mercy Oduyoye, coming from the inculturational point of view in the early stage of her theological career insisted the African Traditional Religion should be the primary lens through which Christian salvation must be understood in the African context. By so doing she, like other African inculturation theologians, wanted to show that there was an African worldview that should be taken seriously in theological reflections.

Mercy indicated in an article she wrote that salvation seems to be central to African religious beliefs and practices and therefore advocated that the doctrine of salvation should be the focus of African Christian theology. Mercy understanding of what salvation means is about rescue from individual and moral evil like racism, poverty and totalitarianism.²⁰

She asserts that because Africans recognize that life goes beyond the physical realms, the desire for salvation from evil forces which operate in the spiritual realm, is the yearning for what she called “life afterlife” that is the desire to have a closer relationship with what she refers to as Supreme Being, source of life, life force, or God.²¹

²⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *The Value of Africa Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices for African Theology in African Theology en Route* pg 109-16

²¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye. *Introducing African Women’s Theology*. (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press 2001)p40.

With this, Oduyoye is saying that, closer relationship with God is made manifested in the overcoming of certain struggles in one's physical life. For her the understanding of salvation by the African as rooted in human rescue from struggles or entanglement of one's physical life must be held on to, but some religious beliefs and practices by the African people including some church practices that undermine human material well-being, especially the well-being of women, must be criticized and rejected.

Mercy shares similar view with Ela, that on the issue of soteriology, the African inculturation theology must be balanced with a theology of liberation, especially the liberation of women. This to her is as a result of the fact that, there are some perceptions of the Christian faith which are not only oppressive to Africans in general but to women in particular. According to Mercy Oduyeyo, the God of Jesus Christ, whom African women worship, is not different from the God they had known in their pre-Christian religion.²² To her, women's understanding of accepting Christ, to be Lord over their lives is not based on the Chalcedonian perspective of the nature of his humanity and divinity but on His ability to exert God's power in their lives which enables them (women) to overcome life denying conditions.

In all, Odeyoye in her soteriological discourse seems not to be futuristic. Even though she believes God ability to save her in the future her hope is in the transforming power of God who can change life here and now.

²²Mercy Amba Oduyoye. *Introducing African Women's Theology* p59.

c) Inculturational View on Salvation

Inculturation is one of the major theological directions in Africa. It is all about the quest to formulate African theology in such a way that it will be understood in the context of African life and culture. This will seek to integrate the Christian faith with African cultural life and thought forms. “There is the need to create a theology that arise from and is accountable to African people”.²³ This was a call by theologians of Third World countries in one of the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians.

Inculturational theology began in the 1960’s and 1970’s when African Priests and Ministers from both the Roman Catholics and Protestants churches felt the need to Africanize Christian doctrines to reflect the culture and traditions of the African people so that they can appreciate and own these doctrines. The African Catholic theologians were first encouraged by the Vatican II as well as Pope Paul VI to adapt what they termed as “theology of adaptation”.²⁴ With this, Pope Paul VI and the Vatican II insisted on the Africanization of some external aspects of Christian theology in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. The African Catholic theologians rejected this, and rather preferred what they termed as the “theology of incarnation” which involves immersing Christianity in African culture so that just as Jesus became man, so must Christianity become African²⁵. According to Ela, Catholic Priest from Cameroun, Africans are estranged from being full participants in the Eucharist when the elements bread and wine are foreign to them. He sees the insistence on using

²³ Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Terres, Eds... *African Theology En Route* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979),p.193.

²⁴ A. M. Lugira, “*African Christian Theology*,” *African Theological Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1. 1979, p.56.

²⁵ Justin S. Ukpog, *African Theologies Now: A Profile* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1984), p27.

elements that are foreign to the geography of the people as characteristic of a church (the Roman Catholic Church) which insist on imposing a Eurocentric interpretation of Christian life on people everywhere and thus alienating them from themselves. The case of the Eucharist, he writes, “reveals the domination at the heart of the faith as lived in Africa, within a Christianity that refuses to become incarnate in our people”.²⁶ This was the cry of some African Roman Catholic Priests. To their surprise, Pope Paul the VI disapproved the theology of incarnation that the African Catholic theologians sought to adapt.

The Protestants at this time had adapted the “theology of indigenization” which was similar to the theology of adaptation by the Catholics because it was an invention and imposition of western missionaries and was only concerned with superficial and external trappings.²⁷

The theology of inculturation came into being in 1977 when a historical Pan African conference of Third World Theologians was held in Accra. This conference was historic because it brought African theological thinkers from both the Roman Catholics and Protestants together. This conference prepared the grounds for a new concept of theology unity that came to be expressed in the term inculturation.

The concept of inculturation was developed from the concept of incarnation which was adapted by the African Catholic theologians but rejected by Pope Paul VI. Jesus Christ was seen as the subject matter of inculturation.²⁸ And he is regarded as “the

²⁶Ela *African Cry*. p 5

²⁷Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 150.

²⁸ Shorter, *Toward Theology Of inculturation*, p. 81.

model of incarnation and inculturation” who incarnated in one particular place and time, and whose life and ministry remain “the central paradigm for uncovering and inculturating gospel values of the kingdom into particular contexts.²⁹

This is what was entailed in the inculturation process as described by Justin Ukpong: In this approach, the theologian’s task consists in re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu. It is the task of confronting the Christian faith and African culture. In the process there is inter-penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation contained in scriptures and tradition are critically re-examined for the purpose of giving them African cultural expression. Thus there is integration of faith and culture which gives birth to a new theological reflection that is African and Christian. In this approach therefore African theology means Christian faith attaining African cultural expression.³⁰

From this time up to this day, inculturation has been accepted by Ecumenical Association of African Theologian as a theological concept in Africa and is used generically to embrace what is both known as incarnation in Roman Catholic circles and indigenization in protestant circles .Inculturation has therefore become the common expression among African Catholics and Protestants, as well as among French and English – speaking African theologians to pursue the phenomenon of Africanization³¹.

²⁹ Peter Schineller. *A Handbook on Inculturation*. (N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1990), p 247.

³⁰Ukpong, *African Theologies Now*, p. 30.

³¹ Emmanuel Martey. *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1994.)p 68

With regards to inculturational theology in relation to soteriology, Kwesi Dickson one of the acclaimed inculturationist has this to say. The cross which forms the basis of the Christian salvation does not deny our human identities and life characteristics which go with them.³² He cited Apostle Paul as an illustration of the truth to this assertion. Apostle Paul was a Jew who treasured his Jewish identity.

In the New Testament Apostle Paul is seen, most often, using Jewish national characteristics in his attempt to state Christian realities. He explains the death of Christ in relation to Christian salvation using the language of the Passover, an event which occurred when his forefathers were taken out of the captivity of the Egyptians. This was a feast which was celebrated by his people (the Jews) and Christian Jews alike in his time. The Jews and the Christian Jews in Paul's time had the understanding that every celebration of the Passover was a participation in the first Passover. This Jewish tradition therefore becomes a tool in Paul's hand to teach or describe a very significant truth of the Christian faith, that is, the death of Christ. This was the only way Paul could speak meaningfully about something that meant so much to him. To Kwesi Dickson, when Paul says that he was determined to preach nothing but the cross, the language in which to do this was part of the cultural tradition in which he had been born.

In all this Paul also knew how far he could go by employing his Jewish traditions to communicate Christian doctrines. He rejected the view that one could gain salvation by way of the law. Those with the inculturational background like Kwesi Dickson,

³²Kwesi Dickson. *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y : Orbis Books 1984) p 168

have the view that soteriology must be looked at from the African heritage, for it to be well appreciated by the African people

According to Henry Mugabe, in the understanding of salvation by the Africans, most of them are influenced in their mindsets by their African cultures and their understanding of scripture.³³ For many of the African people, Christianity in its biblical representation appears to be significantly African. This is in the sense that an African does not have to read far into the Old Testament in order to realize that the traditions that it depicts are similar to that of the African traditions or cultures. To Mugabe, a great deal in the scriptural understanding of salvation is analogous to much of African outlook and expectation.

For example, Abraham Akrong has pointed out that the central soteriology concern of the Akan's in Ghana and for that matter Africans in general has to do with protection, preservation of both physical and spiritual, from the threats of evil doers like witches sorcerers, vengeful spirits and all those who seek to destroy life.³⁴ He continues to say salvation for the Akan therefore, means the condition, context or space in which human well-being and the ultimate fulfillment of the individual destiny are made possible. It means the absence of everything that threatens and destroys human life or disturbs the conditions that guarantee prosperity and well-being. Finally, salvation means the conditions that preserve or restore the harmonies of creation so that the

³³Henry J Mugabe www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jjt136-1_031.pdf.

³⁴Abraham AkoAkrong, "An Akan Christian View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology" (Ph. D dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) p 198.

“rhythm of life” may go on undisturbed in order that human beings may have the space to be human.³⁵

All this come together to represent the meaning of salvation to the African. To Mugabe, the biblical teaching on salvation does include the understanding of salvation by the African as enumerated above. It includes, rescue, liberation, healing, protection and being delivered from physical danger.

2.4 Conclusion

Misiologists such as Danel and Bosch have criticized the Western missionaries that one of their major weaknesses was that they equated “soul winning” to salvation, rather, missionaries preached about Jesus who could only save souls. The Africans began to wonder where the salvation of their lives was going to come from. It was after they read the Bible for themselves that, they realized the corporate and holistic dimensions of salvation to be prevalent in the Bible rather than what the missionaries sought to communicate to them, the rescuing of souls.

The Greek verb (*sozo*: to save) has the idea of being snatched away from peril, of being healed, of being preserved in health and well-being.³⁶ This wholeness is in agreement with what the African believes salvation is.

³⁵Abraham Ako Akrong, "An Akan Christian View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology", p 199.

³⁶William Barclay, *New Testament Word*, (London: S-CM, 1964) pg. 270.

CHAPTER 3

John Mbiti on salvation

3.1 Introduction

John Samuel Mbiti was born in Kenya on 30th November 1931. He studied in Uganda and the United States, and took his doctorate in 1963 at the University of Cambridge, UK. From 1964 to 1974 Mbiti taught religion and theology in Makerere University, Uganda. He was director of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute in Bogis-Bossey, Switzerland. Mbiti has held visiting professorships at universities across the world and published extensively on philosophy, theology and African oral traditions as of 2005. He is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Bern and parish minister in the town of Burgdorf, Switzerland. He is also an ordained Anglican priest.

His research interests include theology in Africa and Asia, and ecumenism. Mbiti's seminal book, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), was the first work to challenge Christian assumption that traditional African religious ideas were "demonic and anti-Christian". His sympathetic treatment of traditional religions was based on massive field work. Mbiti is clear that his interpretation of these religions is from a firmly Christian perspective, and this aspect of his work has sometimes been severely criticized.

Mbiti's publications includes: African Religions and Philosophy. African Writers Series. Heinemann [1969] (1990); Concepts of God in Africa. London: SPCK (April 1970); New Testament Eschatology in an African Background. Oxford University Press (March 1971); Introduction to African Religion. African Writers Series. Heinemann [1975] (1991); The Prayers of African Religion . London: SPCK (October 1975); and Bible and Theology in African Christianity. Oxford University Press (April 1987).

3.2 John Mbiti on Salvation

Mbiti expressed his opinion on the issue of salvation from the African perspective in his book “Bible and Theology in African Christianity”. This chapter seeks to reflect on salvation as presented by him in his book mentioned above and other presentations he has made on this same theme.

Mbiti’s discussion of this theological subject is based on the work done by Kenneth Enang in his book *The Understanding of Salvation among the Annang people of Southern Nigeria*, Mbiti concluded about Enang’s work that “What Enang writes about Annang independent churches and their interpretation of salvation has many parallels elsewhere in Christian Africa”.³⁷ He emphasized that even though Enang’s work on salvation was limited to a specific area of Nigeria, it was general and widespread in many other areas of Africa.³⁸

Before going to Mbiti, I would like to cite a few statements made by Enang on his conclusion as to the meaning and experience of salvation by the Annang people that he used as his case study.

Firstly, he concluded that salvation to them means deliverance, that is to say, deliverance from the power of evil principalities and the enclaves of human enmities.³⁹.

³⁷ John S. Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 155.

³⁸Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 155

³⁹Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 152.

Secondly, salvation is seen as wholeness, being in peace. Salvation is achieved when one is in unity with himself, with his neighbours, friends and God.⁴⁰ Again it is good health, flourishing economic concern and having children. In all, the understanding of salvation has a “comprehensive scope”. It concerns the body and soul, the unity of the whole man.⁴¹

Basing his argument on Enang’s conclusion, Mbiti contends that the biblical record is so broad that it easily encompasses the African world.⁴² The biblical portrait of salvation to him, embraces several meanings that are readily applicable to the African world.

Mbiti argues that the Western missionaries – from both Europe and America who introduced Christianity to Africa gave a restrictive understanding of salvation to the African people. To the missionaries, salvation is to be saved from sin and is largely for the soul. According to Mbiti salvation is more than of sin and soul.⁴³

He notes that the African understanding and application of salvation could be informed by two worlds; one is the world of African life and the other is the biblical world. With the Bible and African worldview, African Christians view of salvation has gone beyond the forgiveness of sin as the only definition of salvation.

Prior to the emergence of Christianity, the Africans had their own way of life (culture) and their own religion (the African traditional religion). In the African traditional

⁴⁰Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* p. 152

⁴¹Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 152

⁴²Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 155

⁴³Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 157

world which consists of both their culture and religion, the African people recognize and experience many dangers and threats to life. Life was seen as a struggle in the face of threats which were both physical and spiritual in nature. To the African, human life is, to a large extent, a struggle, to sail through these dangers and threats. The African people were deeply rooted and built up in this worldview to the extent that it coloured the way salvation is interpreted and applied.

To Mbiti, for the biblical message of salvation to make sense to the African people and to penetrate into the depths of their being it has to enter into their total worldview. Hence this traditional world plays a major role in people's hearing, understanding, experiencing and applying biblical salvation.⁴⁴

The second influence that informs the African's understanding and interpretation of salvation as noted by Mbiti is the biblical world. As stated above, the African people recognize and experience many dangers and threats to life prior to the coming of Christianity. Mbiti sees this African worldview to be parallel to that of the biblical world. For Mbiti, the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, reveals a variety of threats and dangers to human life. Examples cited by Mbiti include the incident of the flood (Genesis 7-9) in which Noah and his family and a host of animals were saved. The collapse of the Tower of Babel, to him, also symbolizes a threat to life. Abraham and Sarah's anxiety over their childless state is another recognition of threat to life. Lastly, the Exodus experience where the people of Israel on the way to the Canaan land from Egypt, met a lot of challenges clearly depicts threats to life of the people of the biblical world.

⁴⁴Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 156

When one considers the New Testament, it could also be seen that clear attention was given to sickness, disease and demon possession as threats to life. It is upon this same background of threats and dangers to life that salvation becomes meaningful to the people of the biblical world.

This is in total agreement of the African world-view on salvation. Mbiti, asserts that, “there can be no salvation where there is no threat to life. Salvation called for, and make sense, only when and where annihilation is a real possibility and the threats and dangers which lead to this final annihilation are not hard to find.”⁴⁵

He notes that salvation being understood from the “two worlds” (the African and biblical worlds), biblical salvation according to Mbiti , should be seen from holistic point of view. Human being, who is the object of God’s salvation is both physical and spiritual. As a result, biblical salvation should be seen to embrace both the physical and the spiritual aspects of humankind.

One aspect either the physical or the spiritual should not be stressed at the expense of the other. To Mbiti, this was the mistake the Western missionaries made. They were unable to strike the balance. In many places they stressed the spiritual dimension to the neglect of the physical.

Mbiti has also stressed that, in Africa salvation also takes cosmic dimensions. This is because the African belief encompasses the belief in the world of divinities, the spirits of nature and of the departed, the mystical, realities of magic and witchcraft and so

⁴⁵Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 158

on, this is to say the world beyond the physical. To the African, salvation in Christ Jesus should be seen and experienced to reach out beyond the physical realities to the world beyond.

For the African, according to Mbiti, salvation is focused on Jesus as seen and expressed in the New Testament. It is for this reason, that the name of Jesus is used in prayer, in exorcisms, in Christian ordinances like baptism and Lord's Supper or Eucharist. The salvation message proclaimed to the African by the overseas missionaries on Jesus Christ as the agent of salvation portrayed Him as the Saviour only on the cross. The African Christian emphasis on Jesus as the Saviour goes beyond that. To the African Christian, Jesus is seen at work as a Saviour right from the beginning of His public ministry, in His ministry of teaching and healing and exorcising the spirits right to the cross experience.

Another important area in relation to salvation by Mbiti worth mentioning is the geography of salvation. The geography, here is the study of places which can be visited, touched, where one can pray, be healed, receive revelations, have fellowship with others.⁴⁶ These locations provide an avenue for people to come and have an encounter (a personal encounter so to speak) with Jesus the Saviour of the world. They come to these places to pour out their heart to Jesus, the agent of salvation, because they see these centers as the center of their faith, their devotion and their salvation.

⁴⁶Mbiti. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 171

Salvation to the African from Mbiti's point of view is not restricted to the individual. It is not for the individual alone. After one has had a personal encounter with Jesus as his/her personal savior, his/her salvation experience does not become private. He/she shares the experience with others. The individual after salvation experience, in Africa, must belong to the wider community, to the fellowship, to the brethren and sisters.

African Christians see salvation as God's dynamic power. This is affirmed by St. Paul in Roman 1:16. "I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith". Many avail themselves in Africa to this power coming from different backgrounds. Some turn to this salvation power weakened by sin, some in various forms of satanic bondages, some crippled by self-interest and many more. When they avail themselves to this power of God, they do experience something of value, something which for them amounts to salvation. This reveals that the African sees salvation as the dynamic power of God.

Mbiti came out with this understanding of salvation from the African Traditional Religion and through this he came to the realization that there was the need to incorporate some of the African Traditional Religion concepts into Christianity.

He began to think that Christian understanding of salvation had to be influenced by the understanding of salvation in African Traditional Religion. In an article titled "some Reflections on African Experience of Salvation Today" published in 1974, Mbiti investigated the traditional language of people of Kenya, and found out that abstract nouns such as salvation or redemption are never used in traditional life. Thus, for their meaning to be clear to African people they need to be made practical. It was

also realized by him that verbs such as “to save” and “to redeem” are used to describe rescue from practical situations such as illness, famine, drought, danger, and other perilous situations. From this background, Mbiti examined how salvation is understood in African Traditional Religion and found out that the main purpose behind the prayers, sacrifices and offerings of devoted adherents of African Traditional Religion is to seek or acknowledge the saving acts of God and spiritual beings. He therefore concludes that salvation in African religion has to do with physical and immediate dangers (of the individual and more often of the community) – dangers that threaten individual or community survival, good health, and general prosperity or safety.

He contends that, this is the main religious setting in which the notion of salvation is understood and experienced. Salvation is not just an abstraction: it is concrete, told in terms of both what has happened and is likely to be encountered by people as they go through daily experiences.⁴⁷

3.3 Conclusion

Mbiti argues that, the western theology’s stress on salvation from sin is out of place (simply one-sided) in the African context because it is foreign to African understanding of salvation. One cannot also accuse African Christians for not upholding the Christian faith for the simple reason that they have applied the concept of salvation to concrete physical dilemmas of their existence. Mbiti acknowledged that the Christianity introduced to us by the missionaries from overseas has brought

⁴⁷ John S. Mbiti. *Some Reflections on African experience of Salvation Today*, S. J. Samartha, ed., *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals* (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1974), p. 112.

the added dimension of salvation, extending to the hereafter, but he insists that the idea of salvation must continue to be applied to concrete situations that negatively affects the lives of Africans today.

CHAPTER 4

Mercy Amba Oduyoye on Salvation

4.1 Introduction

Mercy Amba Oduyoye was born 1934 in Ghana. She is a Methodist Church member and a theologian known for her work in African women's theology. Currently she is the Director of the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture at Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana. Oduyoye holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Ghana (1963) and a second bachelor's degree from Cambridge University (1965). She earned her master's degree from Cambridge in 1969. Oduyoye was awarded honorary degrees by the University of the Western Cape in 2002 and Yale University in 2008

She was Youth Education Secretary for the World Council of Churches from 1967-1979. From 1987–1994, she was Deputy General Secretary for the same organization. She has taught at several institutions including: Harvard University, Union Theological Seminary, and the University of Ibadan. She has also served as President of the World Student Christian Federation.

Oduyoye has written four books and over eighty articles focusing on Christian theology from a feminist and African perspective. One of her central subjects is how African religion and culture influences the experiences of African women. In particular, she has addressed the effects of economic oppression on African women.

Her publications include: *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (1986); *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (1995); *Introducing African Women's Theology* (2001); *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (2004).

4.2 Mercy Oduyoye on Salvation

It may be inaccurate to consider Oduyoye only as a representative of African women's theology because feminist concerns were initially not central to her early contributions as a theologian. In her early works, she considered herself simply as an African theologian and it was only with time that she embraced the cause of women as her theological agenda.⁴⁸

However, this shift in her thinking does not lead her to a different assessment of the material realm but rather towards the same assessment espoused by African male theologians like them her gaze seems fixed on the material realm and the temporal rather than the eternal.

At the beginning of her theological career Oduyoye insisted that African Traditional Religion (ATR) should be the primary lens through which Christian salvation must be understood in the African context. It was only with time that she mounted feminist critiques of certain facets of African culture and Christianity. In her estimation, African culture limits the ability of Africans in general and the African women in particular to participate in the abundant life which Christ brings.⁴⁹ In *Hearing and*

⁴⁸She is considered the founder of the group known as The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, founded in 1989. More about this group can be gotten from the following web site <http://www.thecirclecawt.org/>. This group recently dedicated a festschrift in her honor (probably the only African woman theologian to have a festschrift in her honor). See Isabel ApawoPhiri and Sarojini Nadar, ed. *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006). In addition to founding the Circle, she is also the founder of the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture (1998) located on the campus on Trinity Theological College, Ghana.

⁴⁹In addition to the Exodus motif, John 10:10 and Luke 4 are central New Testament texts for Oduyoye, as is the case with other Africa liberation theologians. The idea of abundant life is taken from John 10:10. What this means in Oduyoye has not be clearly defined but it seems to relate to various facets of material well being.

*Knowing*⁵⁰, she followed the path of African inculturation theologians at the time. She contends that there was an African worldview and that should be taken seriously in theological reflections.

This view has been briefly outlined in one of her earlier articles entitled. “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology.”⁵¹In this article she indicated that since salvation seems to be central to African religious beliefs and practices, the focus of African Christian theology should be soteriological. And the understanding of soteriology she advocates is one that sees salvation as rescue from individual and moral evil like racism, poverty, and totalitarianism. She claims that because Africans recognize that life is not entirely materialistic, the desire for salvation from evil forces is the yearning for what she called “life after life,” that is, the desire to have a closer relationship with what she refers to variously as Supreme Being, Source of Life, Life Force, Being Itself or God.⁵²

According Oduyoye, Christianity has caused marginalization of the African worldview and experience. In *Hearing and Knowing* she positions herself as an African theologian seeking to correct what Africans had been taught about Christianity and what they now know about it. She contends that there is a yawning gap between what they were taught about Christianity and what they now know, caused by the increased marginalization of the African worldview and experience in

⁵⁰ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

⁵¹Oduyoye, “*The Value of African Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices for African Theology*,” in *African Theology en route*, 109-16.

⁵²Oduyoye, “*The Value of African Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices for African Theology*,” in *African Theology en route*, 109-16.

the missionary practice of Christianity on the continent. This marginalization of the African worldview and experience in the practice of Christianity on the continent, she claims, is nothing new. It goes as far back as the beginning of Christianity on the African soil that is early African Christianity.

For Oduyoye, early Christianity in North Africa was set within a colonial context that marginalized the views of African Christians, the Berbers, whose Christianity was a transformed version of their primary religion. That is why early popular expressions of Christianity by groups such as the Montanists, the Novatians and the Donatists were suppressed, aided by theologians like Cyprian and Augustine who were alienated from their own people by absorbing the mentality of their Roman colonial masters.

According to Oduyoye, the imagination of early North African Christians was colluding with the Roman colonial administration to suppress them. In their understanding of God as one who calls for human holistic well-being, these Christians were willing to risk their lives for the faith in service and martyrdom.

The failure of early North African Christian theologians to adopt the understanding of the faith held by the people undermined their ability to plant a viable Christianity in the African soil. Thus, what came to exist as Christianity was superficial in the sense that many did not take it seriously and antagonistic because it was against a majority of the people. For example, instead of advocating a rigid African morality that funded Donatist sacramental theology, the “universal church” (or Catholic Church) represented by Augustine, argued otherwise.

In addition, she claim without saying how, that the Christianity taught by African theologians beginning from Tertullian to Augustine stressed fear more than love. For her, then, it appears that the people were under siege by an elitist theology that undermined their worldview and experiences. Because this Christianity, supported by the Catholic or universal church, alienated the people, they were no longer sympathetic to Christianity as a whole and so when the Muslims invaded North Africa in the seventh century, the people were only too willing to abandon the Christian faith and go over to the Muslims whom they saw as their defenders and liberators.

From this fiasco of early Christianity in North Africa, Oduyoye draws the following conclusion.

1. The gospel has to be dynamically related to a people's "primal religion" if they are to be brought to Christ. Today's primal religion may not be the worship of gods but other more immediate concerns – an ideology, physical comfort, self esteem, or perhaps a vision of what life on earth could be .
2. A theology that will sustain a people's religion and piety will probably not be one produced by intellectual elite or a hierarchical power, but one that is born from the people's experience (sic) of God-in-action. A relevant theology ...built upon the understanding of faith that one finds among the people even before the intellectual elite has begun to cast it in scientific language.⁵³

Because the Christianity that triumphed in North Africa was one supported by "the European allies of Augustine" it did not represent what the people understood by Christianity and the salvation it brought.

⁵³Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 234.

This inability to “learn the ways of the natives” has characterized African Christian theological reflection from the early church to the modern missionary and colonial movements. Although this way of doing church and theology in African began to be challenged by churches founded by Africans in modern times, this tendency has not been completely eradicated in African Christianity. She sees Byang Kato and Tokunbo Adeyemo as examples of those whose theology still seeks the approval of their European masters.

Thus, any salvation message for Africans that is not rooted in African primal worldview is doomed to creating superficial Christians who do not take the faith seriously. Theology should be done for the welfare of the church and people.⁵⁴ It is the understanding of salvation steeped in the African situation (in both primal religious worldview and the history of mission and colonialism) that Oduyoye encourages.

But unlike male theologians who sought to defend the African primal worldview from colonial and missionary assaults, Oduyoye’s understanding of this worldview is nuanced. For her, the African understanding of salvation as rooted in human rescue from material impediments must be maintained, but some African indigenous religious beliefs and practices, including some church practices that undermine human material well being, especially the well being of women, must be criticized and rejected.

⁵⁴-Birgit Meyer, “Make a Complete Break with the Past”. *Memory and Post-Colonial modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse,* *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no 3 (August 1998); 316-49.

Like Éla, Oduyoye believes that African inculturation theology must be balanced with a theology of liberation, especially the liberation of women, because there are some conceptions of the Christian faith which are oppressive to Africans in general and to women in particular. It is in this light that Oduyoye's inclination to feminist (liberation) theology should be understood.

Central to her agenda as a feminist liberation theologian is the critique of patriarchal tendencies from her origin. As an Akan of Ghana whose society is matriarchal, she received a cultural shock when she not married into the Yoruba society of Nigeria, a society which is androcentric, with women seen as the property of men. This challenged her to appropriate those stories that portray the agency of women in African societies. One of these stories is found among the Akan and it credits their rescue from death by thirst during their migratory phase to a woman. The story, like most African stories, is told in different ways by Oduyoye herself⁵⁵ but the gist of the story is that when a group of Akan people were migrating from the North of Africa to their present location in Ghana, they became very thirsty. They came to a lake but were afraid to drink from it fearing that it might have been poisoned. The leader of the people, a woman named Eku, let her dog drink the water. When nothing bad happened to the dog she drank it. And when nothing bad happened to her, the people drank the water shouting, "Eku-aso" (meaning, "Eku has tasted"). To this day the place is known as Eku-Aso.

⁵⁵Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Febella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 35-36 and in Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Woman and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: IrvusVijism 1995) m 8. The main discrepancy seems to be about who drank the water first: the woman or the dog. In the first case it is the woman and in the second case it is the dog.

According to Oduyoye, this woman was the liberator of her people. This story, she points out, indicates that African women, unlike the present backseat which they are made to take by African religious traditions, have often been at the forefront seeking the liberation or well being of their people. “Most migration stories of the Akan,” she writes, “do put women at the center, with women leading the community to freedom and prosperity.”⁵⁶

Such is also the story of the mythical woman, Anowa, who Oduyoye uses in the title of her second book “Daughters of Anowa”⁵⁷ that specifically addresses the situation of the African woman. In this work she sees the industry, creativity and life-affirming activities of women as reminiscent of Anowa, a mythical woman representing Africa, who, before the patriarchal take over of the continent, enabled her people to experience peace and prosperity.⁵⁸ While African women (who are daughters of Anowa, that is, descendants of Anowa) have attempted to lead the people to “Anowaland”, where there is peace and prosperity (salvation), patriarchy has tended to suppress women and harm the entire continent. It is this tendency that has to be critiqued through cultural hermeneutics.⁵⁹

For Oduyoye, tendencies that bring down women are not only found in ATR and culture but also in the Bible (or the church) whence the Christian gospel comes. She

⁵⁶Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 8.

⁵⁷Her first book that specifically dealt with the situation of women in church and society thought it was not limited only to the African women, was *Who Will Roll the Stone Away: The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990).

⁵⁸Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 6-7, n. 6.

⁵⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 13.

notes that because the spirituality of women is closely tied to the Bible, the Bible has become part of the African context. Cultural hermeneutics has to be applied to it in order to extract what is liberating and discard what is oppressive.⁶⁰ Her goal is to encourage the promotion of elements that are life-affirming to African women and enhance their full humanity and participation in society.⁶¹ Here again, it should be noted, the goal seems to be limited to material well being. It is in pursuit of this vision that she, like most African women theologians, celebrates Jesus Christ as liberator, as the one who is a perfect example of mother.

Drawing from a stand of African theology that stresses John 10:10, she portrays Jesus Christ as the one who rescues African women from the various life-denying situations in which they often find themselves, so that they may enjoy abundant life.⁶² It is this Christ who the popular Ghanaian charismatic woman prophet, Efua Kuma, embraces as wonder worker, wise and intimate friend, and one through whom life's battles are won.⁶³

⁶⁰Oduyoe, *African Women's Theology*, 11. Also see Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2002). For my review of both of these works see David Tonghou Ngong, review of *Introducing African Women's Theology*, by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Review and Expositor* 102 (Winter 2005): 166-168; and Ngong, review of *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*, by Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 11 no. 4 (September 2004): 477-479.

⁶¹Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 13.

⁶²Amoah and Oduyoye, *"The Christ for African Women,"* 45.

⁶³Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 59-60.

4.3 Conclusion

According to Oduyoye, the God of Jesus Christ, who African women worship, is not different from the God they had known in their pre-Christian religion.⁶⁴ African understanding of Jesus Christ is not based on the Chalcedonian perspective of the nature of his humanity and divinity but on his mediation of the power of God which enables women to overcome life-denying conditions. True to her insistence on the centrality of material well being in her soteriological discourse, Oduyoye does not look forward to an eschatological existence in God but rather expects to receive from God here in the world “a life lived fully as God would have it, life as a doxology to God, who first loved us.”⁶⁵

She is aware of the power of hope in eschatological discourse but her hope is in the transforming power of God who can change life here and now. Resurrection, for her, happens any time new life in Christ is experienced.⁶⁶ Oduyoye gives the impression that all that matters is that which is located in the present thus reflecting the dominant emphasis displayed in ATR. It is this same emphasis that is found in black liberation theology,⁶⁷ especially as demonstrated by Manas Buthelezi.

⁶⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The Empowering Spirit of Religion,” in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 245-58; *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 51-65, esp. 59.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Njoroge, “Let’s Celebrate the Power of Naming,” in *African Women, Religion and Health*, 60.

⁶⁶ Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 119

⁶⁷ Anthony O. Balcomb, “Is God in South Africa or Are We Still Cleaning Our throats?” *Journal of Theology of Southern African* 111 (November 2001), 57-65.

CHAPTER 5

Comparison and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The study seeks to find out the key features of John Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye understanding of Salvation and where the two converged and diverged. The previous chapters, especially chapters three and four have detailed the views of Mbiti and Oduyoye. This chapter will compare the two views and also offer criticism against them.

5.2 Mbiti and Oduyoye views of Salvation: A comparison

Oduyoye started her theological career as inculturationist and later added women's concerns. Thus, she agrees with Mbiti on most aspects of salvation. The differences are basically Oduyoye's additions from feminist perspective.

Firstly both Mbiti and Oduyoye share a view of salvation that embraces deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God as well as deliverance from the spiritual oppression.

Secondly, they agree that the God of Jesus Christ, who African Christian worship, is not different from the God they had known in their pre-Christian religion.

Thirdly, they also agree that Africans recognize life as not entirely materialistic. Africans desire for salvation from evil forces is the yearning for a closer relationship with the Supreme Being, Source of Life, and Life Force, Being Itself or God.

Basically there are, at least, two areas where Oduyoye differs from Mbiti. Firstly, central to Oduyoye's agenda as feminist liberation theologian is the critique of patriarchal tendencies in ATR and Christianity. Firstly, while Mbiti focuses more on spiritual deliverance Oduyoye focus on material impediments. The understanding of soteriology she advocates is one that sees salvation as rescue from moral evil like racism, poverty, and totalitarianism.

For her, the African understanding of salvation as rooted in human rescue from material impediments must be maintained, but some African indigenous religious beliefs and practices, including some church practices that undermine human material well being, especially the well being of women, must be criticized and rejected. She notes that since salvation seems to be central to African religious beliefs and practices, the focus of African Christian theology should be soteriological – which is limited to material well-being.

But unlike male theologians who sought to defend the African primal worldview from colonial and missionary assaults, Oduyoye's understanding of this worldview is nuanced.

Like Éla, Oduyoye believes that African inculturation theology, the position she share with Mbiti, must be balanced with a theology of liberation, especially the liberation of women. This is so because there are some conceptions of the Christian faith which are not oppressive to Africans in general but women in particular. It is in this light that Oduyoye turns to feminist (liberation) theology. Her goal is to encourage the promotion of elements that are life-affirming to African women and enhance their full

humanity and participation in society. Here again, it should be noted, the goal seems to be limited to material wellbeing. According to Oduyoye, the God of Jesus Christ, whom African women worship, is not different from the God they had known in their pre-Christian religion.⁶⁸

Secondly, true to her insistence on the centrality of material well being in her soteriological discourse, Oduyoye does not look forward to an eschatological existence in God but rather expects to receive from God here in the world “a life lived fully as God would have it, life as a doxology to God, who first loved us.”⁶⁹

She is aware of the power of hope in eschatological discourse but her hope is in the transforming power of God who can change life here and now. Resurrection, for her, happens any time new life in Christ is experienced.⁷⁰ Oduyoye gives the impression that all that matters is that which is located in the present thus reflecting the dominant emphasis displayed in ATR. It is this same emphasis that is found in black liberation theology. She is aware of the power of hope in eschatological discourse but her hope is in the transforming power of God who can change life here and now. Resurrection, for her, happens any time new life in Christ is experienced.⁷¹ It is this same emphasis

⁶⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The Empowering Spirit of Religion,” in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 245-58; *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 51-65, esp. 59.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Njoroge, “Let’s Celebrate the Power of Naming,” in *African Women, Religion and Health*, 60.

⁷⁰ Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 119

⁷¹ Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 119

that is found in black liberation theology,⁷² especially as demonstrated by Manas Buthelezi.

5.3 Mbiti and Oduyeyo views of Salvation: Response from Kato and Adeyemo

Mercy approach salvation from inculturation and feminist perspective respectively. John Mbiti is from East Africa and Oduyoye is West African. Both of them received part of their education from Africa and Europe. Again both of them are Christian and ordained ministers in the Ecumenical tradition. Mbiti is an Anglican priest and Oduyoye is a Methodist Church member. With such backgrounds it is expected that concepts of salvation of Mbiti and Oduyoye would be influenced from multiples sources, especially traditional African religion and Western Christianity. However, Mbiti and Oduyeyo positions have been questioned by some African theologians, particularly Byang H. Kato and Tokumbo Adeyemo

Two influential Evangelical theologians, Byang H. Kato and Tokumbo Adeyemo both from Nigeria, had questioned whether African Christian theology should embrace the African traditional religion's understanding of salvation. Claiming that African theology and Christianity were becoming humanistic and materialistic, they insist that a stress in material well being does not represent a Christian understanding of salvation.

Kato sees the understanding of salvation in ATR as essentially different from that of the Christian faith. Drawing from his own people the Jaba (or Halm) of the North,

⁷² Anthony O. Balcomb, "Is God in South African or Are We Still Cleaning Our throats?" *Journal of Theology of Southern African* 111 (November 2001), 57

central state of Nigeria, he points out that the African traditional concept of salvation is different from the Christian because of their different conceptions of sin. According to the Jaba, he points out, sin relates only to social ills and salvation is obtained by fulfilling social demands. This according to Kato points to a humanistic approach to religion which is not supported by the gospel. The “wrong conception of sin” he maintains, results in a wrong view of salvation.

The Christian view of salvation should focus on the total deliverance from the original and practical sins of the individual. Kato by so doing is not sending a signal that the Christian faith should be contextualized on the African continent. He is rather against the contextualization that compromises “the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ”.

According to Kato, the secularization of Christianity is demonstrated when salvation is understood as overly concerned with “secular” matters such as political liberation and economic advancement rather than the spiritual issue of human reconciliation with God.

According to Kato, those with the inculturated and feminist view of salvation develop theologies of salvation that are unbiblical because they stress human material well-being as if this was the central issue with which a Christian understanding of salvation should be concerned. They neglect the issue of external salvation which has to do with how the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ save individual sinners from their sin and lead them to heaven.

Kato acknowledges that indeed an average African may be experiencing one or two difficulties. He writes that exploitation, diseases, abject poverty, and deprivation of the basic necessities of life have been the lot of the majority of African people. But what is the root cause of these human tragedies? Would humankind problems be solved after alleviation of physical suffering and material deprivation? Is putting clothes on one's back and food in his stomach the way to solve man's basic need? Is political liberation the final answer? He contends that history negates any positive answer to those questions.

Kato notes that the high rate of crime, the utter discontentment and emptiness prevalent in the industrialized nations of the world is a sad commentary on our Lord's words that "man's" life does not consist of what he has.

He argues that, every inch of the African continent may be liberated from foreign domination, every family may have two cars in the garage, and every African may be a college graduate, but that still will not save the African from his fundamental dilemma. These current ills will only be replaced with new and probably worse tragedies.

From Kato, then oppression, poverty and other human sufferings are but symptoms of a deeper malaise in human nature-sin. He continues, the nature of man's fundamental dilemma does not lie in mere physical suffering. It does not lie primarily in horizontal relationships with his fellow man. All human tragedies be they sickness, poverty or exploitation, oppression, are mere symptoms of the root cause, which the Bible calls

sin. It is therefore only by addressing the issue of sin; Kato believes that human problems can be effectively dealt with.

5.3 The study findings

1. Christianity does not have monopoly of salvation; other religious bodies also have their understanding as to what salvation is. For example in Hinduism, salvation is called Moksha. Moksha is when an enlightened human being is freed from the cycle of life-and-death (the endless cycle of death and reincarnation) and comes into a state of completeness. He then becomes one with God. In Islam salvation simply refers to the eventual entrance to heaven or paradise and escaping hell. This can be achieved on the basis of good works alone. These works include doing honourable deeds plus keeping five requirements which is widely known as the five “pillars” of Islam.

2. Among Christian’s traditions the understanding of salvation differs their emphasis. While Jesus remains the savior, different traditions have different emphasis:

We have Western traditional perspective being salvation of the soul, that is reconciliation between God and individual human beings; Liberation Theology views salvation as liberation from socio-economic and political evils; Feminist perspective sees salvation as liberation from socio-economic and political evils including men dominion over women as well as African Christian view – salvation from evil spirits.

3. In African Christianity the understanding of salvation pivots around:

a) Salvation of personal soul, centered on reconciliation between God and individual human beings. This is the legacy of Western evangelical Christianity. Byang H. Kato and Tokumbo Adeyemo are representative of this view

b) Salvation as deliverance from power of darkness as well as reconciliation of one's soul with God. This is a hybrid of African traditional religion and Western Missionary view of salvation. Mbiti and Oduyoye are representatives of this view.

5.4 Conclusion

Jesus remains the savior of humankind but the understanding of salvation differs. In order to avoid unnecessary confusion it would be better to see salvation as holistic: forgiveness and reconciliation of sins as well as deliverance from spiritual and material oppressions. Looking at salvation only as forgiveness of sin and reconciliation of with God is theologically defective.

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