

OF MARIOLOGY AND THE AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL ENTERPRISE

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Introduction

African theology, much like African Christianity, whose function actually it is, has really grown in leaps and bounds. Like theology in general which may be taken here as “a special form of God-talk” (Macquarrie, 1978, 11), this theology in and of Africa is, indeed, a house of many rooms comprising, as it were, Christology, Ecclesiology, Pneumatology, Anthropology, Soteriology, Eschatology, Mariology, etc. Over the years, however, while attention appeared to have been glued to some of these branches of theology, especially, Christology, which, of course, is and remains, as a matter of fact, the cornerstone of African theology (just like any other theology), and then to Ecclesiology, and to some extent, Anthropology, etc., not much, however, appeared to have been done in terms of Pneumatology and Mariology. In fact, these last two appear to carry on their necks the inscription: “We are not deemed important at all in the house of African theology”.

With proper focus this time on Mariology, which, indeed, is the study or theology of Mary, and a Mary, Allen (2009, 50) confesses, “is usually associated with theologians, revelation, and faith”, and using, as it were, descriptive and analytic methodology, this paper seeks to point out the implications that a much more appreciation of Mariology, or better, the relationship existing between Mary and theology, would hold for the African theologian as he or she carries

out, “With passion and compassion” - to borrow the title of a collection of essays sometime ago by Third World women doing theology (2006) - his or her day-to-day art and act of theologizing.

Between Mary and Theology: Any Lessons And Implications for the African Theologian?

Indeed, a myriad of lessons and implications there are for the African theologian and these, among others, include:

Opportunity to Keep the Feminine All the More Alive in the House of African Theology

To start with, it was von Balthasar (1998) who had said something about Christianity in its relation to Mariology that can, however, be applied specifically to the relationship between theology and its Marian character or dimension. According to him, “Without Mariology, Christianity threatens imperceptibly to become inhuman. The Church becomes functionalistic, soulless, a hectic enterprise without any point of rest, estranged from her true nature by the planners. And because in this manly-masculine world, all that we have is one ideology replacing another, everything becomes polemical, critical, bitter, humorless, and ultimately boring, and people in their masses run away from such a Church” (112-113). And saying almost the same thing, Ratzinger (2005, 27), on his own part, would observe: “A purely structural ecclesiology is bound to degrade the Church to the level of a program of action. Only the Marian dimension secures the place of affectivity in faith and thus ensures a fully human correspondence to the reality of the incarnate Logos. [...]. This affective rooting guarantees the bond 'ex totocorde' - from the depth of the heart - to the personal God and his Christ and rules out any recasting of christology into a Jesus program, which can be atheistic and purely neutral: the experience of the last few years is an astonishing contemporary verification of the legitimate core carried in such ancient phrases”.

And commenting on the above observations especially von Balthasar's latest, Gardner (2004, 76), in her essay, *Balthasar and*

the Figure of Mary, would point out that such would not have come out of Balthasar if he, Balthasar, that is, was not doubly convinced that,

Christian theology must always take account of Mary if it is to take proper account of God, the world, Christ, the Church, and itself. Moreover, Christian theology will only arrive at any worthwhile understanding of human being and the history of salvation, and thus of the Church and of itself, if it is prepared to contemplate the

nature and significance of the difference between the sexes, a task desperately necessary, he felt, in the Churches of his day.

That is to say then that a stress on the Marian dimension of theology, on the relationship between Mary and theology, is, indeed, a stress on the import and significance of keeping the feminine alive in the house of theology, something whose devaluation or, at times, neglect, has been quite an impoverishment (Macquarrie, 2001, xxvi.) and, in fact, a shortcoming in the grandeur and beauty that is theology. “Nowadays”, the same Ratzinger (2002, 302) comes in, “Protestants are making some timid efforts to recapture the figure of Mary. People have realized that the complete removal of the feminine element from the Christian message is a shortcoming from an anthropological viewpoint. It is theologically and anthropologically important for woman to be at the center of Christianity. Through Mary, and the other holy women, the feminine element stands at the heart of Christian religion. To think of Christ and Mary as being in competition means ignoring the essential distinction between these two figures. Christ gives John, and through John all of us, the Mother. That is not competition but a most profound intimacy. The Mother and Virgin forms an essential

part of the Christian picture of man”

As a matter of fact, this is something important to and for the African theologian: the keeping alive of the feminine in the house of theology and ipso facto in African christianity as whole. Yes, it was Nasimiyu (1990, 25) who had pointed out that, “It has been perceived by theologians of hope, liberation theologians and political theologians in other contexts that the liberating potential of Christianity was crippled by the “constantinian captivity” of the church. In this way christianity was taken over by men and made to serve patriarchy[...]. Thus, this Christianity like all major World Religions is not liberating to women”. And if that is an accusation against Christianity as a whole, it is, however, something some believe to be more particular to African christianity – despite its phenomenal success and expansion (Isichei, 1995, 1) - and they think they have an idea why it is so. Indeed, it has been observed that outside of St. Paul, Augustine is and remains not only “the greatest Christian Theologian that has ever lived”(Omoregbe, cited in Oguejiofor, 1998, 50), but for many centuries, from the Middle Ages to the present, the most widely studied author in Western Christianity(Drobner, 2000, 18), to the extent that Viladesau (2006) would hold nothing back in calling him, Augustine, that is, “the greatest inspiration of Western theology”(31).

And this, of course, is not only by reason of the proficiency and profundity of his writings and of the fact that he helped in particular in the actual development of theology as an academic discipline(McGrath, 2013, 25), but also because of the pastoral colouration of his entire philo-theological enterprise. “The roots of this extraordinary phenomenon”, says Drobner (2000), “go back to Augustine's own lifetime, and are in part due to the fact that he did not produce the most literary corpus of all Western Christianity for solely academic purposes. Already a good number of his contemporaries considered him to be both the most accomplished theologian and the most trustworthy pastor of their times”(18). In

fact, as Oguejiofor(1998, 51) would observe:

Right from his youthful years, he[Augustine] found in Neoplatonism a welcome tool for the elaboration of a consistent Christian theology and philosophy. His project [of] Christianising Platonism is best described by Thomas Aquinas who said that 'Whenever Augustine, who was imbued with the doctrines of the Platonist, found in their teaching anything consistent with faith, he adopted it; and those things which he found contrary to faith, he amended'.

Hence, von Campenhausen(cited in Pelikan, 1999, xiii) would state categorically that Augustine is “the only Church father who even today remains an intellectual power”.

However, there have been some accusations levelled against this same Augustine of which one actually is of greatest interest, here. According to Comblin (1989, 39), “In the West, the influence of St. Augustine was decisive in eliminating all feminine reference from theology and Christian imagery. Woman, according to him, is not the image of God; only man is”. Hence, Armstrong (2009) would observe that, “Augustine was a complex man, and neither he nor his theology was flawless. He could be intolerant, misogynist, and depressive - this last tendency exacerbated by the fact that he witnessed the collapse of the western provinces of the Roman Empire, a calamity that was like a huge environmental disaster. A deep sadness pervades Augustine's later work”(121).

But since it is not the intention of this paper to plunge into the sea of controversy surrounding his origin, as to whether, that is, he was an African - since there are some like Omoregbe (cited in Oguejiofor, 1998, 55) who would declare that he was “indisputably an African”, and some who would not want to hear anything of that sort and even some who, even if they were to accept that he was an African, however, would not dillydally in pointing out that he was

“an African who forgot his African roots”(Murungi, 2013, 49), or even some like Hegel(cited in Oguejiofor, 1998, 63) who would want to qualify the part of Africa that he hailed from as “European Africa”- suffice it to mention here that Augustine had something really to do with Africa and “lived in a context in which Africans of his region and age lived” (Oguejiofor, 1998, 63). In fact, when Julian of Eclanum (cited in Wills, 2005, xi) negatively and derisively referred to Augustine as “what passes for a philosopher with Africans”, he was inadvertently confirming positively what this paper is trying to say here. Hence, not only would Orobator (2008, 113), in his invocation of African Saints and Ancestors, call him, Augustine, that is, “doctor of the church, North African bishop”, the same Omoregbe (1989) elsewhere would openly refer to him as “the great African philosopher and theologian” (128).

However, it was Achebe (1987, 47) who, in talking about the character Ogbuefi Odogwu in his *No Longer at Ease*, had observed, among others, thus:

He was not a Christian, but he knew one or two things about Christianity. Like many others in Umuofia, he went to Church once a year at harvest. His only criticism of the Christian service was that the congregation was denied the right to reply to the sermon. One of the things he liked particularly and understood was: 'As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end'.

And similarly, these same people, very fond as well, like Ogbuefi Odogwu above, of the reality of “As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end”, believe that just as it was Augustine, the African theologian, who in the beginning eliminated “all feminine reference from theology”, who, that is, never gave ears to the feminine thereof, so today, in the African house of theology, other African theologians, suffering from what Uzukwu (2012, 37) had called “rigid masculinism”, and following,

as it were, in the footsteps of Augustine, their ancestor, both in faith and culture, have also refused to give ears to, or rather, enough space to the feminine. “When I look at the mold”, and that is Oduyoye (1995, 157), “in which religion has cast women, the psychological binds of socioeconomic realities that hold our domestic influence by Western-type patriarchal norms, I call what I see injustice. No other words fits[...As] an African woman I do want to be given a hearing”.

With reference to what she (1983, 250) had elsewhere referred to as “the maleness of Christian theology worldwide, together with the patriarchal presuppositions that govern all our relationships as well as the tradition; a situation in which men (male human beings) reflected upon the whole of life on behalf of the whole community of women and men, young and old”, which, however, may apply to a significant extent to the reality of things in Africa for which African women theologians rising from their meeting in Accra in 1977 would deplore the female “exclusion from our past theological endeavours” (cited in Baur, 1994, 295) she would call the church and, by that very fact, African theologians, to give more space to women. “The African Church”, she (1995, 181) would begin once more, “needs to empower women not only to speak for themselves and manage their 'women affairs', but to be fully present in decisions and operations that affect the whole Church, including the forming of its theology”. Hence, the final communique of the aforementioned Accra meeting of African women theologians would declare: “The future of African theology must take seriously the role of women in the Church as equals in the doing of theology” (cited in Baur, 1994, 295).

In fact, it was the main female character in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1999), Beatrice, who had put on record that she had also a native name, an Igbo name precisely, Nwanyibuife, A female is also something, given to her by her parents who had expected her to be a boy after the mother had given birth to five girls in a row, with her being the fifth. Though she herself never loved that name – and who

would in the circumstances surrounding its being given to her? – and would dislike it considerably less, however, in its abridged form, Buife(87), suffice it to mention that the point meant for emphasis here is that women – and it must be observed even if in passing that things have improved a bit today compared to the situation in the past- should be made to feel, in the house of theology, not just as Somethings, but as Somebodies, yes, as real theological Somebodies!

And the importance of the foregoing rests on at least two facts. First, the fact that it is only when

there is this presence, indeed, this profound presence of the feminine in theology, in African theology, that we can claim to have got the “whole” theology, the whole of African theology. Yes, an inclusive theology with reference to women, to borrow the rider of Uchem's book!(2001) Anything short of this leaves us with “Half African Theology”, which, like half-truth, is usually a dangerous reality. What, therefore, is needed is to put Half and Half together to the extent that what the same Oduyoye (1983, 246) had said elsewhere may apply here: “Once there lived on earth Half and Half, each of them only half a human being. They spent all their time quarrelling and fighting, disturbing the rest of the village and trampling upon the crops. Every time a fight began, cries went up to AnanseKokroko: Fa be Fa reko o! 'They are at it again, Half and Half are fighting.' So, one day God came down, brought Half and Half together and a whole human being appeared”.

Hence, she (1983) said, “The way forward is a 'new community of men and women', not reversal, participation, not takeover or handover. Feminism in theology springs from a conviction that a theology of relationships might contribute to bring us closer to human life as God desires it”(254). For “[o]nly then”, she (1995, 181) would continue elsewhere, “will the church become home for both women and men”. No wonder, John Paul II (2001, 46) would conclude that,

The great procession of saints through the ages makes it clear that women have always brought unique and indispensable gifts to the life of the Church, and that without those gifts the Christian community would be hopelessly impoverished. More than ever now, the Church needs the skills and energies, indeed the sanctity of women, if the new evangelization is to bear the fruit so earnestly sought[...]. It is important that the Church at the local level enable women to play their rightful part in the Church's mission; they should never be made to feel alien.

And the second reality, closely related to the first, however, calls to mind the observation made by Marten (cited in Iwe, 1985, 175) sometime ago that, "It is the law of eternal justice that man cannot degrade women without himself falling into degradation: and he cannot raise them without himself becoming better". And similarly, the African house of theology cannot neglect or ignore the feminine in its house without falling into degradation and crisis, just as the converse also holds true: it cannot recognize it and give more space to it without becoming, by that very fact, a better, solidified, more embracing and more beautiful house! Hence, the relationship between Mary and theology which this paper has tried to explore above and its appreciation by the African theologian may become – and that has been what this same paper would wish to put across here- a profound challenge and counterbalance to the obvious "maleness of Christian theology" which many African women theologians, Oduyoye-like, have complained of and about. Yes, it could help to keep the fire of the feminine flaming all the more in the house of African theology!

Development of an African Mariology

There is, indeed, yet another thing that could be said here, another lesson to be drawn and implication that the foregoing would hold for

the African theologian – even as this is a little bit related to what has been said above. Yes, it was Appiah-Kubi (1987, 69) who had once remarked that, “whereas there are volumes written on African ideas of God, surprisingly, there is a very thin literature on African christology”. This writer thinks, however, that the same could be said here, as well. In fact, whereas today there have been volumes and volumes written on African ideas of God and, indeed, on African christology the latter to the extent that not only would Nyamiti (1991, 3) confess that, “There is no doubt that christology is the subject which has been most developed in today's African theology”, but Oborji (2008) would, in supporting him, maintain that, “Christology is perhaps the one aspect of theology that has received the greatest attention from African theologians” (16) – all of which would comfortably put to rest the fears of some like Fashole-Luke (cited in Clarke, 2011, 1; Mbiti, 1972, 51), who, some years ago, had lamented that, “there are no signs that christological ideas are being wrestled with by Africans” – not much, however, has been done on the reality of African Mariology.

Indeed, Akinwale (2010, 239) it was who had observed that there are some “celebrated African theologians whose publications represent attempts at doing christology as if the Christological councils never took place”. And similarly, it could be said that there are, as matter of fact, many African theologians today who do their theology as if Mariology is never ordinarily a part of theology and one, indeed, that ought to have properly become, as a result, a branch of African theology.

Yes, Ukwuije (2013) had talked of “The Trinitarian deficit in African Inculturation theology” maintaining that, “Today, in Africa, it is easy to lay hand on books that introduce students to the question of inculturation, Jesus Christ, liturgy, moral theology and Church as family of God in Africa but it is difficult to see books that introduce the fundamentals of Trinitarian theology written by African theologians” (20-21), this writer thinks that there is, as well, a

Marian deficit in African inculturation theology in that it is even much more difficult laying hands on books written by African theologians on Mariology.

Of course, this writer is not oblivious of some Mariological attempts in African inculturation theology like Nwaigbo's *Mary - Mother of the African Church: A Theological Inculturation of Mariology* (2001) which, following the process of inculturation, tries to study and understand Mary in the context and reality of the African society and the Church and tries to understand the African race through Mary, of some chapters given to Mary in books of and on African theology like "Mama Maria, Mother of Sorrows", in Orobator's *Theology Brewed in African Pot*, (2008, 91-103) as well as attempts made by some feminist theologians to forge some comparisons between the life of Mary and the life of women in Africa, etc., this paper thinks, however, that much more needs to be done and much more attention needs to be given to this area, since these, in comparison with developments in other areas of African theology, are nothing but a drop of water.

More worrisome, above all, is the fact, as hinted at above, that some just tend to forget or, may be, do not always consider Mariology a part, or even, a serious part, of the whole of African theology. For instance, Baur (1994), in making an appraisal of major African theological achievements in his book, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa*, had talked of the positive re-evaluation of traditional African religions and cultural values as being the most outstanding result of African theological endeavours so far; lamented the fact that "besides the treatises of men like Mbiti, Sawyerr, Dickson and Pobee, no serious treatment of Scriptural text can be found that would deserve the name African Biblical Theology"; talked of the attempts by Bimwenyi-Kweshi at constructing an African Fundamental Theology; stressed the fact that the central theme in African theology is Christology even as he would lament that despite the claim of the existence of "innumerable African Christologies", he was able to find four elaborate treatises on the

subject (Bujo, Nyamiti, Udoh, Wachege); talked of African Ecclesiology as being derived by most authors from christology, in the meaning of the Church being the Body of Christ and lamented the fact that Sacramental Theology has not yet been developed as much as could be hoped, with Moral Theology or Christian ethics being the most neglected area (295-306). It is interesting to note, however, that he never had anything to say neither about Pneumatology nor, especially, about the major concern of this paper, here, African Mariology.

The argument may, of course, be posited that he thought, or better, considered the fact that Mariology could be handled under African Christology or even under African Ecclesiology which may not be wrong. After all, while it was Macquarrie (2003) who had observed that, “mariology could be discussed either in relation to christology or in relation to ecclesiology – and of course christology and ecclesiology are themselves closely related” (393), what the Fathers of the Vatican Council II had to say on and about Mary, as a matter of fact, can only be found in what they had to say about the Church in *Lumen Gentium* (1964, 52-69) wherein Mary is hailed, among others, as “a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity” (1964, 53). But what actually this paper wishes to emphasize here, however, is the fact that it should be seen that African Mariology is being done and done in actual fact and not become- to paraphrase what MacGrath (2007, 227) had said about the Holy Spirit and theological reflections on Him - the Cinderella of African Theology which would be left behind every time the other branches of theology are on their way to the theological ball!

Yes, Oduyoye (1998) it was who had pointed out that, “To write theology we must use an instrument” (34). And the good news here is that there are really no dearth of instruments, materials and resources that could be used in the development of this Mariology, African Mariology, that is. For instance, there have been some recent Afrocentric studies and readings of Matthew's infancy

narrative that try to show that Mary and ipso facto Jesus, her son, were Africans of Egyptian origin resident in Galilee(Ezeogu, 2010, 150-179). Again, Malueke (2006, 66; Pan-African Conference of the Third World Theologians, 2008, 270) had observed that:

We must stretch to include as theological or at least as sources of African theology several unconventional works[...]. There is also a vast amount of Black literature – poetry, fiction, political works etc. which in my opinion are legitimate sources of African theologizing. Part of our problem is that we tend not only to look for overt theological works which start with Bible and verse; but also we tend to maintain and enforce a ridiculously strict separation between the so-called African Christian thinkers and African non-Christian thinkers.

And this is something that should be taken into consideration as well. Orobator (2008), for instance, understood this very well. In his afore-cited book, *Theology Brewed in African Pot*, apart from the help he got thanks to his personal experience, the bible and the tradition of the Church, he also had made use of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, confessing that, “What I have found intriguing in reading and rereading this novel is the fact that it contains such profound source of wisdom, narratives, and events that can enrich, structure, and enlighten theological reflection from an African perspective. More significantly, this captivating African story provides me with an accessible methodology for giving theological reflection a distinctively African flavor” (20-21). It hardly bears any emphasis the fact that it influenced what he had to say about Mary in the same book. Hence, Shorter (1973, 117) would maintain that, “The novels has always been one of the most important vehicles of ideas and values in all literate society, and there is evidence that the

African novel is making an impact on the African elite. Its importance to the Christian educator and theologian cannot be emphasized too strongly”.

And to make use of such aforementioned sources and more, it is important that attention should be paid to what the Church and tradition have had to say about Mary. Only knowledge of that would put one in a better position to construct this Mariology, African Mariology, that is. The imperativeness of this rests on the fact that there have been occasions during which many African theologians have had to dabble into inculturation theology without adequate knowledge of the teachings of the Church and tradition. “The problem of African theology”, observed Ukwuije (2010, 279; 2013, 67) in support, “is that many African theologians adventure into inculturation of Christian faith without deep knowledge of the tradition of the Church and her doctrine. It is like joining a conversation without knowing the object and the origin of the conversation as well as its *status quaestionis*. African theologians should endeavour to revitalize their theology through sane exegesis, inquiry into the Fathers of the church (patrology) and the Church's entire tradition”.

Again, such a one must, as a matter of fact, pay attention to what other theologians the world over, especially those of them from Africa, have had to say about Mary no matter how apparently little. This is because it was Donne (1839, 575) who had pointed out that, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main”. Hence, Nouwen (1990), as if confirming the stand of the paper, here, would maintain: “Whenever God appears, we are called to community. We cannot live the promise on our own. As God interrupts our history and shows us a new way to go, God always offers us companions to travel with. Those who cling to a promise in isolation may go mad. It is precisely in the community of faith that the jealous love of God, who is greater than our heart and mind, can be absorbed and integrated. Even hermits need spiritual guides. Without any spiritual companionship

they cannot be a sign of God's presence. They become eccentrics. Theologians who want to enter more deeply into the mystery of God cannot do so alone. They need each other to stay in touch with the promise of God. Without a community of faith their theological understanding cannot bear fruit in the Church and the world. They become interesting figures who can stimulate many debates but cannot foster a life of faith”(98).

However, it was Pausell (2002, 22), who, commenting on the writing engagements of both St. Augustine and Marguerite d'Oingt, the latter a Carthusian nun in southern France who died in 1310, had made the following observation: “For writers like Marguerite d'Oingt and Augustine, writing required a combination of audacity and humility”. Likewise, the African theologian, in trying to pay the suggested attention to the aforementioned reality of African Mariology and to construct, thereof, some African Mariological models, would have to carry in his\her two hands – even as we are not oblivious of the observation of Merton (1981, 178) that, “It is extremely difficult to write theology well” - the same two virtues: audacity and humility. According to the same Paulsell(2002, 22),

It is precisely this need for both audacity and humility in approaching the blank page that opens a space for writing to become for us one of the spiritual disciplines from which our life as theological teachers might take its shape. We need the

audacity to believe that our writing matters, to stick with a difficult task, to live a life that makes room for the discipline of writing. We also need the humility to know that our writing must always be under revision, to do slow, painstaking work with no immediate external rewards, to be willing to seek and receive the critical response of others.

Hence, Mbiti (1980), in what he had said elsewhere, but which could be considered quite *ad rem* to the situation here, would advise: “We must move with the times and get on with the work of theologizing. After all we have the tools and sources necessary for the fulfillment of this task. Like the African proverb that says that ‘the eyes of the frog do not stop the giraffe from drinking water in the pond,’ neither the critical, skeptical, nor advice-filled eyes of others should prevent creative theologians from engaging in theological output” (122).

Indeed, it was von Balthasar (1998, 101) who in beginning his essay, *The Marian Principle*, had narrated an encounter involving him and Barth. “Karl Barth who in his later years was a regular listener to the Roman Catholic sermons on a Sunday on the radio”, he had begun, “once pointed out with satisfaction that he had never yet heard a sermon on Mary. ‘So you see, you can get on without her after all’, he said with a certain jovial maliciousness”. And as if responding to him, Barth, that is, Stravinskis (2001, 86) had said that, “one cannot ignore this woman [Mary, that is], lest one risk distorting the bible itself”. And this, likewise, can be said here, as well: One cannot ignore the Marian side of theology, cannot ignore precisely, African Mariology, a fact that has been the preoccupation of this paper so far, without risking, at the same time, a distortion of the reality and the great edifice that African theology is.

Reason: “The mystery of Mary lies at the very heart of Christian theology. This theme highlights God’s relation with His creatures in clear relief, and reveals the human response to God at its most perfect [...]. And so, God’s coming into the world is inseparably bound with the reality of His Mother Mary. Thus, in Christ’s coming, we see most particularly and clearly what God does for humanity, in the marvels He has worked in and for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore a study of Mary, Mother of God is like a microcosm or synthesis of the whole of theology, because of her intimate link with Christ in His act of creation, His Incarnation, the Redemption wrought by Him, and eschatology which is still to be

completed. The words of Mary the Mother of God, 'the Almighty has done great things for me, Holy is His name', are echoed by the Church and humanity" (Haffner, 2004, 1-2).

But then, it is good to point out here that in the development of the foregoing African Mariology, or better, the models of the same, care must be taken so that presentation of the relationship existing between Mary and theology, will not give credence to the fears of some who think that such a Mariological articulation may lead to adiminution, or even, an indirect attack on the Christocentric, and ipso facto, the Trinitarian, character of theology, the character on which, it must be said, theology stands or falls (Mbiti, 1971, 190) since it is, indeed, the key and principle of interpretation of the entire theological edifice (Dupius, 2005, 2). And truth be told, such fears and accusations may not be without foundations in the long history of theology, as exemplified, in particular, in the Medieval period when, as Coyle (1996, 93) pointed out, "devotion to Mary at first paralleled and then outshone that of the Godhead".

On contrary, a healthy and balanced stress on the aforementioned relationship will surely keep, or better, allow Christ to remain, as it were, the centre stage in the house of African theology. Indeed, writing in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II (2005, 212), whose theology of Mary, or rather, whose attachment to Mary is never, Dulles (2008, 249) maintained, a fruit of sentimentality, had made a personal observation that actually has a lot to do with what is at stake, here:

Totus Tuus. This phrase is not only an expression of piety, or simply an expression of devotion. It is more. During the Second World War, while I was employed as a factory worker, I came to be attracted to Marian devotion. At first, it had seemed to me that I should distance myself a bit from the Marian devotion of my childhood, in order to focus more on Christ. Thanks to Saint Louis of

Montfort, I came to understand that true devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, indeed, it is very profoundly rooted in the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption.

Put in another way, it could be said that the Marian dimension is built, as it were, on the rock of the Christocentric dimension of theology, and that it is being emphasized not for its own sake but always for the sake of the same Christological character personalized in her son, Jesus Christ. In fact, to borrow the words of the Fathers of Vatican Council II, it could be said to flow “forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. In no way does it impede, but rather it does foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ” (1964, 60). Hence, Orobator (2008, 92) would remind us of the African proverb that says that, “the mother of a king drinks from her son's cup”.

Similarly, care must be taken so that the development of the same models of African Mariology may not lead to a complete forgetfulness or neglect of the pneumatological character of theology, or better, of the Holy Spirit Himself and His position, consequently, taken over by Mary, nor occasional return of things to the way they were in the past. In the past, the Holy Spirit was almost, in theological circles, what Gregory of Nazianzen (cited in Gelpi, 1984, 4) had called 'Theosagraptos', 'the God about whom nobody writes about' and even when they wrote about Him, what was written was just so little in comparison with what was written about Christ (Kuyper, 2007, ix) and about both Christ and the Father (St. Augustine, cited in Congar 1983, 1:77). And even as the fact that the theological world in general is today witnessing what Moltmann (2001, 1) would call “a positive obsession with the Spirit”, or, as Kärkkäinen (2002) would term it, a “pneumatological renaissance” (11), may make this difficult, it may not have been just a superfluity

calling this to mind.

Acquisition of a Marian Imagination

It was Brueggemann (1978) who had talked about the reality of prophetic imagination, that “courage or power”, according to him, “to think an alternative thought” (44), a thought not co-opted or assaulted, as it were, by the “royal consciousness”, the dominant culture around. Yes, and the foregoing stress on the relationship between Mary and theology can help the African theologian-who, of course, already has the expected Christological-cum-Trinitarian imagination -towards the development and acquisition of yet another imagination: a Marian Imagination. The latter, contextually, would mean that imagination that would enable him or her, the African theologian, that is, not to think of Mary as having nothing to do in and with theology and the theologian as having, on his or her own part, nothing that he or she could learn from Mary in the very enterprise of his or her theology. In fact, John Paul II (1998, 132) it was who had talked about the holy monks of Christian antiquity who called Mary “the table at which faith sits in thought”. And there is, indeed, a way in which the aforementioned Marian Imagination would, as well, enable the African theologian to consider Mary not only as the table at which he or she can and actually does sit in thought, the table at and on which he or she theologizes but also the touchstone on which the soundness, solidity and authenticity of any of the various Christological models that litter African Christian landscape today may be ascertained. According to Ratzinger (1983, 35-36),

[O]nly when it touches Mary and becomes Mariology is Christology itself as radical as the faith of the Church requires. The appearance of a truly Marian awareness serves as the touchstone indicating whether or not the christological substance is fully present. Nestorianism involves the fabrication of a Christology from which the nativity and the Mother are removed, a

Christology without mariological consequences. Precisely this operation, which surgically removes God so far from man that nativity and maternity – all of corporeality – remain in a different sphere, indicated unambiguously to the Christian consciousness that the discussion no longer concerned Incarnation (becoming *flesh*), that the center of Christ's mystery was endangered, if not already destroyed. Thus in Mariology Christology was defended. Far from belittling Christology, it signifies the comprehensive triumph of a confession of faith in Christ which has achieved authenticity.

Hence, the African theologian will always, whenever and wherever, follow the example of the Apostle John who, on receiving Mary from Jesus (“This is your mother”), the Scripture points out, did the one thing expected of him: he simply “took her[Mary] to his own home”(Jn. 19:27). Yes, the African theologian should take Mary to his or her own theological home for that is where, yes, where, she truly belongs and even if he or she were to entertain some fears - such may not be ruled out - the words of the angel of the Lord to Joseph would surely suffice, here: “Do not be afraid to take Mary[home]...She has conceived by the Holy Spirit”(Matt. 1:20).

Consequently, the African theologian should try to follow her example who not only heard but above all allowed the will of God to be done in her life. Yes, Lossky (1978, 3) it was who once made the following observation: “Theology [...] is located in a relationship of revelation where the initiative belongs to God, while implying a human response, the free response of faith and love, which theologians of the Reformation have often forgotten. The involvement of God calls forth our involvement. The theological quest supposes therefore the prior coming of what is quested, or rather of Him Who has already come to us and is present in us. God

was the first to love us and He sent us His Son, as St. John says. This coming and this presence are seized by faith which thus underlies, with priority and in all necessity, theological thought”.

And if what Lossky says above is true and it is, in fact, true, this emphasis on the acquisition of a Marian imagination which, of course, is an offshoot of the foregoing emphasis on the Marian character of and relationship with theology, is also another way of saying that while “theology [...] is located in a relationship of revelation where the initiative belongs to God, while implying a human response, the free response of faith and love”, it is in the life and times of Mary, that poor woman of Nazareth, that we see a model and prototype of this “human response, the free response of faith and love” to God's revelation, a model that theologians cannot but take after. In fact, it can be said that no theologian can ever do his or her work, his or her work, of course, as a response made in graced faith and love to God's word, and do it well, if it is not done - to borrow what von Balthasar (1968, 65) had said elsewhere - under “the 'protective mantle' of the fiat spoken archetypally for him and all men by the bride and mother, Maria-ecclesia”. Hence, the same von Balthasar (cited in Sicari, 1991, 130) would put it on record that,

This is the proper origin of the theology of the Church. This wisdom of the Marian Church consists in making place in oneself from the beginning for the word of God with the fiat, in meditating on it in the heart, in letting it grow, in bringing it to the world, in the form of man, and in entrusting it to humanity. In this, Mary is also the prototype of the whole theology of the Church, and for this she is honored by the Fathers with the title 'Theologos' [...]. To cultivate this theology by following Mary cannot be the privilege of the “saints” (whose theology is then rejected as a spirituality not to be taken seriously) but must be the fundamental act

of every theologian whether layman or 'professional'".

Opportunity for a Much More Ecumenical Theology in African Christianity

While calling attention to the need for the development of an African theology of martyrdom, this writer had pointed out that such would see to the development of a much more ecumenical theology in African Christianity(2015, 20). Here, too, attention to Mary and ipso facto her theology or study, that is, Mariology, the later which Balthasar(1998, 103) had pointed out “existed from the very beginnings of theological reflection as an indispensable part of the objective Christian doctrine of salvation”, would surely help all the more in the development of the said ecumenical theology in African Christianity. No wonder, the Anglican theologian, John Macquarrie (2003, 282), would not only put it on record that, “In this era of ecumenical exchange, no theology can fail to say something on the subject of Mariology”, but in giving reasons why he had to devote a section of the same book of his, *Principles of Christian Theology*, to Mary, had made the following observation: “[T]here may be some who think that here I am introducing a needlessly controversial and divisive topic. They forget that when at an earlier stage of this book, a brief discussion of Mariology was promised, the reason given was that no ecumenical theology could afford to ignore it. If the division of Christendom are to be overcome, it can only be through frank discussion of such issues, not by evasion. A distinguished Protestant theologian, Max Thurian, who has recently written a book on this theme of mariology, says: 'Instead of being a cause of division amongst us, Christian reflection on the role of the Virgin Mary should be a cause for rejoicing and a source of prayer....It is both theologically essential and spiritually profitable to consider the vocation of Mary with some freedom'"(393). In fact, just as Kalu(2008, 15) in commenting on some currents in world Christianity at the opening of the twenty-first century had observed that, “Mariology is winning a hearing outside the Roman Catholic fold as the Apocrypha is being printed

and read by evangelists”, so also it is being underscored here that the same Mariology should be seen to be winning a hearing in the house of African theology, despite the denominational inclination of the theologian involved.

Conclusion

This paper has endeavoured to look precisely at the relationship that exists between Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, who, as matter of fact, “is no stranger in the Christian faith”(Orobator, 2008, 91) wherein she is, indeed, an icon (Okwuosa, 2007, 19), and the enterprise of theology and the fact that she, as pointed out before now, is usually associated with theologians(Allen, 2009, 50). It has been found out that a much more positive appreciation of this relationship, between her and theology, and *ipso facto*, the theologian, that is, will surely have implications for the African theologian who, even as his or her theology is “en route”- to borrow the title of the text edited sometime ago by both Appiah-Kubi and Torres (1979), - which, of course, is normal for any theology, since “one never comes to a finished state of theological insight and one can never say, 'I know it all, now'” (Johnston, 2008, 1), - has, however, today made its presence felt not only in the Church in Africa but also throughout the world. This to such an extent that the bias and doubts of Vanneste (cited in Hebga, 2003, 41-42) about the possibility of an African theology and the fears of Mbiti (1972)himself who was lamenting that the African Church was “without a theology, without theologians and without theological concern”(51), would no longer hold water.

This paper did point out that the implications could be located in the help that it could give the theologian, in this case, the African theologian, in keeping the feminine all the more alive in the great house of African theology and in the development of a more elaborate African Mariology as the latter appears to be lagging behind in comparison with other branches of the same African theology. It was equally observed that it could offer a helping hand

in the development of a much more ecumenical theology in African christianity and then see to the acquisition of what has been called here a “Marian Imagination” in that just as John Paul II (1998, 108) would conclude by observing that the afore-cited holy monks of Christian antiquity were convinced of the need to philosophari in Maria(to philosophize in Mary), so the African theologian, when all is said and done, would be convinced as well of the need, whenever and wherever, to always do the same: “theologari in Maria”!

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