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## Pastoral Theology: Its Role and Relevance in African Christianities (124)

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## (124) PASTORAL THEOLOGY: ITS ROLE AND RELEVANCE IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITIES

**Herbert Moyo**

### **Introduction**

Actions speak louder than words. The church can be described by academics and theologians in books and articles, but it is the life of the church through overtly pastoral religious practices and the general life of Christians that makes the church visible in society. Pastoral theology is the theological praxis of the church as the body of Christ. It seeks to interact with the socio-economic, religious and political realities of specific contexts. Pastoral theology is the theological and doctrinal foundation and justification for the pastoral praxis of African Christianities. The continuous critical reflection on the continuous pastoral practices of Christianities is the foundation of the relevance of pastoral theology.

Pastoral theology is the discourse on the praxis of God and the praxis of human beings in the socio-economic, religious and political context. Christianity in Africa has so many types and styles that it becomes fair to talk of African Christianities instead of African Christianity. Pastoral theologies vary according to the different strands of Christianities. However, in general, pastoral theology concerns itself with the inherent presence of Christianity in the everyday life of Christians. Pastoral theology drives the visibility of Christianity at significant points of the lives of individuals and communities, both in joy and sorrow. In fact, in most African settings, pastoral theology is synonymous with the functions of a pastor as he or she responds to the pastoral needs of individuals, groups and communities.<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues that pastoral theology is the heartbeat of African Christianities, as pastors act as diviners or spirit mediums, responding on behalf of God (and the church) to the challenges and joys of communities as the shepherding arm of Christianity. I will describe pastoral theology to lay the ground for a discussion on the role of the pastoral theology which can be personified by the role of the pastor. The chapter describes the African context in general and how it interplays with the understanding of the role and relevance of pastoral theology in African Christianities.

### **Defining Pastoral Theology**

Pastoral theology is concerned with the holistic care of humanity and the environment from a theological perspective. Mwaura says, 'Pastoral theology... discusses the duties, obligations and the functions of the priest in the care of souls.'<sup>2</sup> In addition to this understanding, I would say it is the care for all creation by pastors and all believers as espoused by the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Pastoral theology is the action-reflection dialectic in the shepherding ministry of the church. It is central in African Christianities as it makes Christianity relevant to the contextual needs of people. Pastoral theology contextualizes and enculturates pastoral care, producing a hybrid suitable for specific contexts.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. Drum. 'Pastoral Theology' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14611a.htm> (accessed 9 February, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Philomena Njeri Mwaura, 'Healing: A Pastoral Concern', in *Pastoral Care in African Christianity*, eds. D. W. Waruta and Hannah W. Kinoti (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000), 72.

<sup>3</sup> See Roderick R. Hewitt, *Church and Culture: An Anglo-Caribbean Experience of Hybridity and Contradiction* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2012), 50-84.

Mwaura adds pastoral theology ‘... can best be understood when it is integrated into the cultures, times, circumstances and actual situations of a particular people’.<sup>4</sup> This understanding calls for theological reflection on the contextual pastoral needs and dynamics in a variety of socio-economic, cultural, religious and political situations of the location of the church. ‘Pastoral theology is the continued reflection of the Church on the unchanging truth of doctrine in view of its being lived in faith, hope, and charity, and in view of giving direction to all of the pastoral activity of the Church. Pastoral theology studies doctrine in order to uncover its significance for the human person and build up the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.’<sup>5</sup>

Pastoral theology in African Christianities can be classified into six operational models of pastoral care, with different denominations emphasizing certain models over others. The following are the basic classifications: pastoral care (PC) as performance of miracles and exorcisms; PC as homiletics, liturgy and worship; PC as prophetic social action for socio-economic and political transformation; PC as healing (there are different forms of healing ministries but the basic understanding is that the church must do healing); PC as socialization (personal interaction)<sup>6</sup> and PC as religious and civic education. Currently, in African Christianities, the most prominent models of pastoral care are healing and the performance of miracles to solve the problems of church and pastoral clients. Churches that perform miracles are fast-growing compared to those that heal through the western type of hospitalization. To sum up this section, pastoral theology is the praxis of the pastoral care ministry of the church as it demonstrates the mystery of the saving power of the Christian God over other gods.

### **The Role of Pastoral Theology in African Christianities**

#### *Pastoral theology and social construction*

African Christianities cannot be ignored by either politicians or economists in determining the direction of society. Pastoral care is, in some cases, part of the many problems of society, but it is also part of the solution. Pastoral theology interrogates different socio-economic and political challenges from a Christian perspective.

Pastoral theology determines the nature of the pastoral voices that are heard in African Christianities. The role of pastoral theology in social construction is to develop an authentic Christian pastoral voice within the diverse Christianities that can positively contribute to socio-economic and political development and/or stability.<sup>7</sup> The challenge is that there are many voices that claim to be authentic pastoral voices, and this confuses society, since there are no tools for authenticating the voices that they come across. On the one hand, the pastoral voice of the church is believed to bring new life through conversion and transformation of individuals and communities. The prophetic pastoral voice is expected to speak the truth to political establishments, thereby bringing peace and justice where there is strife and war. On the other hand, pastoral voices can lead to war and suffering, in cases such as in Nigeria where religious strife exist

<sup>4</sup> Mwaura, ‘Healing: A Pastoral Concern’, 72; See also John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969) and Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), x.

<sup>5</sup> Ave Maria University, “What is Pastoral Theology?” [www.avemaria.edu/MajorsPrograms/GraduatePrograms/MTSinPastoralTheology/WhatisPastoralTheology.aspx](http://www.avemaria.edu/MajorsPrograms/GraduatePrograms/MTSinPastoralTheology/WhatisPastoralTheology.aspx) (accessed 20 February, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London and New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 55-59.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Moyo, ‘Religion and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Healing and Communal Reconstruction in African Communities’, *Alternation Special Edition No. 11*, (2013): 207-236.

between Christians and the Boko Haram militants.<sup>8</sup> At times, the pastoral voice can speak unreasonably in the name of God. For example, it is irresponsible for the pastoral voice to say that sick people with chronic illnesses should stop taking scientifically proven medications because they have been healed by the Holy Spirit. Hence, the lack of analysing the nature of the pastoral voice can at times lead to war, human suffering and death.

In Africa, there is no problem of unbelief. However, there is the challenge of the authenticity of the pastoral voices that people are being asked to believe. This is especially true of African Christianities where church leaders speak with many contesting voices at times, for instance, against tried and tested means of healing chronic diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis and diabetes. The role of pastoral theology is to come up with life-affirming pastoral practices and proclamations.

*Celebrating the God of life and standing up for dignity and justice through pastoral theology*

Pastoral care as prophetic social action for socio-economic and political transformation is social activism by pastoral care-givers. Christianity in Africa is a key factor in civil society and can be regarded as one of the most vibrant assets, energies and tools for engaging social and political developments on the African continent. In this case, pastoral theology in African Christianities becomes concerned with social action, with pastoral care-givers becoming social activists.<sup>9</sup>

Africa is riddled with unfavourable political developments that impact negatively on the socio-economic sphere of humanity. Corruption, partisan politics, political violence, rigged elections, genocides, tribalism, ethnic wars and civil wars are very common in most parts of Africa. The above scenarios usually result in the abuse of human rights, economic meltdown, and mass movements of people as internally displaced people and as refugees. Pastoral care-givers advocate prophetically against questionable political developments through ecumenical structures and individual prophetic pastors. According to the World Council of Churches, 'Christians have been called by God to fulfil a mission in the world, and obedience to this call means full participation in the life of the world.'<sup>10</sup> Christians have a responsibility to be concerned about the structures of society as well as the morality of individuals who make up society.

The church '... seeks a responsible society in which there is a genuine respect for persons, freedom, peace, justice for all, and a due restraint of power... defending basic rights and dignity...'<sup>11</sup> The African political realm is affected by tribalism, ethnic wars, racism, political intolerance and the inherent mentality of a one-party state system. In this realm, pastoral theology has the role of being the conscience of society. Through pastoral theology, the church should play a role of bringing about tolerance, agreements, the harmonizing of competing claims, persuasion and co-operation for the sake of influencing the quality of life in society. In fact, '... the presence and ministry of the church influence the quality of life in society. As one formative influence, the church may awaken and renew the social conscience within society. Such influence upon the common life will have indirect consequences for policies of the state'.<sup>12</sup> Through pastoral theology the church should use its wealth and heritage of ethical teachings to speak prophetically in defence of human dignity, human rights and human welfare.

Through *diaconia*, the church responds to government failure by providing hospitals, schools and hospices, sourcing drugs, food parcels and entrepreneurial initiatives. The church therefore seeks to bring

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<sup>8</sup> Goodluck Jonathan, 'Why Nigeria has not Defeated Boko Haram' *Premium Times*, 28 September 2014. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/168771-why-nigeria-has-not-defeated-boko-haram-jonathan.html> (accessed 15 November, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Lartey, 'In Living Color', 57-58.

<sup>10</sup> WCC 1967:110.

<sup>11</sup> WCC1967:111.

<sup>12</sup> WCC 1967:112.

the heavenly values of equity to the kingdom of the world. 'The model of pastoral care implied in this approach has been described as prophecy to structures or speaking truth to power.'<sup>13</sup>

*Pastoral theology and the healing ministry of the church*

African Christianities have a mandate to heal society of any possible iniquity and sickness. The African context is premised on physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, communal and relational wellness.<sup>14</sup> Wellness and health from an African perspective is holistic. For example, there is a need for continued healing in coming to terms with different sexualities,<sup>15</sup> such as homosexuality, trans-gender, bisexuality and intersex. Christianities should begin to stumble by being inclusive rather than to stumble on the side of excluding others, to err by loving rather than to err by hurting. Pastoral theology espouses the healing of broken relationships.

African Traditional Religion is rooted in the realm of the supernatural. Christianity has also been placed in that realm. In the African worldview, religion is set apart mainly for responding to situations beyond human capabilities. It is in situations such as death, incurable diseases, bad luck and spiritual challenges that people turn to religion for answers. Christianity is therefore to fill the gap of ATRs by responding to challenges through supernatural acts.

In the realm of the supernatural, the most common reference is made to questions of sickness and prosperity. Healing for the sick is central in the quest for religious intervention. The future of pastoral theology in African Christianities therefore lies in its ability to respond to the socio-economic and healing needs of Africans. Having challenges based on diseases such as HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, churches can only do well in responding to these.

Popular, growing African pastoral ministries are founded on healing. These churches perform miracles and spiritual healing in the name of Jesus. Miraculous healing crusades, camps and sessions are held, where people profess to have been miraculously healed. For example, in the time of HIV and AIDS, on many television channels across sub-Saharan Africa, images of people living with HIV being 'miraculously healed' are being aired. In some instances, people living with HIV form their own queue, carrying placards that indicate their specific health challenge. The 'man of God'<sup>16</sup> will then touch the person living with HIV and declare him or her delivered in 'the name of Jesus'.<sup>17</sup> In many instances, people are given holy water or holy pieces of string or wool to use as tangible sources of healing.

Pastoral ministries that do not promote miraculous healing do not attract a big following. The growth of African Christianities is determined by healing. This is understandable, since for Christianity to be comfortable in Africa, it has to resonate and enculturate with ATRs. The beliefs and practices of ATRs seek to secure health and eliminate pain and suffering. 'Salvation in ATRs is to a very large extent earthbound: health, prosperity and longevity in this world.'<sup>18</sup> In agreement, Laurenti Magesa says,

... so from beginning to the end, from birth to death, African religion stresses and orients its adherents, directly or symbolically, towards the 'abundance of life' motif. Thus birth, all the rites of passage marking different

<sup>13</sup> Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> See Mwaura, 'Healing: A Pastoral Concern', 72-100.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Moyo, 'Caught between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Politics of Homosexuality and the Response of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ)', *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* Vol. 18, No. 1, (July 2012): 155-167.

<sup>16</sup> It is mostly and popularly men who perform such miracles, hence the popular phrase 'man of God', with little said about 'woman of God'.

<sup>17</sup> Ezra Chitando and Charles Klagba, *In the Name of Jesus! Healing in the Age of HIV* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Chitando and Klagba, *In the Name of Jesus!*, 6.

stages in the development of the vital force, and indeed earth itself as the culmination of life, receive special attention in African Traditional Religious activity.<sup>19</sup>

Ogbu Kalu is of the view that the issue of health and healing is a very important aspect of religious life in Africa, and in explaining the growth of both AICs and Pentecostalism on the continent. Healing is the heartbeat of pastoral care. It releases the energy for participatory worship that integrates the body, spirit, and soul.<sup>20</sup>

### **Pastoral Care as Socio-Economic Transformation**

Amongst the AICs, the quest for material success and prosperity ranks second to healing in many sprouting ministries in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The growth of Pentecostal churches and AICs is also located in spiritualization of materialism. In Zimbabwe, prophets such as Emmanuel Makandiwa of the United Family International Church, Eurbert Angel<sup>21</sup> of Spirit Embassy, and Walter Magaya of Prophetic Healing Deliverance Ministries (popularly known as PHD Ministries) perform miracles to give people material gain. There is popular miracle money where the prophet prays that one gets money and the following day there is money in the bank account of the church member. People give to the church ('seeding') in order to receive tenfold from the 'man of God'. Prophets pray for people to have homes, money, motor vehicles, businesses, designer clothes and employment. If there is witchcraft preventing prosperity, the prophets can exorcise such evil spells in the name of Jesus.

In the pastoral healing mission of the churches, the question of who approves what is becoming urgent. In seeking to become responsible, there are situations that could result in a high level of irresponsibility. If, in the process of healing, the church discourages adherents from taking tried and trusted forms of medication, then this becomes irresponsible and criminal on the part of the church. For example, there are people who have stopped taking antiretroviral drugs because of claims that they have been miraculously healed. People then develop drug-resistant strains of HIV. This has also happened to people with other forms of chronic illness, such as hypertension and diabetes. In such cases, the church should be prophetic to itself. Through scientific means, the state has also been questioning the voice of the church. So, who authenticates the pastoral voice of the church in the ongoing healing mission where these have displayed a level of irresponsibility?

### **Pastoral Care as Care**

People in many parts of Africa are wounded both physically and emotionally and they need healing. So a key function of pastoral theology is to create an understanding of a God who cares for humanity and the environment. The relevance of pastoral theology cannot be over-emphasized in Africa's context of multiple forms of wounds – caused by perpetual wars in some parts of Africa, the salient scourge of HIV and AIDS which is vicious in Africa, poverty and bad governance.

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<sup>19</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), 250.

<sup>20</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 263.

<sup>21</sup> This prophet's original name before being called by God was Eurbert Mudzamiri. After his calling to serve God, he resorted to a new identity.

### The Relevance of Pastoral Theology in African Theologies

The primary focus of pastoral theology is precisely the 'living relevance' of doctrine in contemporary Africa. It is not divorced from the globalized world, but is still unique from the rest of the world in its own way, thereby requiring uniquely African interpretations of the gospel message. Pastoral theology is the theoretical soul of the praxis of pastoral care. Pastoral theology enables continuous reflection on the practices of the pastoral ministry of the church. Pastoral theology is the theoretical basis for bringing the word of God to the socio-economic and political realities of given pastoral contexts to inspire a spirit of liberation. In addition, Lartey says pastoral theology is also based '... on a socio-economic and political analysis of a specific social context. Such analysis is undergirded by historical criticism and theological reflection. Its aim is the transformation of societies and persons'.<sup>22</sup> So the relevance of pastoral theology in African Christianities is that it is a tool through which pastoral care-givers engage in the praxis of practical care. As a result, it can be argued that pastoral theology is the science of pastoral care that renders all 'branches of theology, whether theoretical or practical, purpose in one way or another to make priests the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God'.<sup>23</sup> These branches include '... the apologetic, dogmatic, exegetic, moral, juridical, ascetical, liturgical... pastoral theology teaches the priest his part in this work of Catholic and Christian tradition of revealed truth...'<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the life of the church is premised on pastoral theology in activities such as teaching/educating, healing, guiding, liturgy/worship, administration of sacraments as per denominational dogma, catechumen classes for denominational indoctrination, reconciling and repairing injured morals, empowering, nurturing and liberating.<sup>25</sup> Pastoral theology needs to continue to reflect on the nature and direction of pastoral duties and responsibilities in African Christianities. This will enable continued refinement of pastoral praxis in Africa from a contemporary globalized Africa.

### Conclusion

This chapter defined pastoral theology from an African perspective. The definition was followed by a discussion on the role of pastoral theology in African Christianities. The third section of the chapter discussed the relevance and need for pastoral theology in African Christianities. It can be concluded that pastoral theology is the reflection aspect of pastoral practices of the church in different contexts. This kind of action and reflection needs to continue to guide and inform the pastoral life of African Christianities.

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<sup>22</sup> Lartey, 'In Living Color', 58.

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<sup>24</sup> [www.newadvent.org/cathen/14611a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14611a.htm).

<sup>25</sup> See, Lartey, 'In Living Color', 60-68.

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