

# THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

ISSN 0794-9715

June 2014 Vol. 28

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Editorial   | v   |
| The Relevance Of Christian Faith For Positive Change<br>In The Public Sector In Nigeria<br><i>Bona. Ikenna Ugwu</i>   | 1   |
| Advocacy Of Faith With Good Works:<br>The Nigerian Situation<br><i>Obiorah Mary Jerome</i>  | 25  |
| Overcoming Ethnic- Religious And Political Violence A Cusan<br>Search For National Unity Through The Religions<br><i>Nicholas Ibeawuchi Mbogu</i>               | 45  |
| Restoring The Participatory Rights Of Women In Liturgy<br>In The Nigerian Church<br><i>Emmanuel Chinedu Anagwo</i>  | 83  |
| Transformation Imperative Of The Incarnation<br><i>Anthonia M. Essien</i>   | 99  |
| The Evangelizing Nazareth Maiden (Luke 1, 39-45):<br>Paradigm For The New Evangelization Initiative<br><i>Caroline N. Mbonu</i>                                 | 113 |
| The Pursuit Of Justice And Righteousness As Panacea<br>To Social Chaos And Disorder (Micah 6:6-8)<br><i>Agnes I. Acha</i>                                       | 129 |
| Africa And The Word: Implications From The<br>Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, <i>Verbum Domini</i><br><i>B. A. C. Obiefuna &amp; Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony</i> | 145 |

Published by the Catholic Theological of Nigeria (CATHAN)

## TRANSFORMATION IMPERATIVE OF THE INCARNATION

**Anthonia M. Essien,**  
Department Of Religious & Cultural Studies  
University of Uyo, UYO  
Akwa Ibom State.

### Introduction

This discourse involves a dialogue within the paradigms of social transformation as a viable theological option. This peculiar perspective is concerned with the transformation of the oppressed people. On the surface it appears to be a reactionary effort against a "speculative" theology that has not spoken to needs of the concrete situation. Oppression relates to physical, economic, psychological, and political repression. In view of this oppression, transformative approach in theology seeks to speak to "this-world" problems, before "other-world" issues; to concrete circumstances before abstract thought; to the sinfulness of people's plight in the slum before the sin in people's heart. It pertains to man's efforts to establish a just and fraternal society in which all people may have dignity and determine their own.

A renewed transformative approach in theology has made valuable contributions to theological discussion today. First, and perhaps its most positive value, is the reminder of the wholistic nature of salvation. In contrast to a Greek view of reality, which put undue emphasis on the spirit at the expense of the body, transformative approaches in theology building on Judaism, acknowledges a unity of body and spirit. The kingdom which Jesus preached and represented through his existence is not only the soul's bliss but shalom for the body as well: peace on earth and liberation of the creature from the past. If, the body belongs to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:13), the task of the Christian is to await and anticipate his dominion in the future redemption of the body. Transformative approach in theology help us that other members of the body of Christ are hurting, and are in poverty, disease, and physical want. Scripture plainly teaches that when one member of the body of Christ is in pain or need, the rest of the body is to give that hurting portion special attention (1 Cor 12:25—26).

Transformative approach reminds us that if theology is to be thoroughly biblical and to emulate the Lord, must find practical

expression. To have great words of wisdom and knowledge without practical expression (love) is to be only a noisy gong (1 Cor 13:1). This is the implication of the incarnation.

### Incarnation and Implications

Christianity is concerned with the birth and the formation of a new socio-political reality: the kingdom of God and the embodiment on earth, through the Holy Spirit a new ethos. Therefore it is a theological imperative to exemplify that the kingdom is a living extension of the living Christ.

The kingdom of God has a 'now-and-not-yet' nature to it. The 'now' has been manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter Adam argues that:

Incarnation without verbal revelation means a dumb incarnation of uninterpreted presence ... There is no reason to be content with a notion of incarnation which is only personal or sacramental, and which does not value verbal revelation in Christ's ministry and in our own. ... I am not arguing for unincarnated words, for messages without presence. I am claiming that verbal revelation is part of Christ's incarnate ministry, and ... incarnated ministry should also include incarnated words, the message of the Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

Biblical images of the early church present it as "organic, dynamic and interdependent."<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming picture in Paul's writings is of every Christian living in total interdependence on one another.<sup>3</sup> By extension, each corporatized or institutionalized expression of Christian ministry is also interdependent on each other part. For Paul, "there is no expectation that each Christian, or every group of believers, will serve God in precisely the same way, each encompassing the whole range of possible expressions of Christian faith."<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, Paul

teaches that there are a variety of gifts and that we should rejoice and respect the gifts of others, not "deprecating or envying the fact that God calls others to express their faith in a different way."<sup>5</sup> The burden of the incarnation was that because God's reign is near, so near that its presence can already be sensed and even experienced, the time is ripe for transformation.<sup>6</sup>

The incarnation of Jesus shows us an important truth. Jesus came into the world speaking the language, living the customs, and using the forms meaningful for people living in a particular time and place. These acts reflected values of the kingdom of God that radically countered those of broader culture. This means that instead of inviting people into the church, the church must enter into the world. It must be missionary instead of attractive.

### Dimensions of Transformation

One aspect of the transformation Jesus called for was a change of attitude ("repentance"), a reorientation of mind and will and life. Yet there is another dimension to the transformation Jesus called for as a result of the nearness of God's reign, a dimension implied by the gospels even if not articulated overtly. This other dimension is *social* transformation alongside and in continuity with personal reorientation in response to the nearness of God's reign. There are at least three reasons for claiming that Jesus called for social transformation:

- It is implied in the very concept of the "reign of God";
- It is confirmed by the nature of Jesus' mission; and
- It is spelt out in Jesus' teaching, which was both personal (directed at persons) and "political" (aimed at addressing social relations and redressing social injustice).

It is proper to assert that the basis for transformation is derived from the fact that all people in need of transformation are made and loved by God. They are stamped with God's image<sup>7</sup>, and this instills everyone with an intrinsic dignity. This is a crucial and indeed foundational difference between a Christian and a secular worldview of transformation. And it is this underpinning belief in a shared humanity, derived from God, which leads to a sense of mutuality and obligation. One aspect of this is that from earliest times God has reinforced the idea of upholding the rights of the vulnerable.

1 Cited in Doug Edmonds An incarnational agency in an evangelical world (a theological consideration of Anglicare's role in mission) Launceston, Anglicare Tasmania (Paper presented on 2 September 2008 at the Anglicare Australia 2008 Conference, Sydney, NSW) at 4.

2 Edmonds, 6

3 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12

4 Edmonds, 6

5 Edmonds, 6

6 see Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43

7 Genesis 1:26-27



### Biblical Basis

In the Old Testament, there are repeated injunctions to God's people to respect the rights of the widow, the orphan, the alien, the debtor, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalised, amongst others. This is reflected in commandments, especially in the Deuteronomic law, in the constant refrain of God's prophets, and in the proverbs, psalms and wisdom literature. It is a common theme throughout the Old Testament. This common theme continues in the New Testament where the call to justice is renewed in the life and teaching of Jesus. There is express command to treat others the way we would like to be treated.<sup>8</sup> There is also the consistent example of Jesus who befriends the poor, the outcast and the leper. And importantly, a new and transcendent understanding of "who is my neighbour?" emerges from the parables.<sup>9</sup> This undercuts any attempt to narrowly circumscribe our own responsibility toward others. So one conclusion is reached quickly and easily, we must care about human rights because God does and this is the basis of social transformation from a Christian perspective.

A Christian approach to transformation will not be grounded in a secular, political agenda. It will be grounded in the life of Christ. When we examine Christ's life it reveals a steady appeal to the obligations owed by God's people. The Trinitarian Godhead – the very being of God – is an eternal and intimate community of self-giving and service. Biblical foundations for transformation are about fairness and right relationships. Humans are made in the image of God in order that they may serve others. There are many places science simply cannot go. It cannot comprehend evil. It cannot forgive. It cannot help a devastated community to trust and start over. It cannot believe in the kingdom to come, and balks at an afterlife or resurrection. It can help to grow food, but knows nothing of the good of sharing. It can provide health, without cherishing life, and may explain the physical world in astonishing detail, but never its meaning. For this reason science is in desperate need of transformation. As Pope Benedict XVI says: "From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly."<sup>10</sup>

### Early Church

Because Christian transformation is essentially a transformation of human persons, the Scriptures themselves provide the first descriptions of organized food distributions and care for the vulnerable members of the society.<sup>11</sup> During Roman times, especially after official recognition of the Christian faith, the transformative contributions of Christianity included: the elimination of infanticide, the end of gladiatorial sports, improving the rights of women, providing burials for paupers, promoting humane treatment for slaves, and establishment of public healthcare. The First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. urged the Church to provide for the poor, sick, widows and strangers. It also ordered the construction of a hospital in every cathedral town.

In the Middle Ages, the Christian church made startling contributions to music and the arts. The monastic orders had a pioneering role in providing care for the aged and infirm, in establishing teaching institutions, and in providing places of refuge for the persecuted. Christianity encouraged scientific exploration, believing that new discoveries brought ever greater glory to God as the creator of all. Importantly, "...the Catholic tradition emphasises contemplation and the goodness of the intellect in itself..."<sup>12</sup>

In the industrial age, Christians had a prominent role in reforming social ills, such as child labour, debtors' prisons and unsafe industrial conditions. Christians led the campaign for the abolition of slavery. The Sunday School movement was established, not exclusively to promote the Christian faith, but to provide basic literacy for the children of industrial slums who might otherwise be trapped by circumstance.

### Challenges Before the African

It was Pope John Paul II who said that "the greatest challenge to achieving peace and justice in Africa consist in the good administration of public affairs, in the two interrelated areas of politics and the economy."<sup>13</sup> He continued: "The suffering of the African peoples is, to a great extent, linked to bad administration in these two areas. This is a major challenge to evangelization in Africa."

Governance and addressing the issues of poverty is a serious business. For Adam Smith, every business transaction is a moral

<sup>11</sup> Acts 6: 2-4

<sup>12</sup> Charles Curran "The Catholic identity of Catholic institutions" *Theological studies* March 1997, 10

<sup>13</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 7:12

<sup>9</sup> Luke 10:25-37

<sup>10</sup> Papal Encyclical *Dues Caritas Est* No 28

challenge to see that both parties come out fairly. Fairness and benevolence in business are the underpinnings of the free enterprise system called capitalism. Our economic system comes out of a constitutional democracy where underprivileged rights are to be attended to as well. The spirit of the Golden Rule is a spirit of morality, of mutual benefit, of fairness for all concerned.

A comprehensive description of poverty will be multidimensional, to include:

- Unequal distribution of income
- High population growth
- Illiteracy.
- Large families
- Ethnicity
- Problems Of Rural Poverty
- Presence of malnutrition, illiteracy, diseases and long term health problems.
- Unhygienic living conditions, lack of proper housing, high infant mortality rate, injustice to women and social ill-treatment of certain sections of society.

The poor talk about various dimensions of poverty and express frustration over their powerlessness and voicelessness. Being a complex concept, poverty is not easy to define. It can mean different things to different people. At least six interlocked dimensions feature prominently in poor people's definitions of poverty.

- First: Hunger and lack of food remain core concerns of the poor.
- Second: Poverty has important psychological dimensions also. In explaining poverty, the poor often express a sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, voicelessness, dependency, shame and humiliation.
- Third: Poor people often lack access to basic infrastructure such as roads, transport, clean water, electricity and marketplaces.
- Fourth: While literacy is clearly valued, schooling receives little mention or mixed reviews. This might be due to the poor quality of education or lack of job opportunities for educated people.
- Fifth: The poor dread serious illness within the family more than anything else. Poor health can lead to job loss and entail large health-care expenses, pushing the family into further poverty.
- Sixth: Lack of access to assets and basic needs such as education, health care and safe drinking water are some of the most critical issues concerning poverty and development.

### **The Poverty Within**

The poverty situation in most African states today could be frightening. Millions of people are homeless, disease is rampant, and starvation is a common occurrence. People die from preventable diseases like malaria, or diarrhea. Lack of food is a primary cause, as it leads to malnutrition, vitamin deficiency, and ultimately, a painful death. Access to clean drinking water is rare and precious. The future for most African children looks bleak, because without support, an early end to a young life is the only escape from reality. Some of these children are orphaned at an early age, because of HIV/AIDS, malnutrition or war.

Less than fifty years ago Africa was still considered a continent with the lowest degree of urbanization. Fifty years ago only three of African cities were listed by the United Nations among the world's 100 largest cities. But in recent decades Africa is certainly among the most rapid population growth and urban change of any of the world's regions. Many factors wear away at the economic stability of the city and multiply the pain of poverty, corruption, injustice, war and political/ethnic conflicts. In most urban cities there is a general deterioration in public services, infrastructure and growing unemployment in the formal sector.

Up to two-thirds of Africa's urban population is made up of the under 25 age group. More than 45 percent is under the age of fifteen. This disproportionate number will grow with Africa's high population growth rate. With poverty around them, young people roam the streets. They are found in the city's dumps for recyclable items such as paper, plastic, glass, and scrap metals. Some of them survive by means of theft and expediency. Without affection, education, and the security of family life, they are abused and maltreated by adults whom they regard as enemies. The present "Boko Haram" malaise come to mind where small boys under the age of fifteen are abducted from the streets to become terrorist soldiers. In some places the exploitation of female children is on the increase, mainly in urban areas. Masters rape servant girls, older men their relations. School girls are lured into prostitution in order to get pocket money.

### **Young People in Need of Transformation**

A key issue within the general problem of poverty is the lack of economic prospects for the young generation. Young people can negatively influence crises and violent conflicts. Because of the lack of economic prospects and exclusion from the regular economy, they form a

major pool of human resources for markets of violence and criminal structures. What we experience now is that, many young people are being excluded from the regular economy, while traditional rural structures are breaking down at the same time. The young generation is thus becoming an inexhaustible resource for criminal entrepreneurs: where there are no prospects, the availability of instruments of violence exerts a powerful appeal. With a gun in his hand, a young man can intimidate people and demand for false respect and he is shown such respect by other people for the first time in his life, even if it is simply sheer terror on the part of the persons threatened.

The role of Africa in the world's economic development, remains marginal. Although considerable economic growth rates can be observed in many African countries, Africa's share in the world trade is decreasing. The WTO has failed to address the core concern of the poorest countries, especially the continuing collapse in the price of agricultural commodities, which are their main exports. It has also failed to prevent industrialized countries from putting up barriers to exports from developing countries. At the same time, the WTO has insisted that developing countries open up their economies to foreign imports.

One agreement, protecting the right of multinational companies to patent their products, prevents developing countries from producing their own substitutes. This for example impairs development in pharmaceutical industries.

While it is true that almost all of the African states lived through a long and sad history of exploitation at the hands of colonialists, it is also true that the factor of exploitation did not terminate with de-colonization. It still endures even today in different forms, including the crushing burden of international debts, the unjust trade practices, and the severe conditions imposed by World Bank sponsored programmes of structural adjustments. In addition, there is the challenge of dishonesty on the part of corrupt government leaders who, usually in connivance with domestic and foreign private interests, divert substantial national resources to their own private ends by transferring public funds to their private accounts in foreign banks. Therefore, the question here is: Given this sad state of affairs, how can the Church in Africa assist in devising ways and means to encourage honest politicians to protect public funds from misuse. Another major challenge is the influence on African states by external factors.

The growing inputs of China, India, Russia and other "new" powers in Africa will also have a price. At present, they seem to provide

new opportunities for development. Yet, in the future they are to be paid for by a further extension of Africa's dependency on international players. Whilst Africans have fought against colonialism, neo colonialism and apartheid from the West, today Africans seem to be blind to the newly emerging dependency on the East

### **The Church's Response**

The development of leadership qualities in Africa, and the willingness of the leaders to work together for a common destiny have to be the basis for a substantial increase of Africa's say in matters of its own concern and interest. This is a fundamental question for good governance on continental level.

"Religious communities are without question the largest and best organised civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the divides of race, class and nationality."<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt at all that bad governance is the source of injustice and conflicts. It is adequately highlighted in the social teachings of the Catholic Church, and was given appropriate emphasis in the encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI which is titled: "On the development of Peoples"; that the peoples' major aspirations are for freedom from misery; greater assurance of obtaining sustenance, health services, education, an increased share of responsibility through meaningful participation in the decision-making process; and security from situations which violate their personal dignity.

There are just too many examples of undesirable consequences arising out of bad governance. The sources of poverty, human suffering, instability, civil conflicts, and unresolved conflicts, can easily be traced back to bad governance. The Church has a clear obligation to actively address this fundamental issue of bad governance wherever it occurs, because it is directly harmful to the existence of peace and justice among the people of God. This issue is obviously closely associated with the healing role of the Church, more specifically, healing in its relation to politics, the economy and culture.

We learn from the Bible (ref. Luke 9:6; Mark 16:15-20) that Christ heals and sends us to heal others, not to transmit spiritual goods only, but to save the body along with the soul. This means that the tasks

<sup>14</sup> Cited in James, 7



of healing are not limited to the liturgical sphere alone; they also include and presuppose the political, economic and cultural spheres. These values are fundamentals on which a healthy social, economic and political life of any society can be built. They are essential for progress. However, they are not gained overnight. The Church as Family of God faces this challenge in its transformative mission.

"The principle of free trade is no longer adequate for regulating international agreements. It can certainly work when both parties are about equal economically....But the case is quite different, when the nations involved are far from equal...It must be avowed openly that, in this case, the fundamental tenet of liberalism (as it is called), as the norm for market dealings, is open to serious questions."<sup>15</sup>

Globalization offers opportunities to the African people. Many Africans have found their own place in the sphere of global business as well as in international institutions. Migration is a positive concept for these men and women. Greater strata of the population are, however, still systematically excluded from basic access to the market sphere and remain restricted to subsistence or sheer survival economies.

The modern communication systems have linked Africa to the global scientific and economic progress. The internet, for example, gives Africa a unique chance to equally participate in the global development. Many individuals, however, lack the basic knowledge and education to make use of these new opportunities.

"Lack of education is as serious as lack of food."<sup>16</sup> In addition, the African continent has been continuously discovered in recent years as a resource base for industrial progress and a potentially growing market. But Africa hardly has the bargaining power to decide upon the use of its own resources. The continent is a subject of decisions which are made from outside.

Often the poor and defenceless people in areas, where extractive industries are operating, are the ones who suffer most from the irresponsible orientation of certain companies towards pure profit making, without any regard at people's living situation. In terms of

political influence, Africa has nowadays a more important voice than ever before. Still it takes much longer to organize international intervention such as armed forces for crisis situations in Africa than for other regions in the world.

### **Community-Ship**

One of the major challenges in Africa today is the comparative lack of success in both the political and economic fields of human endeavor. This is partly attributable to the multi-ethnic composition of the African states. Ethnic pluralism is often the cause of tensions within the states of Africa. The community, then, has an imperative to intervene in such problematic situations, resolve conflicts and restore justice. What is important is not to pretend to avoid all conflicts, but to solve them in creative ways without allowing the eruption of violence.

The question here is: How can ethnic pluralism be transformed into a positive, constructive factor, and not one which leads to divisions and rivalries? Persistent social tensions impede progress, and lead to political disturbances and even armed conflicts, for example, when peace is sometimes confused with tranquility imposed by force.

Any community with a diversity of members and interests will not be entirely without conflict. Conflicts indicate there are tensions in the community and they may be due to valid instances of discrimination, injustice and misunderstanding related to unequal or inadequate distribution or availability of resources, illegitimate divisions of power or disputes about status in society.

Today we have nation-states everywhere, covering a certain geographical space, created by various kinds of historical circumstances.

The political theory that developed in Europe during the Enlightenment sees the State as a collection of individuals, who have their inalienable rights, but who, in pursuit of their own self-interest, come together to set up structures of common living, spelt out in a contract. These structures insist on the dignity and rights of every individual. In such a situation conflicts are seen in terms of the legitimization of power, the defence of one's rights and the search for one's interests. While we do not deny the relevance of these factors, social contract of individuals seems inadequate as the foundation of community. It does not give adequate attention to natural communities like families, kin groups, etc. The basis of community is relatedness. Every human being has the experience of being in relationship with others for his/her

<sup>15</sup> *Populorum Progressio*, 58

<sup>16</sup> *Populorum Progressio*, 35.

origin, life, culture and celebration. To live in community is to develop such sustainable relationships

Once we go beyond individualism as the basic element of society, then we acknowledge that a nation is actually a community of communities, because a nation is not a conglomeration of individuals, but is made up a variety of ethnic, cultural and religious groups. People in a national community do not relate to each other only as individuals, but as members of particular groups, each with its identity. Each group attempts to protect its identity and deserves recognition and respect. The groups should not be allowed to stifle the freedom of individuals in the name of preserving and defending group identity.

Correspondingly, when the average Africans read the Bible they explore the images of Jesus that are parallel to the sense of community. The images in the West seem related either to a conquering community identity like Christ the King or to private emotional piety like the suffering Christ or the pierced heart of Christ. The latter images may be made use of to enforce moral behaviour by creating a sense of guilt: Christ suffering all this for me. The images of Christ the King help to legitimize civil and ecclesiastical authority and the call for a servant leader. There is a mystical Christ side by side, who was present in the sacraments, mediating salvific grace. None of these images would have found priority in the traditional African reconciliation processes.

In Africa Jesus would have been seen as a Sage. He was a free person, open to love and reached out to all, but particularly sensitive to the poor and the marginalized. He was a wanderer, who had no roots because he belonged to everyone everywhere, a pilgrim always on the move, in the company of many others, on the way to the kingdom. People heard about him, saw his works and crowded round him to listen to him, so that he really had no time to be alone. He did not hesitate to criticize the rich and the powerful when they turned oppressive. He promoted the spirit of equality and sharing, of justice and communion, of forgiveness and reconciliation. His love was unconditional. "Love one another as I have loved you!" was his main law. He spoke about the great love that God has for the people through many images and stories and underlined one or other point by a miraculous gesture. Many traditional people, even those in African Traditional Religion have been attracted by the Jesus of the Gospels, though some are critical of the Christianity of the Churches. Could this be reasons for so many African Independent Churches?

## Conclusion

It would be presumptuous to suggest that poverty can be tackled without seeking their active engagement. A World Bank study by Narayan concluded that "religious leaders and institutions were often the most trusted institutions in developing countries."<sup>17</sup> Faith based organisations, including Christian development organizations, are uniquely well placed to pursue that engagement. At a practical level, for one key issue alone, it is reported that "one third of all AIDS patients in the world are served under the auspices of the Catholic Church."<sup>18</sup> These facts all point to ever greater need to engage Christian organizations in development work, and to ensure that they undertake that work as effectively as possible.

It is incumbent on Christian organizations to reflect deeply on how they can serve God better.

While Christians will diligently seek the rights of others, they will never allow those rights to define or limit their own responses. Christians will also have an inherent bias toward preferring the needs of others. They are called to live sacrificially. Jesus Christ came to bring good news to the poor.<sup>19</sup> A biblical framework of human rights therefore is about a rescuing justice – a justice that rescues victims. Jesus lived this out himself by not asserting his human rights on the Cross. He abandoned them in the ultimate act of service for others. Christians likewise are called to die to self,<sup>20</sup> and to go the extra mile.<sup>21</sup> One of the paradoxes of Christian faith is that "in Christ...God invests human life with dignity precisely by sharing in the suffering that human beings inflict on one another."<sup>22</sup>

Theology is not the monopoly of privileged professional theologians or Churchmen, as may be the case in speculative studies of the discipline. Theology of transformation is not always printed in the form of books or articulated in famous public lectures. Transformative theology is going on, at times it is spoken, at times written, articulated, and illustrated by our local artists, poets, journalists, housewives, people

<sup>17</sup> Referred to in James, 8. And see Batchelor, *People in rural development*, 42

<sup>18</sup> James, 8

<sup>19</sup> Luke 4:18

<sup>20</sup> Matt. 16:24,25; Mark 8:34,35; Luke 9:23,24

<sup>21</sup> Matt 5:41

<sup>22</sup> Richard Amesbury, and George M. Newlands (2008). *Faith and human rights: Christianity and the global struggle for human dignity*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 110

imprisoned for their public ministry, and students. From them we hear the cry of God's people from various perspectives. If theology is a people's understanding of people in the light of their understanding of God, whatever their religious persuasions, then it is clear that theology is being done from the point of view African Traditional Religion as well as from other religious and ideological perspectives.

The message of Christ, then, is seen in Luke 4:18—19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." Christ became a member of the oppressed in order to promise them freedom and hope. Also He suffered as an oppressed individual. He was a poor Jew in a Roman dominated world. Christ is the expression of God in history whereby one can know God's concern for the rejected of society.

This discourse has been the story of Christian social transformation, in different cultures times and places. It has asserted how God is continuously at work in the world. Christianity has an inherent capacity to renew itself as it speaks into ever changing social contexts. God is continually calling to us to take part in his magnificent agenda for transformation. The Christian theology of transformation is that it is God himself who brings about change in the world, with humans aligning themselves as active participants in his redemptive purposes. The change God seeks is fullness of human life: while this entails rescue from harm and impoverishment, it equally requires the promotion of goodness, wholeness and knowledge. This is an imperative for us as Africans, as a church.