The New Catholicity

Rethinking Mission in an Age of Globalisation with Special Reference to the African Situation

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Writing a few years ago, Timothy Radcliffe expressed his reservations about taking globalisation as the new context of mission. He observed that perhaps "what is really distinctive about our world is a particular fruit of globalisation, which is that we do not know where the world is going. We do not have a shared sense of history."[1]

Perhaps one of the reasons about this scepticism is that there is no scholarly consensus on the meaning of globalisation or even on locating its beginnings in history. Manfred Steger describes globalisation as "a multidimensional set of processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant."[2] This multidimensional set of processes resists being confined to any single thematic framework. Probably this is one of the reasons why so many people disagree and are confused about globalisation. It is an uneven set of processes. People living in different parts of the world are affected very differently by this gigantic transformation of social structures. Perhaps that's why some scholars have insisted that globalisation is not only about interconnectedness, homogenisation but also fragmentation.[3]

Thus globalisation has been described as not only bringing homogenisation and interconnectedness but also fragmentation and ambivalences. Schreiter writes, "the West is now experiencing the same kinds of ambivalences (or contradictions) felt by the rest of the world."[4] It seems to me that Africa has experienced these ambivalences and contradictions for many centuries.

[1] "Mission to a Runaway World: Future Citizens of the Kingdom", in T. Radcliffe, *I Call You Friends*, London: Continuum, 2001, p. 128. Radcliffe borrowed the expression 'runaway world' from Anthony Giddens. See A. Giddens, *Runaway World. How Globalisation is Reshaping our Lives*, London, 1999.

[2] M. Steger, *Globalization. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: OUP, p. 1.

[3] P. Heslam, *Globalization. Unravelling the New Capitalism*, Cambridge: Grove Books, p. 6.

[4] R. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*, NY, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, p. 13.

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A prominent African political scientist, Ali Mazrui, described Africa's condition in these paradoxical terms:

> Africa was the earliest habitat and yet is the last to become truly habitable. Africans are certainly not the most brutalised of peoples and yet they are the most humiliated in modern history. African societies are not the closest culturally to the western world and yet they are undergoing the most rapid westernisation. Africa is by no means the smallest continent and yet it is almost certainly the most fragmented politically. Africa is not the poorest of the regions of the world but it is technically the most retarded. And the basic paradox is that, though Africa is the most centrally located continent, it is the most peripheral in political terms.[5]

Looking at Africa, one can argue that this fragmentation is not a new phenomenon but a reality that goes back to any recorded history of the continent beginning with its contact with the West. Slavery was one of the earliest beginnings of African fragmentation. Since the scramble for Africa culminating in the partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference (1884–5), African societies have been even more fragmented. In the name of the homogenisation of Africa, ethnic groups that were very different were put together to form single artificial nations. Some ethnic groups had highly organised social and political systems in the modern sense of the world, while others had hardly any stable political structure. Traditional structures were broken up in one go. In fact it has to be said that African homogeneity as presented in many romantic views of the past did not exist. Modern Africa is composed of many ethnic groups, some of which were autonomous nations. With its partition, a new continent was born with its modern characteristics. The main unifying factor is the history of this vast continent in the last two centuries. All African states were colonies of the West and the latter chose to regard them as states. But as Gifford notes, "not a few countries in Africa are countries in a cartological sense only; they are presented in a distinct colour on the map, so an unwary observer might think that they are countries of the same nature as Australia or Sweden. They are not: though they are recognised legal entities, they are not, in a functional sense, states."[6]

In the following reflections I would like to look at mission with special reference to Africa. The question I will be answering has to do with rethinking mission in an era of globalisation. As I see it, the theological answer to globalisation has necessarily to do with mission.[7] But what is mission? Carl Braaten beautifully described

[5] A. Mazrui, *The African Condition*, London: Heinemann, 1980, p. vii.

[6] P. Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, London, Hurst and Company, 1998, p. 9.

[7] See P. Sedgwick, "Globalisation", in P. Scott & W. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 497.

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mission as "the exploration of the universal significance of the gospel in history."[8]

It is important not to take a static view of mission. In his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*,[9] David Bosch showed that mission has to be seen in terms of changing paradigms throughout the history of the Christian era. New models come and replace old ones, while the former ones may also coexist with the latter ones. We need to explore history to find out which models of mission can be helpful to our times. I will propose 'reconciliation' and 'new catholicity' as expressions that may be useful in the understanding of mission in this age of globalisation.

The New Catholicity

It is quite remarkable that we are having these reflections on 'Globalisation and Catholicity' at the very time when we are marking almost forty years since the end of the Second Vatican Council. In his theological interpretation fourteen years after the Council, Karl Rahner described Vatican II as *the Church's first official self-actualisation as a World Church*.[10] The expression "New Catholicity" comes from Robert Schreiter, who has used it to explore the many aspects of globalisation that challenge Christianity at the beginning of the third millennium.[11] Out of its internal history and resources, theology must be able to interact with globalisation theories without being simply reactive to them. "We must seek ways of engaging globalisation, so that we do not engage in ineffective resistance, succumb to its enticement, or resign ourselves to its inevitability. We must not simply repeat the formulae that had served us in the past. We must rather reflect on them in a way that will allow us to draw forth from them what will help us most. We must also analyse the situation and not simply remain content to denounce it. Denunciation may give us the comfort of feeling prophetic, but it may not in itself change much in such an all pervasive and complex situation."[12] But what kind of dialogue can exist between theologians and globalisation theorists? What kind of concepts in theology can be used in this dialogue? Schreiter proposes 'new catholicity' as the theological concept most suited to developing this dialogue.

[8] C. Braaten, *The Flaming Centre. A Theology of Christian Mission*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977, p. 2.

[9] New York: Orbis Books, 1990.

[10] K. Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II", *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), pp. 716–27.

[11] See R. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity* especially pp. 116–33.

[12] Schreiter, Response to de Freitas, in R. Schreiter (ed.), *Mission in the Third Millennium*, NY: Orbis, p. 120.

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'Catholicity' is one of the marks of the Church as defined by the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, in which Christians profess faith "in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church."[13] Christians seem to return to these marks in times of conflict and uncertainty, when they feel that their identity is threatened. Historically most of the discussion about catholicity has largely been of an intra-church nature. Competing groups have tried to claim to be the true manifestations of the Church of Jesus Christ. Early Church controversies were mainly about this even though they often had a public nature. Catholicity has the dual meaning of universality and orthodoxy (fullness of faith). But it has also tended to acquire a juridical meaning in terms of controversy as in the time of the Reformation. Rome understood catholicity as communion with the bishop of Rome. However, alongside this understanding there was also a mystical one adopted by the Eastern Churches and also later by the Churches of the Reformation. This understanding referred to catholicity as something that would be achieved only in the fullness of time. The church visible is incomplete and broken, but already participates in the invisible church. All in all one can identify many meanings of catholicity throughout history: fullness and orthodoxy, extendedness and even identification with the Empire, juridical bond and conformity, partial and visible manifestation of the already and not yet fully revealed lordship of Christ. Different contexts and circumstances led Christians to modify their understanding of catholicity.

While previous understandings were mainly of an intra-church nature, new approaches need to look at the church-world relationship today. How does the Church understand its catholicity vis-à-vis the world? First, how does the Church see its purpose in and for the world, and second, how does the Church understand evangelisation? Following Schreiter I propose three important periods: the period of European expansion (1492–1945), the period of the Cold War (1945–1989) and the period after the Cold War (1989 to the present day).[14]

[13] It is Ignatius of Antioch, who in the year 110 first uses the term (*Symr* 8,2): "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."

[14] K. Rahner ("Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II") had also divided Church history in three different epochs: the period of Jewish Christianity (just a few decades), the period of Gentile Christianity free from Judaic Law (a very long period) and the transition from a Western Church to a World Church (1960s to the present). In this paper I could have considered the early Church with the contributions of the great African Church fathers such as Augustine, Cyprian and Tertullian but I am restricting my analysis to the three main understandings of the beginning of globalisation as put forward by different scholars. See Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, pp. 5–6.

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Phase 1: Mission during the European Expansion (1492–1945)

The first period was characterised by the expansion and creation of colonies by Europe in the name of civilisation. Many European thinkers had dismissed the relevance of Africa. Hegel, for example, wrote: "The realm of Absolute Spirit is so impoverished among Africans and the natural spirit so intense that any representation which they are inculcated with suffices to impel them to respect nothing and destroy everything. Africa does not have history as such. Consequently we abandon Africa, to never mention it again. It is not part of world history: it does not evidence historical movement or development."[15] Hegel's words did not hinder the policy of European expansion. The whole world had to be conquered so that far away peoples, who were considered inferior to the Europeans, could profit from European civilisation. The Church participated in this expansion and empire building by engaging in the so-called saving of souls of the infidels in the name of planting the Church (*plantatio ecclesiae*). This very noble task, however, rejected the traditional cultures of Africa and considered them as pagan. This alienated the Africans from their own cultures in order to embrace the Western culture. The Church never lives in a vacuum and during the colonial times, the European missionaries could not avoid the ambiguities of their historical situation.

But to be fair to them, one can say that in spite of their exclusivist theology, which is understandable in the context of the theology of the time, missionaries were not the blind instruments of colonialism and cultural uniformity as they are often accused to have been. They have on many occasions defended the African peoples against colonialism and neo-colonialism and in modern times have acted as pioneers of the implementation of reforms, often in the face of opposition from a very conservative African Church leadership. One would not be wrong to say that missionaries have also functioned as agents of indigenisation, creating the basis from which African believers can solidly build their own contextual theology.[16] In fact, missionaries have contributed to the preservation of African cultures. The insistence on the learning of local languages and customs and the translation of the Bible into these languages, were invaluable contributions. Languages developed indigenous awareness and they were used to defend traditional cultures.[17] One could say

[15] G.W.F. Hegel, Lectures in J. Hoffmeister, ed., *Sämtliche Werke*, Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1955, 231–4.

[16] R. Esteban, "Mission and Inculturation", in *Petit* Echo, Special Issue 4, Missionaries of Africa: Rome, 16.

[17] Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West. Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension*, Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1992, p. 104; Here too, generalisations should be avoided. Sanneh (p. 77) points to the fact that in much of French and Portuguese-speaking Africa, for example, vernacular scriptural translations were avoided. English-speaking territories were more favourable to vernacular.

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that very often those efforts were taken for tactical reasons, but nobody can deny their benefits for the conservation of cultural riches. It is in that way that many Christian communities born of mission have become, in Africa, bases of hope and of reconstruction of a proper African identity that respects the cultural pluralism of the continent.

Phase 2: Mission after World War II to the End of the Cold War

The second epoch began after the Second World War and continued until the fall of the Berlin wall (1945–1989). It was the time of the bipolar world of Western capitalism and Eastern socialism with the poor majority of the world's peoples oscillating between the two. It was also a time of optimism as the West grew economically and many former colonies obtained their independence. The model of adaptation replaced the model of implantation. This model took into consideration the historical evolution of the Church in the West and its encounter with the African peoples and tried to 'adapt' the practices of this Western Church to the socio-cultural life of Africans. In 1945 Belgian Franciscan Missionary, Placide Tempels wrote *Bantu Philosophy* as an attempt to understand the Bantu peoples of Africa so as to be able to announce Jesus Christ to them in their own cultural categories. This was also known as *indigenisation*. The gospel had to be put in indigenous categories. Later a group of African priests studying in Rome wrote their "*Les prêtres noirs s'interrogent*" (1956), in which they challenged the attitude of missionaries to the African cultures. They called for the *adaptation* of Christianity to the indigenous Cultures of Africa. One can rightly say that what is known as African theology sprang from the confrontation between 'missionary Christianity'[18] and the traditional cultures of Africa. However, it became increasingly clear that adaptation did not go far enough. The Roman Catholic Bishops of Africa expressed that in the 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome. They opted for the expression 'incarnation' instead of adaptation and called for the "incarnating of the Gospel" in Africa.[19]

The term 'incarnation' gave way to the new term of 'inculturation'. During the last four decades, there has been much talk of 'inculturation' as a new principle in theology, and especially in the development of

[18] '*Missionary Christianity*' is the term used to describe the period between the mid 19th Century and the early 60s (a time that coincides with independence and in the Roman Catholic Church with Vatican II Council). It is the time when the Churches of Africa were still strongly subordinated to the Western Churches.

[19] "Following this idea of mission, the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar consider as being completely out-of-date, the so-called theology of adaptation. Instead, they adopt the theology of incarnation". Cf. "Africa's Bishops and the World Church, *Relevant Documents of the Roman Synod* 1974, published by AMECEA, Nairobi, p. 20.

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African Theology. In the Roman Catholic Church, the terminology of 'inculturation' dates back not more than four decades.[20] The term may be new, but the concept is not. From the Biblical writers, the Church Fathers, the medieval theologians, the Reformers, down to our own day, the effort of theology has always been to 'inculturate' itself, that is, to express Christian faith in culturally comprehensible terms.

Vatican II was the major breakthrough in the Church and was characterised by its optimism and openness to the world especially as exemplified by *Gaudium et Spes*. Voices from the South began to be heard and there was also a call for a moratorium on sending any more missionaries from the North. Mission was seriously put into question. But it can also be called a period of solidarity and dialogue. There was talk of 'global mission'. The churches of the South would not be mere receivers but partners in mission with the North. Dialogue between Christian theologians and secular Marxists as well as interfaith dialogue began to put its mark on the mission landscape. Respect for non-western cultures as well as liberation from social injustice became important theological themes.

In 1980 Joseph Blomjous, a Dutch Missionary Bishop in Tanzania, coined the term 'interculturation', precisely to stress the *reciprocal* character of mission. He wrote:

> The period 1960–1980 can be considered as the main transition period from the traditional Mission to the new Mission of the future. It has been characterised as the period of "inculturation", though the better term would be that of "interculturation", in order to express that the process of "inculturation" must be lived in partnership and mutuality.[21]

In other words, it was noted that any talk about inculturation had necessarily to take into account the multi-cultural context in which people live. Inculturation must be intercultural with multi-cultural benefits, a multi-way process and never a one-way process. Different cultures need to 'speak' to each other in view of a mutual enrichment. In this perspective the Church, which can only be one because it is the Body of Christ, had an important role to play. It had to function as

[20] A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, London, 1988, 10, thinks that this term goes back to the Jesuits, especially to *Joseph Masson*, professor at the Gregorian University during the time of Vatican II. Masson wrote: "Today there is a more urgent need for a Catholicism that is inculturated" Cf. J. Masson, "L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde", *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 84, 1962, pp. 1032–43. But according to A. Roest Crollius ("Inculturation", in: *Following Christ in Mission* Nairobi: Pauline Publications 1995, p. 110) the term was first used by D. Segura P.B (M.Afr.), "L' initiation, valeur permanente en vue de l'inculturation". *Mission et Cultures non-chretiennes, Rapports et compte rendu de la XXIX ème Semaine de Missiologie*, Louvain 1959, pp. 219–235. He adds: "However, it was only after the Internal Scientific Congress of Missiology, held at the Pontifical Urban University from October 5 to 12, 1975 and the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1974–75) that the term gained wider acceptance".

[21] J. Blomjous, "Inculturation and Interculturation", in *AFER*, 22, n. 6, (1980) pp. 93–398.

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a kind of "universal hermeneutical community, in which Christians and theologians from different lands check one another's cultural biases".[22]

But inculturation is only one of the dimensions in the theology of mission and in African theology. The other important model is '*liberation*'. Inculturation cannot cover all the immense mystery of God's work in the world and the promise of God's Kingdom. If we take 'contextualisation' as the 'umbrella' term encompassing both liberation and interculturation, then both the rooting of the Gospel in cultures and the issues of suffering and liberation have to go hand in hand.

There is something about the concept of 'inculturation' that brought uneasiness. Inculturation presupposes people with a wealth of cultural heritage to draw upon. But if one takes seriously the 'preferential option for the poor', one finds that the poor of today are principally those who are marginalised and therefore have mostly lost their cultural bearings. That is the fate of most Africans who are living in great situations of oppression and insecurity. Many have lost all grids of meaning and understanding. Their misery, even more painfully than in the case of material poverty, consists in total cultural deprivation. This phenomenon is condemning a growing number of people, especially the youth, to an abyss of despair in the towns and cities of Africa. These 'marginalised' and 'rejected' have become so numerous in such a way that all talk of inculturation may sound like a bad joke.[23]

Here it is important to point out that many of the Africans, who have worked out theories of inculturation, have developed these ideas outside real African contexts. This is in itself a danger. Such theories may tend to ignore the natural context and the real people living in it. The theorists do not necessarily have a direct link with the ongoing experience of the common people. Their reconstruction of realities runs the risk of being selective, artificial, elitist and idealistic. For some, the culture they try to reconstruct is hardly anything but a representation of the past that is really no more there. Taken out of context in this way, culture may be simply a collection of folkloric items or reminiscences of customs and practices, of real interest only to ethnologists.

A greater danger is that most of these theorists are by and large members of the middle class of their communities of origin. No one would wish to deny that the representatives of indigenous or inculturation theologies in Africa are mainly members of this group. In Africa priests and theologians enjoy an enormous social prestige and have often close links with the political powers. They

[22] D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 457.
[23] R. Esteban, "Mission and Inculturation", p. 20.

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tend to look at realities from the rather safe side of those to whom power and privilege are available. Nationalistic interests cannot be easily excluded. Perhaps, then, without realising it, their programmes do not address the real issues of liberation and empowerment for the people at the grassroots. Rather the projects they propose would serve to maintain their people in positions of relative powerlessness and vulnerability.[24]

Instead of doing cultural 'antiquarianism', that is, looking for elements of the traditional past that made up African cultures, some have called for more attention to be paid to the new situations of violence, poverty and rejection which one finds almost everywhere in Africa and hence are more liable to provide the platform for a new African culture.

A few African theologians have taken the cry for liberation in Africa very seriously.[25] One of the most outspoken is the Cameroonian Jean-Marc Ela.[26] Inculturation and social justice should always go together. Ela argues that the Church in Africa should move beyond mere inculturation into the phase of genuine liberation, in which the Gospel enlivens the life of Africans. The elements of continuity are there, but they are only part of the whole reality. They must be taken together with the new elements that make up modern African cultures. This implies also liberation from the political, social and economic oppression to which Africa is so much subjected. These things are not neutral. They are very determining, more than theological concepts.[27] African theologians of inculturation cannot be accused of having evaded the liberation issue altogether. However, many can be accused of concentrating only on the external factors of oppression and ignoring the internal factors of misery. The liberation struggle in Africa cannot just be directed against powerful external forces of oppression. "The struggles against colonialism, racism and neo-colonialism do not exhaust the list of the African liberation agenda. Oppression of Africans by Africans is shamefully present in every part of the continent. Substituting a tyranny and atrocity of the indigenous ruler for those of the foreigner is not attaining freedom. Furthermore, oppression of women by men is most ubiquitous".[28] Younger African theologians especially women have been very critical of the romantic cultural enthusiasm that has characterised most of the inculturation theologies. Women's views are rarely heard but African women theologians and sociologists are

[24] P. Kalilombe, "African Diaspora", in *Petit Echo*, p. 88.

[25] Liberation Theology in Africa has been mainly a specialty of South African theologians with their version of "Black Theology", which had similarities with the North American Black Theology. The racial situation of oppression in South Africa (Apartheid) was an obvious reason for these affinities.

[26] J. M. Ela, *Le Cri de l'Homme Africain*, Paris, 1980; *La Ville en Afrique noire*, Paris 1983; *Ma Foi d'Africain*, Paris 1985.

[27] M. Neels, "Inculturation and Justice", in *Petit Echo*, p. 78.

[28] E. Martey, *African Theology. Inculturation and Liberation*, NY: Orbis, 1993, p. 144.

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challenging the so cherished African 'values' or traditions. They consider traditions in Africa being more convenient for men than for women.[29] In the name of inculturation, for example, African cultural conservationists, "who are of course male defend polygamy as a value. They forget that they alienate women from the social and education changes which lead to a more just world".[30] During the synod of Bishop's for Africa (1994), the Congolese religious, Bernadette Mbuy Beya strongly criticised the practice of marriage by trial or by steps (*marriage par étape*), which was advocated by many African bishops and theologians. This practice is extremely unjust towards women. She also criticised the interference of the African extended family in the lives of couples as a great cause of conflicts and separation of which the women and children are the principal victims.[31]

Today some African theologians are becoming more and more aware that theories of inculturation alone are not enough especially since what is often defined as African culture amounts to nothing more than traditionalism. Emmanuel Martey writes that it is necessary "not to confuse culture with irrelevant traditionalism. It is around the struggle of the oppressed African people – the wretched of the earth – for full humanity that the black African culture takes on substance, and not around songs, poems or folklore".[32] Nobody can deny that after decades of independence, the hopes of many Africans have been shattered and disillusionment and public apathy have led to uncaring governments. "Today in most countries women, men and children have been condemned to poverty, servitude and sometimes torture and murder. Human rights violations and abuses, curbs on freedom of speech, detention without charge or trial, together with hunger, refugee problems, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of access to social welfare and health care, make the life of Africans the most miserable".[33]

Phase 3: Mission after the Cold War: Reconciliation and the New Catholicity

From the foregoing discussion, we can see how mission has often been characterised by such terms as implantation, adaptation, inculturation and liberation: models in the understanding of mission in the

[29] See, for example, M. A. Oduyoye/M. Kanyoro, *The Will to Arise, Women, Tradition & the Church*, New York: Orbis 1992.

[30] A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Polygamy. A Feminist Critique", in ibid. p. 101.

[31] B. Mbuy Beya, "La Femme dans l'Eglise en Afrique: possibilités d'une présence et promesses, in: W. von Holzen, S. Fagan (eds.) *AFRICA. The Kairos of a Synod*, Sedos Rome 1994, p. 41 ff.

[32] E. Martey, *African Theology*, p. 125.

[33] Ibid., p. 144.

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different ages. In the recent past new terms have particularly been introduced, namely: dialogue, solidarity and reconciliation.

According to Schreiter, 'globalisation' becomes the characteristic of the third epoch especially with the end of the cold war. But the conditions leading to this somewhat unclear period marked by global capitalism began much earlier. Events such as the OPEC oil embargo and phenomena such as "new technologies, especially in communication began to shift the wealthiest economies away from being based on heavy industry to a new basis in information, high technology, and services."[34] Mobility and flexibility of capital, information and other resources began to characterise the wealthy economies. Global capitalism has changed the world by compressing time and space, erasing the importance of political boundaries and blurring national and cultural identities. Though the accent is usually on the economy, politics and cultures are largely affected. One cannot dispute positive effects linked to globalisation but the negative ones abound too. While new wealth and opportunities for interconnectedness have been created for some, even more poverty, misery and conflicts have amassed for many especially for the poor of Africa.

Theological responses in the second phase are still valid but a refocus is now necessary in a time of globalisation.[35] Ecumenism has stagnated; genuine dialogue with others is questioned while inculturation does not often avoid the link with promoting ethnic and cultural conflicts. Liberation loses its influence especially as it confronts a world of global capitalism with no alternative to propose. It may be that 'catholicity' may provide a new framework and model for mission in the changing context. But it must be a new catholicity, a renewed and expanded form of catholicity. One of the things that this new catholicity has to attend to is the question of conflict and reconciliation.

The last decade has seen a dramatic increase of interest in reconciliation. The relatively peaceful ending of *apartheid* took the world by surprise and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has attracted global attention. This may be pointing to *reconciliation* as the new model for mission. Of course reconciliation is not in itself a univocal concept, nor are the motivations of those who invoke it universally shared. For some it is merely an ideological device for perpetrators to forget the past of their crimes and get on with the future. For some, reconciliation means conflict mediation, for others it is about seeking justice for the victims. For some it is a coming to terms with their painful memories, while still for others it is about the moral reconstruction of their shattered societies. It is

[34] Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, p. 126.

[35] R. Schreiter, "Globalization and Reconciliation. Challenges to Mission", in R. Schreiter (ed.), *Mission in the Third Millennium*, NY: Orbis Books, 2001, 138.

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true: reconciliation is about seeking justice, healing memories, rebuilding societies. A closer look at the region of the Great Lakes may shed some light.

The problem of group identities and violent conflicts in the region has a long history revolving around the Tutsi and Hutu peoples of Rwanda (and Burundi).[36] The awful events of the 1994 genocide happened in Rwanda but its causes and consequences belong to the whole region of the Great Lakes. The story of violence in Rwanda represents the consequences of global capitalism in poor nations. Compared to its neighbours Rwanda was considered an economic success in the late 1980s. It had adjusted to the demands of the IMF and the World Bank. But it had also refused to allow its many citizens of Tutsi origin to return. The question of human rights had to be faced too. When the Rwandan administration agreed to enter into negotiations with the Tutsis living in exile, Hutu extremists saw that as a betrayal. The return of Tutsi refugees from Uganda with the Rwanda Patriotic Front invasion, the genocide coupled with the fall of Mobutu in neighbouring Congo after 36 unshakeable years of dictatorship have made the region one of the hotbeds of conflict and violence. The end of the Cold war had made Mobutu irrelevant to the West. Uganda and Rwanda increased in importance as major players in the region. There was certainly the rise of Kabila as one of the hopes of a new generation of African leaders to bring about new peace but this was not going to be. The unresolved conflict in Rwanda spilled over in Congo. One began to see a new scramble for Africa: 'Africa's scramble for Africa' or Africa's First World War as so many states began to use the Congo as Africa's battleground. Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Angola and others scrambled for Congo. It is a messy war – not clear to understand. Neighbouring countries support different types of rebel groups with no obvious coherent message other than saying that they were opposed to power in Kinshasa. International observers have counted over five million dead so far.

Reconciliation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa is a daunting task but, according to the Ugandan political scientist Mahmood Mamdani, coming to terms with the Rwandan genocide of 1994 is of utmost importance. The genocide led to a tension-ridden polity and society and the consequences have overflowed the boundaries of Rwanda, making it the epicentre of the crisis in the whole region. One

[36] The question whether Tutsi and Hutu are two different ethnic categories is still debated today. Recent research would point to seeing them as 'political', and 'racial' identities constructed by Belgian colonialism. The Hutu and Tutsi speak the same language, have lived together and intermarried for centuries. This makes it difficult to see them as two different ethnic groups. See M. Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers. Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001, 76–103.

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must add the role of the Churches both in understanding the conflict and in the post-conflict reconciliation.

The Rwandan genocide needs to be seen as an attempt by the Hutu extremists to clear the land of the threatening alien presence of the Tutsis. To be sure, it was not so much an ethnic as a 'racial' cleansing. Belgian colonialism and missionaries with the help of racist and pseudo-scientific theories such as the *Hamitic hypothesis* had constructed Tutsis and Hutus as alien Hamitic settlers and indigenous natives respectively. Accordingly the Tutsi Hamites were superior and came from elsewhere because no sign of civilisation could have had its origin in Africa. Thus the Hutus and Tutsis began to perceive each other as different races with different political identities. Of course these identities changed in the different political phases of Rwandan history.

It seems to me that the story of Rwanda represents the three models of mission mentioned above (inculturation/indigenisation, liberation and reconciliation). The early decades of the 20th century represented what one can call the indigenisation of Rwanda as a "Christian Kingdom" with the conversion of *Mwami* (Tutsi King) to Christianity. The history of the Tutsi dynasty was seen by both the missionaries and the Belgian colonial administration as a sort of 'Old Testament' that prepared the new Christian Kingdom. Alexis Kagame, priest and philosopher followed in the footsteps of Placide Tempels in writing his own '*philosophie bantou-rwandaise*', in which he used Aristotelian categories to acculturate the Church analogically and historically as court culture.[37] The Tutsi dominated the Church leadership. But with the 1959 revolution came the social Catholicism of the post-war Belgian clergy and the Swiss Archbishop Perraudin. This was a form of an early model of *liberation*. The Roman Catholic hierarchy switched its support from the Tutsis to the Hutu masses. Perraudin's own secretary, Kayibanda led the revolution that ousted Tutsi power and installed the first Hutu government after independence. It is difficult and probably too early to speak of reconciliation as a model that has taken root in post-genocide Rwanda. As I see it, African theology and African theologians have easily 'moved on' as if the genocide did not happen.[38] It may be that we have to look elsewhere particularly in the writings of political scientists, historians and to South African theology to see an emerging model of reconciliation.

Mamdani has drawn our attention to the genocide in Rwanda and to the genocide that did not happen in South Africa. He writes: "If Rwanda was the genocide that happened, then South Africa was the

[37] See A. Kagame, *La Philosophie Bantou-Rwandaise*, Bruxelles: Academie royale des sciences colonials, 1956.

[38] There does not seem to be a sort of 'interruption' similar to European theology after the Holocaust – particularly represented in the theologies of J.B. Metz and J. Moltmann.

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genocide that didn't."[39] The Rwandan genocide took place at the same moment when South Africa was holding elections that marked the transition to a post-apartheid era. All expectations had pointed to South Africa as the more likely location for genocide. South Africa instead emerged as a model for reconciliation not only for Africa but the whole world.

Post-genocide Rwanda presents a sharp contrast to post-apartheid South Africa. Indeed if South Africa had millions of beneficiaries and few perpetrators, Rwanda had many perpetrators at least in the hundred thousands and few beneficiaries. The difference highlights a salient political fact: that the genocide was carried out by subaltern masses, even if organised by state functionaries. The 'popular' character of the Rwandan genocide is the most morally disturbing factor. That so many people participated in the killings presents a big dilemma for reconciliation. While in South Africa political violence was generally secret, killings in Rwanda were done by the masses and in broad daylight. The identity of the perpetrator was not always known in South Africa while in Rwanda it was very often the neighbour, the member of the family, the spouse, the relative or any other whose identity tended to be more public. Yet it would be difficult to define victims as well as perpetrators in clear-cut terms. The identification of both victim and perpetrator is dependent on one's historical perspective. This is why Mamdani argues that reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi is not possible without a prior reconciliation with history.[40] Ever since the colonial period the cycle of violence between Hutu and Tutsi has been fed by victim psychology on both sides. Each group has used violence against being victimised yet again. Perpetrators became victims and vice versa. Each round of violence produced another set of victims-turned-perpetrators.

To break the cycle of violence there is a real need of reconciliation with history. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa has insisted on truth telling as an important dimension of the process of reconciliation and restoring justice. In Rwanda this should mean not only telling the truth of genocide but also contextualising this truth. Mamdani[41] argues that it is essential to differentiate cultural from political identity, and thereby to depoliticise historical facts of migration. In racialising Rwandan society and polity, the colonial project also racialised the parameters within

[39] Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 185.

[40] Ibid. p. 14: "to understand the logic of genocide, I argue it is necessary to think through the political world that colonialism set into motion. This was the world of the settler and the native, a world organised around a binary preoccupation that was as compelling as it was confining. It is in this context that Tutsi, got constructed as a group with a privileged *alien settler* presence, first by the great nativist revolution of 1959, and then by the Hutu Power Propaganda after 1990."

[41] Ibid. pp. 266–82.

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which most historians pursued knowledge most of the time. If the colonial state underscored racial origins as a key attribute to citizenship and rights, historians became preoccupied with the search for origins. If official racism presumed that migration was central to the spread of civilisation (The Hamitic hypothesis), scholars seemed content to centre their scholarly pursuits on the question of migration. And finally if the colonial administrators defined the subject population as Hutu, Tutsi (and Twa[42]) – regardless of the extent of intermarriage – historians presumed an equally unproblematised link between ancestral Hutu and Tutsi and those contemporarily so identified. Thus historians, preoccupied with the search for origins, read cultural differences from facts of migration and translated cultural into political difference. It is important to recognise that Rwanda is once again at a historical crossroads faced by two clear options. Either the continuation of the civil war, as those defeated in the last round prepare for battle in the next; or a political reconciliation that rejects both victory and defeat and looks for a third and more viable possibility. Each of these possibilities is linked to a different form of justice and a different form of state. The first is victor's justice; the second is survivor's justice. These two forms of justice are similar to what is described as retributive justice and restorative justice in the TRC of South Africa. According to Desmond Tutu, in the post-apartheid South African experience there was a search for restorative but not retributive justice. The TRC process was an example of restorative justice. It was based on an African concept, *ubuntu*, very difficult to render into English, as there is no precise equivalent. "*Ubuntu* is the essence of being human. A person is a person through other persons. We are made for togetherness, to live in a delicate network of interdependence. The totally self-sufficient person is subhuman for none of us comes fully formed into the world. I need other human beings in order to be human myself. I would not know how to walk, talk, think, behave as a human person except by learning it all from other human beings."[43] This points to restorative justice, which is singularly hopeful, as it does not define perpetrators by their crimes.

According to Tutu, "*Ubuntu* and so restorative justice gives up on no-one. No one is a totally hopeless and irredeemable case. . . . We can say that the principles of *ubuntu* have helped in our case in South Africa to avert a catastrophe of monumental proportions in substituting forgiveness for revenge and reconciliation for retribution. . . . We were exhilarated by many examples of victims forgiving the perpetrators in a display of remarkable magnanimity

[42] The Twa are another group often ignored in Rwandan society.

[43] D. Tutu, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission" – Longford Lecture in *The Independent*, 16 February 2004.

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and generosity of spirit. It was not just black South Africans who did this. Many white South Africans did as well. What is more it was not confined only to South Africans."[44]

It is true: reconciliation is about seeking justice, healing memories, rebuilding societies. In the context of today, it is a new model of mission. It is something being done today in Rwanda by the *Gacaca* (people's courts) or village tribunals under tree shelters. These are a new form of citizen-based justice, aimed at unifying this scarred nation. Perpetrators and victims sit together and listen to each other and undergo a process of forgiveness and healing through narrating their stories. The victims have a chance to tell their story and be heard. Can this system succeed? They have no lawyers and no computer records like those found in modern courts of justice. Many perpetrators have been freed and others are at large in neighbouring countries. On the one hand, the *Gacaca* tribunals represent a remarkable democratisation of justice (similar to the TRC) for a people accustomed to obeying dictatorial authority. They offer a therapeutic voice to survivors. On the other hand, the system is fraught with potential pitfalls – inexperienced, minimally trained judges deal with complex cases, and there are certainly possibilities of false accusations or confessions, revenge or fear of revenge, inconsistent application of the law, and more.

Obviously there are still many unresolved issues. The language of reconciliation does not necessarily make a distinction between different issues. Can one equate the actions of those struggling for liberation with those of perpetrators who violate human rights? What are the criteria of granting amnesty to those who have committed crimes against humanity without undermining the rule of law and even causing more bitterness to the victims? What is the relation between truth telling, justice and reconciliation? How are other issues such as honouring property rights, gender relations and rights of children dealt with? At a theological level one needs to look at individual and collective guilt without blurring the two. The role of religious communities and churches needs to be re-examined. This is particularly important in the Rwandan post-genocide conflict resolution where the complicity of the Church remains an unresolved issue.

Apart from the above-unresolved issues, one may still find the language of reconciliation dangerous as it mixes or confuses politics and theology. But it may not really be about confusing the two. It is rather the recognition of the historical link between the two and rethinking a newer and healthier relationship. Concerning reconciliation in the Great Lakes, we must remember that the Churches have a wide range of international connections and political alliances with enormous resources. In other words alongside the state, the Churches

[44] Ibid.

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are key players in political and social reform. As already during the colonial time, today Churches are political institutions capable of transforming society.[45]

As I see it, the language of reconciliation is vital today. It will be important to realise that the work of reconciliation is first and foremost God's work and this is in line with contemporary missiology, which understands mission first and foremost as '*missio Dei*'. The enormity of the misdeeds of the past is so great that it overwhelms the human imagination to consider how they can be overcome. Who can undo the consequences of a war, genocide or of centuries of oppression? Who can bring back the dead? It is only the God of life. Reconciliation is about new creation, the work of the Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth. Only God can begin that. But if it is God's work, it is also our task. That's why we can speak of a ministry of reconciliation.[46] Schreiter names three ways in which this ministry can be achieved. First, it is necessary to create communities of reconciliation, safe places where victims can come to receive empowerment and tell their story. Second, reconciliation requires engaging in the moral reconstruction of broken societies and finally, articulating and then living a spirituality of reconciliation.

Back to Catholicity

What concept is most appropriate for rethinking mission in a World Church? It seems to me that the expression 'new catholicity' may be helpful in rethinking the mission of the Church in our times. This is all the more so because the Church is now faced with multiculturality with all its implications and the challenge of maintaining the unity and integrity of the church worldwide. Orthodox and Protestant Christians also hold the eschatological sense of catholicity in a way that can be helpful in reviving the concept. Dulles sees catholicity as the ability to hold things together in tension with one another and Schineller speaks of its tentativeness, anticipating the whole.[47] While the traditional understanding of catholicity expressed extension throughout the world and fullness of faith, today we need to see this fullness or wholeness through exchange and communication pointing to full *koinonia* as reconciliation, sharing, participation and communication.

This communication leading to wholeness or fullness needs to take inculturation seriously as it is important to renew the way the Gospel is received in different cultures and contexts. Experimentation needs

[45] See A. Hastings' editorial in "Religion and War in the 1990s", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume xxxi, 2, 2001, p. 2.
[46] Schreiter, "Globalization and Reconciliation. Challenges to Mission", 140f.
[47] See R. Shreiter, *The New Catholicity*, p. 128.

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to be accepted as a necessary form of inculturation and intercultural communication. But this will have to take into account the fragmented nature and partial experience of culture, the experience of conflict, ambiguity and partial belonging. Most important a new catholicity must be present at the boundaries of those who profit and enjoy the fruits of globalisation and those who are excluded and oppressed by it.

But all this points to the question of reception to which far more attention must be paid because if a message is not received the quality of (inter-cultural) communication needs to be reassessed. How is the message communicated and how is it perceived? Here it is also important to stress the indeterminacy of the message. Indeterminacy is not necessarily negative. It may point to an important aspect of the message because at the heart of the Christian message lies a narrative and not a proposition. The Christ event thrives on a certain indeterminacy that allows the story to be retold. Earlier missionaries quickly condemned cultural expressions as syncretism without a careful understanding of how Africans received and assimilated the message.

But in an age of globalisation many values such as progress, equity and inclusion can become demonic if they are not guided by a *telos*, a theological goal. "The ability to provide a goal, a *telos*, drawing especially upon the eschatological possibilities of Christian faith is a special part of a new catholicity."[48] This requires rethinking what full dignity of human persons means in a world where so many people are driven to misery and where so many divisions and conflicts destroy possibilities of peace and co-existence. The biblical and Christian tradition can provide a *telos* for a living a new Catholicity that promotes reconciliation and the dignity of every person.

However, fullness of faith must also be accompanied by *exchange* and *communication*. There is a need for intense dialogue in order that the message may be received. First, this means that truth must go beyond referential understandings of truth to embrace existential understandings as well, such as *orthopraxis*. Second, there must be a constant negotiation of sameness and difference and thirdly, the emphasis on agency in both speaker and hearer must be stressed. "A new catholicity requires speakers who accept to be evangelised by the hearers . . . and hearers who become subjects of their own history in the act of evangelisation."[49] This means that contrary to what earlier missionaries thought, mission will not be about bringing God to a godless world but to a world in which the divine presence is already active. Collaboration with secular agencies will be important. Any solidarity that supports justice making can only be welcome and in line with the Gospel message. The speaker must then be ready to be

[48] Schreiter, 131.
[49] bid 132.

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surprised by the hearers and to receive the message from them. Church policies that frustrate agency run the risk of replicating the worst mistakes of globalisation and reinforcing its exclusionary and oppressive aspects.

Conclusion

If mission as a process has to do with exploring the universal significance of the Gospel in history,"[50] Christians will need to embark on this process by exploring what the Gospel of God's inclusiveness and unconditional love has to say in our age of globalisation where so many people are excluded in many different ways. This will require a renewed sense of catholicity that is creative and inspired by the Holy Spirit who never ceases to surprise and renew God's people. Most of our mission models have been modelled on Christ. We need to attend to a much broader perspective of *missio Dei* by including the Holy Spirit. The model of reconciliation will need to rediscover not only Christology but also Pneumatology. Mission will be done in such a way that there is the recognition of God's Spirit preceding us in the world. The Church will learn to be attentive to the many voices and to form alliances with secular agencies. Christians will acknowledge their participation in the multiple identities of their existence. Thus the language of reconciliation will become the point of intersection between the Church and the world, politics and religion. Global mission will be a mission of reconciliation and reconciliation will be the new model of mission.

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[50] C. Braaten, *The Flaming Centre*, p. 2.

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