

# **“Rethinking African theology: exploring the God who liberates” by Jean-Marc Ela<sup>1</sup>**

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## *Abstract*

Jean-Marc Ela of the Republic of Cameroon has marked the contemporary world by his writings whose echo went beyond its domestic readership. Ela, who popularly became known as the “spokesperson of Africa’s diminishing status in the world”, was not hesitant to write about those issues considered controversial and “no go” areas by many African societies. The author builds up his theological discourse from a question raised during a debate by a young woman who asked what “worshipping” God means for people in situations of poverty, drought, famine, injustice and oppression. The challenge of reinterpreting the message of Christ in a language appropriate for indigenous people remains a critical need. The time is now for theologians and Christian thinkers alike in Africa to propagate the Christian message of total faith from an African perspective. The radicalism of the Gospel and its lack of relevance to Africa emerge as some of the major problems facing Christianity today. The debate on the relevance of the Gospel for Africa continues to become central and inevitable. In an attempt to engage readers in this debate, the following question is asked: “What should the essential message of the Church be in the articulation of the Gospel and its relevance for the people of Africa?” In an effort to provide possible answers to the above question, I explored Ela’s thoughts in one of his works entitled, *Repenser la théologie africaine: le Dieu qui libère* (2001).

## **Introduction**

### *A bibliographical note*

Jean-Marc Ela was born in 1936 at Ebolowa administrative centre in the Republic of Cameroon and died in exile in Montreal, in Canada on 15 December 2008.<sup>2</sup> Ela was a holder of three doctorates in theology, sociology and anthropology, respectively. He also had a Bachelor’s degree in philosophy. He was a diocesan priest and worked at the department of sociology of the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon as well as at the University of Laval in Montreal, Canada. The echo of Ela’s writings went beyond the contemporary world of his native land. He was popularly known as the “spokesperson of Africa’s diminishing status in the world”, and was not hesitant to write about those issues considered controversial and “sacred” among African societies. In 1995, Ela fled to Canada after the murder of Father Engelbert Mveng in Cameroon. He spent the rest of his life in Canada. No less than 25 publications are counted among his writings.

### *Limitation*

My article centers briefly on one of the four sections of the book, which is also the first part, namely, *Evangile et libération* (Gospel and liberation). It comprises five chapters which are more than a third of all chapters contained in the book. I chose this part, among others, as a representative of the major themes within the whole book because of the high missiological emphasis in this section.

### ***Evangile et libération: Gospel and liberation***

During Jean-Marc Ela’s visit to a certain village, accompanied by some young priests, they were busy exchanging views with a group of inhabitants on certain issues relating to daily life, when a young woman of *kindi* tribe stipulated in anger saying, “God, God, and later?”

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marc ELA. 2001. *Repenser la théologie africaine: le Dieu qui libère*. Paris: Karthala.

<sup>2</sup> Internet: <http://WWW.editions-harmattan.fr>

All through the night, the question raised by the young woman kept coming back in Ela's mind. The question was asked to find out what God means for people who are in situations of poverty, drought, famine, injustice and oppression. The question raised served as a starting point from which the author builds a theological discourse in his book about "the Gospel and the liberation" (Ela 2003:8).

In every epoch, the challenge to reinterpret the message of Christ in a language which is understood by all people still remains a critical need. This is now the time for theologians in Africa to elaborate the Christian doctrine grounded on total faith, and perfectly rooted in their Africanness (Ela 2003:9). The radicalism of the Gospel and its relevance constitutes a major problem in Christianity today. The debate on the meaning of the Gospel is completely central and inescapable. What should be the components of the message that the Church in Africa should propagate to make the Gospel relevant for its people?

The question was also asked by Cardinal Thiandoum at the African Synod in the following way: "Church in Africa, what must you do now to make your message so relevant and credible?" (Maura 1996:10) In other words, what can we do to change situations of suffering in Africa which continue to haunt our continent? African theologians are challenged to find evangelical answers to the problems facing Africa today (Ela 2003:10).

The author stresses that it is necessary to understand what it means to make theology relevant to the African context. In Ela's view, it requires a new way of thinking about our faith and putting into perspective our respective histories. I fully support the viewpoint of Ela. It is the contextual theology which is currently needed for our African church.

Theologians should be able to make sense of the link between Africa and a Palestinian Jew who was 'stoned and executed to death on the cross (Acts 5:20). They need to take the risk of understanding God's mystery ministry and respond to questions raised by men and women in the church in Africa who wonder if God is concerned about them while they are living under poor conditions (Ela 2003:11). It is for this reason that it is difficult to speak about God to Africans, the majority of whom are extremely poor and usually go to bed on an empty stomach (Ela 2003:14).

Theologians should make efforts to show that God's revelation through Jesus Christ finds its full meaning in Africa when the church brings the Gospel as a message of liberation. This constitutes the major theme of Ela's theology for the liberation of Africa. The theological debate that Ela engaged is to explore what "God's reign" means in Africa. How can Africans make sense of the world in which they live? The above question seeks to provoke theologians to make theology relevant for Africa (Ela 2003:18) and to create space for the Africa voice to be heard.

### *Speaking about God<sup>3</sup> in a bruised continent*

One of the challenges for the church in Africa is a discourse on how to speak about God in Africa in the hope of finding relevant answers to people's problems. In other words, how can one speak about Jesus Christ in order to have a meaningful impact in our contemporary world?

Speaking of God is a hermeneutical assumption which appeals to both the biblical text and African contexts (Ela 2003:33). Theology's humble approach of faith as our concern should seek to let God be God. Christians seem to create God in human form and therefore it causes a limitation of measure. Origen in Ela notes that: "It's always dangerous to speak about God. What we can say about God seems derisory and incomplete" (Ela 2003:33). In fact, we have to be aware of the incompleteness of any human speech about God. In the same vein, Pascal in Ela supported that "only God speaks about God" (Ela 2003:33). In view of the above, to speak about God is to try to re-appropriate this unique word where God speaks about himself. This presents a challenge for practising theology in Africa today.

It is necessary for us to discover the Gospel by returning to the life of the believers to rethink the faith which concerns the totality of the realities of societal concrete existence where God meets them. Such a context becomes relevant for the living revelation (Ela 2003:35). It is only in Africa where converted black Christians are still questioning the "salvation" of black people as an effort to discover if the Bible really contains good news for the welfare of Africans. It is therefore necessary to reread the Bible either through the eyes of the oppressors and keep African religiosity as an "oppressed theology", or through the eyes of the Africans themselves and read from the context of their own experiences. In this perspective, the greatest good news for enslaved peoples must be the proclamation of the liberation of the Africans.

### *The motive of the liberation in the African theology*

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<sup>3</sup> How to speak about God in a continent where people are oppressed, exploited, dehumanized and are daily saddened?

If we admit that God is always speaking in languages that men and women of our context can understand, then what was said about God to the indigenous people by the Western churches needs to be revisited and questioned. How can we make this discourse about God relevant? Is it by examining the nature of the “soil” in which it was planted? Such questions which are asked many times are extremely serious. It is about the relationship between African people and Jesus of Nazareth in a new age of doing Christian theology in Africa. The Gospel in Africa must have its wings as well as roots in order to get embodied by Christians. To concretely make Jesus Christ the way of liberation from poverty and exploitation in Africa, is to render a meaningful and relevant discourse about God.

During ancient times, the Scriptures were always subjected to examination by the communities of faith of the time. They read according to the events and the situation in which they faced their own problems and life experiences. This rereading of the Bible itself tended to become a requirement in the life of the People of God (Ela 2003:55f). This should be applied as well to the African Communities of faith today.

*Are the Bible and tradition for continued slavery, or for liberation of the oppressed people in Africa?*

To reflect on Ela's view, I wonder if the Bible and tradition are still for slavery, or for liberation of the oppressed. Let us reconsider for example the biblical narrative of the patriarchs in which it is mentioned that the message of Jesus Christ is interpreted in the perspective of God's intervention in favour of the Israelites in Egypt. This fact gave Israel the consciousness of its identity and placed her forever in the history of having founded the tradition that they, as the “chosen people”, were released by God from bondage. So the Bible speaks about God from a history of a people where God shows himself as the deliverer of his people. God's intervention in Israel's predicament demonstrates that he could not remain unmoved when his people were subjected to poverty and slavery (Ex 3:7; 5:1; 6:2; 7:1). The mission given to Moses by God meant that the slavery which Pharaoh imposed on his people in Egypt should come to an end. Alongside the same dimension of the liberation of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, we in Africa should only speak about God as a story of liberation (58f). The Western dicta, the projects of exploitation of resources to perpetuate the neocolonialism, the continued impoverishment of African countries by institutions such as the Bretton Woods, the subjection of African governments under heavy and endless debts and the violence (Mutombo 2011:13) ... such bondage put Africans in a situation that God's intervention for deliverance is needed today in Africa.

To stress what is said above, I notice Ela is using the context of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt by God to build his theological discourse. God's intervention in the deliverance of Israelites from slavery in Egypt enabled the Israelites to construct a theological discourse about “God of Israel who delivered them from slavery”. It is similarly appropriate that Africa of poverty and slavery should speak about God by viciously challenging “sins” such as dominion of people in the powerful position against the powerless ones, oppression by the rich, exploitation, poverty of the margins, injustice and neocolonialism. It seems this serves as a paradigm of reading the biblical story of salvation.

Israel's faith was cultivated through sustaining a tradition about God's deliverance from the tasks and hard bondage imposed by the Egyptian taskmasters upon the Hebrews during the period of slavery in Egypt. The attitude of the Israelites as a people inclined towards the poor and the oppressed were also connected to this tradition of freedom from oppression. The sabbatical year is centered on God who released and put an end to ‘forced’ servitude and oppression (Dt 15:1-15; Lv 25:1-55; Ex 23:11). Such understanding of Israel reading should be applied in our context to build a meaningful and relevant discourse about God today in Africa.

*The forgotten on earth*

In these dramatic stories of humanity through the centuries, the Africans are really the forgotten ones on earth. It is necessary for Africans to acquaint themselves with the strength of the Gospel which frees, and by that fact to get their voice to be heard.

In fact, let us not forget that ever since the partitions of the world as decreed by Alexander VI in 1493, Africa became a private ground for the Portuguese. According to the spirit of that time, Africans were seen as sub humans. From then on, to enslave Africans was perceived as a “normal matter”. Comparatively, the slavery of black people was less inequitable than that of the Indians and other peoples (Ela 2003:66f). One could mention the horror and atrocity committed by King Leopold II through the exploitation of people in Congo (Hochschild 1999:1ff).

Among Christian nations, slavery of black people was seen simply as a well-deserved just punishment. Such is the kind of biblical reading which was accepted by church. In 1870, in the first

council of Vatican, a group of bishops' missionaries presented a document asking the Pope to free the black race from the curse which was pressed on them and which seemed to come from Cham. Libermann, a Jew who converted to Christianity, attacked the racism of his time by denouncing the colonial myth of the curse and the inferiority of blacks in a context where in the West, according to Hegel, an African man lives outside the reason and the history. From the 18th century, Buffon declared that: "The interval which separates the monkey from the Negro is difficult to seize." It is not evident that European Christianity knew how to reveal to the African the true nature of the face of the God of the Gospel.

We cannot confess to God without worrying about seeing his image shining on every man and woman's face. In consideration of this, for Africans who personify the drama of the poor men and the oppressed, God can reveal himself through Jesus Christ. What must be taken seriously in a new perspective of the theological work in Africa is the memory of the people who remember their origin and how evolution took place in the past. It is necessary to find the life of the people through their social and symbolic creativity, whereby Africans create their own appropriate languages with which they confront the realities of daily life. We should also be attentive to the language of "black Christs" in order to rediscover what they say about God and the revelation in the Afro-Christian Churches which often raises up an interpretation of the Christian message in a context of resistance against the oppression from biblical readings (Hochschild 1999:72f).

The Afro-Christian churches exist only because the western Churches forgot and underestimated the Gospel of liberation in the history of the African continent. This is what is needed to find out about rereading the Bible in view of the societal realities of daily life. What is to be understood is the discovery of God from "the bottom-up", to where people live in expectation of the Messiah, their redeemer.

#### *The value of the world on earth*

An attempt is made to show that Christianity introduced to Africa is linked to the spirit of economic dominion, which sets itself up on slavery and exploitation. We cannot ignore the role of this history in the production of the religious discourses. The faith received from Western missionaries carries the mark of a culture that legitimises the interpretation of Scriptures according to the Christianity of antiquity (Ela 2003:79f).

In the Bible, we read that God intervenes in problematic situations affecting human beings as follows: in slavery (Ex 28:2, the Middle of 64), in persecution or oppression (2:22:8; Ps 106: 10), in exile (Jr 50:19f, 33-34; Bar 5:1-9), in distress, poverty and disease (Mi 5:28) or in death (Jn 11). In all these situations, God delivers his people from evil (Mt 6: 13). We can see that God intervenes in various aspects and contexts of human encounters.

In this perspective, it appears fundamental that God does not operate from the sky. In Jesus Christ, he "came down from heaven". That is why he acts today in the world to which human beings belong and where the history of the human race takes place. God always comes to rescue humans in the history of human drama deliberately created by the forces of disparities, inequality, violence, oppression, conflicts and injustice. If God came to recreate the man in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Ep 4:24), he cannot be indifferent to the human being in our day. Fighting slavery is an obligation of the evangelical message that continues to shake the history which western Christianity corrupted by creating and conditioning generations of slaves to stop searching for salvation so that they lose their freedom and their rights. The creative God intervenes in the freedom of human beings from the chains imposed by their fellow men (Ela 2003:82).

Christianity has to join the poor and the oppressed of Africa in their conditions in the campaign for liberation which is the sign of the reestablishment of the eschatological Kingdom. This becomes a real rediscovery of the radical newness introduced by the presence of Jesus Christ into the world.

In the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is necessary and completely appropriate for African theologians to rewrite the story of this man who redeemed humans from slavery to freedom (Ela 2003:88).

#### *Believing in Jesus Christ today*

We need to re-appropriate ourselves with God in Jesus Christ in order to understand the reason of our existence and belief in this God. Indeed, our faith is not blind: we have light in the written Gospel so that we may believe that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and so that we may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31) (Ela 2003:136).

So, believing in Christ is to adhere to what he meant when he said: “The Truth and the Life” (Jn14 6). Jesus is therefore the source of all freedom, because he is still saying today: “The truth will set you free” (Jn 8 32). Jesus Christ is “the real freedom” and he is “the eternal life”. To believe in Jesus Christ is not only to look at the universe with God's eyes, but it is also to experience a new situation whereby people occupying the political and economical positions of power no longer have a grip on those who have been enlightened by the presence of God's reign in this world.

The Gospel is the source of real freedom. By adopting the drama of life and death, we relate ourselves with the invisible power of Jesus who was victorious over authorities and powers (1 Cor 15:24; 1Pt 3:22; Revelation 12:7-8).

We need to reformulate our faith by critically examining Scriptures and the contributions of the tradition of the Church fathers. We can repeatedly echo what Bonhoeffer said of Jesus, that he was “a man for others, to whom love took the entire place” (Ela 2003:149).

#### *Context of the Democratic Republic of Congo – my native country*

In his book Mutombo (2011:13f) better describes the situation in the DRC by saying,

The DRC is still being controlled by imperial powers. The former imperial system is still funding and organising the assassination of leaders and creating others whom they favour. They stir up and equip rebels in order to impose into power certain western-oriented citizens who would continue to maintain their position, amassed with socioeconomic mentality aimed at destabilisation so as to continue to “enjoy” its underdevelopment. They do so through canvassing the support of the European Union, even by influencing the United Nations and the international financial institutions in the fulfillment of their projects of exploitation in pursuit of neocolonialism. Institutions such as the Bretton Woods continue to impoverish the people country of the DRC, whom they deliberately put in heavy and endless debts for their continued subjection. DRC's natural resources are exploited and exported to the West as well as to Asia, where they are refined and transformed into finished products before they are finally resold to Africa at exorbitant prices. It is all intended to maintain the DRC in perpetual poverty. Rape and genocide of the peoples in Kivu will not exonerate the Americans and the Europeans or Asians as long as their mining businesses and technical equipment continue to exist in an effort to expropriate the DRC local minerals such gold and diamonds. The objectives of Westerners are intended neither to establish democracy nor to restore justice and order in the country; in fact the objectives are to selfishly exploit the DRC natural resources in the conflict zones with neither respect for a continued loss of human lives nor concern about repeated cases of rape of the DRC citizens, particularly women.

How can someone speak about God in a country which seems like a jungle and where the imperial power subjugates and dehumanises all people? Only the rereading of the Bible that is centering Jesus of Nazareth as the God of Liberation who redeemed humans from slavery to freedom can make the Gospel meaningful and relevant in the present context of Congolese peoples. Such a proclamation of Gospel is the Good News.

More than 50 years have passed since the DRC acquired its political independence. But the current conditions in which people are living suggests a critical need for rethinking our theological discourse in order to free people from new slavery.

#### **Is Ela's reading of theology of liberation relevant to South Africa and the rest of Africa today?**

To answer the above question, let us reflect on what Ela (2003:80f) is stressing in his formulation of theology:

- 1 Ela is highlighting that, Christianity introduced in Africa was linked to economic dominion by establishing slavery and exploitative systems. Today, African theologians have to take into account this historical aspect in developing their religious discourses by taking into account the current context.
- 2 The current situation in Africa has some similarities with the time Israel was facing conditions of slavery, oppression, exile, distress, poverty, disease and death. Because of this, as the Redeemer, God had to intervene on behalf of his

people. In fact, when one talks about God in the African context, this aspect surely has to be taken into account?

- 3 The reinstatement of the completeness of the salvation and identity of a human being constitutes both the soul and the body. As expressed by John-Paul II: “The liberation and the salvation which the Kingdom of God brings, affects the human being in both its physical and spiritual aspects.” The church in Africa has the duty to build a holistic message of Gospel for its people.
- 4 In this perspective, God always partakes in the history of human drama plagued by the forces of disparities, inequality, violence, oppression, conflict and injustice. If God comes to recreate the human being in the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Ep 4:24), he cannot be indifferent to the human being. The creative God intervenes in the freedom of the human race from the chains of oppression imposed by their fellow humans.
- 5 Christianity needs to join the poor and the oppressed for their liberation, which is the sign of the establishment of the eschatological Kingdom. In the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is necessary for Africa to rewrite the story of Jesus who was able to deliver people from slavery to freedom. The African theologians have to introduce a new Christianity which is linked to the God of Liberation.

Drawn from the concepts outlined by Ela, I now make an attempt to appropriate these concepts in the context of South Africa as explained below.

#### *The South African context*

- The plight of homeless people

The phenomenon of homeless people among residents in our beautiful city of Tshwane, the majority of whom literally “sleep” and “scavenge” on several streets in the city, is characterised by accusations of stealing, rape, violence and all kinds of crime that continue to haunt our society. This category of society constitutes a kind of delayed bomb which can explode at any time. Our environment is becoming a threat to our society and we cannot ignore the phenomenon of homeless people, poverty and their impact on societies. Homeless people see themselves as excluded from society and because of that, there is a need on their part to find a way to survive by creating for themselves a new social order.

To argue further, someone can share the experience that I had with homeless people through a Bible reading. I invited a couple of homeless people and having a dialogue on the Word of God, I read Romans 1:16, which read: “For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes – the Jew first and also the Gentiles”. A long comment from the audience in relation to that verse came from Nkhutole who said: “You see here, it is said ‘Jews’ first of all and then the ‘Gentiles’ come later. This shows that not all of us are part of the message of salvation. This ‘Good News’ is revealed for the benefit of the ‘Jews’. I think we, as homeless people, are excluded as you can see the ‘Gentiles’ come afterwards.”

To support his view, Nkhutole further narrated the following stories:

- 1 There is a story that Jesus was telling people about a king who was busy making plans to celebrate a “Great Feast” for his son and he invited the wealthy people, excluding the people like us – “homeless people”. Many guests were invited, among them business people, farmers, and recently-married couples. When the banquet was ready, he twice sent his servants to notify everyone that it was time to come. But they all refused and started making excuses. Then later, the invitation was sent to “people on street corners ...” (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24).
- 2 In another story, Nkhutole went on to say that the Bible tells us a story about Jesus and a non-Jewish woman, who was a Gentile. She had a daughter who was about to die of demon possession. The mother had heard about Jesus, and now she came and fell at the feet of Jesus. She begged Jesus to have mercy on her and bring liberation to her daughter from the demon possession. But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a single word until his disciples urged him to send her away. The lady did not want to give up. She came for a second time and worshiped him and pleaded again, “Lord help me please!” Nkhutole went on to show that Jesus’ answer was deceitful by denying the humanity and rights of this Gentile woman:

“I can’t give the food for children to dogs,” said Jesus ... (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).

In both stories, we get the impression that Jesus was more concerned about the Jews, and the Gentiles only featured at a later stage. In other words, Nkhutole suggested that the Bible was primarily written for and about the Jews. We as Gentiles have become part of the biblical story by adoption. There is no doubt that homeless people see themselves as *voiceless people* in our society. However, such an explanation of the bible is wrong. As we are all created in the image of God, and homeless people should not feel like second class citizens or less important any more.

- A sociopolitical issue

The other issue is the sociopolitical nature of Julius Malema’s case. At the time of writing this article, politics in South Africa was dominated by Malema’s crises. The judicial fight around the “hate speech complaint” and the song “*Dubul Ibhunu*: shoot the Boer” by the ANC’s Youth League president may have in its basis the struggle for liberation. The first page of the local newspaper, the *Pretoria News* of Thursday, 15 September 2011, carried the heading: “Malema hits back at Court.” The “hate speech complaint and song” stipulated that,

The Equality Act, in terms of which the hate speech complaint was made against him, had been used to divide people, said Malema. The song was a resistance song, not a love song, but the message was never about genocide, he said. Shifting the focus to Afri-Forum, an animated Malema jokingly said the liberation movement now needed to run everything by the Afrikaner union. You need land, what will Afri-Forum think? You want to sing? Will Afri-Forum agree? We are subjected to white minority approval and we can’t allow that, Malema said with laughter. We were banned from singing this song during apartheid. We are now banned from singing the song during democracy. The judge’s decision was about me. I did not write the song. I do not have copyright to it ... The judge said that the song was intended to be “hurtful and to incite harm”. He ordered that Malema and the ANC pursue new ideals and find a new morality in accordance with the Equality Act. But Malema accused the judge of trying to secure the interest of minorities over those black people, saying “courts do not care about what the majority thinks”.

From this quote, one can argue that South Africa is still battling in “the Liberation movement”. Malema’s case is one of a few challenges of the “Liberation” that the country is experiencing today; for example, socioeconomic development could be the area to deal with. One would view this in terms of rethinking the African theology: exploring *the god who liberates* from the neocolonialism and its political and economic dicta. This should be the imperative task today that African theologians should explore in order to reconstruct an appropriate discourse about God as one who liberates. The African church should endeavour to play its prophetic role in order to allow “the voiceless” to be heard.

It is disturbing to realise that Africa is endowed with vast wealth which is being exploited by rich countries, yet the African people themselves are condemned to live in perpetual poverty. In this context, the poor countries continue to become “sanctuaries” where humanity has to “keep” reserves of natural resources which the rich countries need for their upkeep. We must remind ourselves that the domineering companies did not disappear with the abolishment of colonialism. One can refer to a comment made by the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, at a summit in Johannesburg when he spoke about the “economic apartheid and logics of re-conquest on Africa resources which affected the life of local populations” (Ela 2003:120).

From that perspective, I agree with Ela’s proposal for a theology of liberation which is still relevant in the South African context as well as for the rest of the African countries.

What is currently happening in the DRC and South African contexts is an illustration of the situation in Africa in general (Katongele 2010:1ff).

## Conclusion

In my view, calls for a theology of liberation should include dialogue as opposed to the brutality which naturally occurs due to fighting. It is also disturbing to realise that even where there is dialogue, it is not easy to have a consensus; violence still persists between and among societies. From a political perspective, *liberation* often refers to the use of force to control others. Liberation is always viewed in

terms of militancy as the only method to establish order. I would not perceive such a theology of liberation to operate by means of force as relevant in our society because such a modality usually causes worse problems than creating more solutions.

In my point of view, the current situation of Africa needs more than a mere message of liberation. It needs also to build a space for the dialogue for life by taking into account the interests of all. The liberation which exists in political independence is not sufficient to bring full transformation for our environment and communities. African theology should embrace liberation as well as the variety of expressions, tendencies such as theologies of enculturation, indigenisation, adaptation, embodiment, invention, restoration, "black theology", the development, the life, the shared prosperity, the reconstruction, etcetera. (Mutombo, 2011:19).

Instead of just talking merely about African theology, I have moved a step further by proposing a theologically inclusive rereading of the Bible in light of the current situation in Africa. I therefore reaffirm my position for an African theology that seeks to provide food for the hungry, shelters the homeless, liberates the oppressed and which restores full dignity to a human being created in the image of God. Only then can we debate about a theology that liberates. In my view, this is the right way to rebuild the *dei imago* of the human race.

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