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THE HUMAN DIMENSION IN THE THEOLOGICAL QUEST



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by

K. A. DICKSON

University of Ghana, Legon



*An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ghana, Legon,
on Thursday, 6th May, 1976.*

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By

K. A. DICKSON

*Professor and Head of the Department for the Study of Religions
at the University of Ghana, Legon*

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AS A PREFACE to this lecture I should like to pay tribute to my predecessors, Professor James P. Hickinbotham, Professor Noel Q. King and Professor Emeritus Christian G. Baeta. All three were my teachers, and the last two were my teaching colleagues. I remember Professor James Hickinbotham for his fascinating exposition of Church History, Professor Noel King also for his Church History, and for his persistent encouragement, and Professor Emeritus C. G. Baeta for his great interest in the study and exposition of that phenomenon of our times — religious pluralism. It is an honour to succeed these in the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana.

I have chosen as my topic *The Human Dimension in the Theological Quest*, not only because of the observable fact of the variety of religions practised by man and the need to give this fact a meaningful theological evaluation, but also because it provides me with the opportunity to reveal something of my approach to my work in this University. My basic theological presuppositions arise out of an awareness of this human dimension. Religion, to make an incontrovertible statement, is something practised by man; no one would seriously challenge this statement. However, some would find it difficult to accept without question the more fundamental statement that what we see as religion: the ritual practices, the verbalisation of various patterns, the rules and regulations, etc.; these externals are only one dimension of religion, and not the most fundamental at that. To view religion only in terms of observable phenomena and patterns of behaviour is to ignore that aspect of it which gives shape to the phenomena and the rich variety of cultic practices. To concentrate on the latter — and various physical constraints tend to give encouragement to so doing — is to make it easier to speak of religion, to be sure, but it also inveigles us into hoarding our prejudices. Religion is basically interior to people, and is often at the basis of their hopes and fears. Studying religion, then, amounts to studying people. This realisation has important consequences, and my intention in this Lecture is to draw out these, particularly as they relate to my work and to the system of courses in my Department.

In 1966 a Conference, sponsored by the now London-based Theological Education Fund, was called at Enugu in Nigeria. To it came representatives from Departments of Religion in Black African Universities to consider afresh the nature of theological education and how best to organise it in Africa. It was the first

time such a representative gathering had taken place, and the participants had every opportunity to examine what the various Departments of Religion in Africa were doing. By that time our Department had been through the throes, on more than one occasion, of reorganising our syllabus to reflect more enlightened thinking on theological education. My immediate predecessor had more than one opportunity to spell out the story of the changes we had made and the philosophy that gave rise to them, and I shall not go over that story here. My immediate interest is to make a few observations on that Enugu Conference.

First, those of us who represented our Department, Professor Emeritus C. G. Baeta and I, were pleasantly surprised to discover that the system we had devised was considered by several of the participants to be ahead of theirs; what was found appealing about our system was the way we had endeavoured to unify the theological course in such a way as to introduce students to a broad study of religion. I cannot help observing that the theological training I received, both as a seminarian and as an undergraduate, did not involve raising seriously the question of what religion is, and on the rare occasion when such a question was raised it was discussed almost entirely in terms of theories of religion and the various manifestations of religion. It was distinctly possible, not only in the University of London of which our University was once a part, but also elsewhere, to study theology without facing seriously the question of what religion is. The second observation I wish to make arises from a question put to the Conference by a European participant: Is it not time that we had an African Theology? The reaction by one participant to the question was as significant as the question itself. The questioner spoke out of his experience of attempts which were being made by certain theologians in Asia to express their Christian faith in terms which were meaningful to them in their religio-cultural situation. It was suggested by one participant who reacted to the question that the questioner was thinking in a characteristically European fashion since he was seeing theology as a systematic statement of ideas and, indeed, the questioner's reaction to this amounted to an acceptance of this assessment of the assumptions underlying his question.

There are two realities reflected in the question and the response. The question reflected the need for theology to arise out of concrete human situations, while the response was a reminder that granted

that theology must of necessity have a particularity in terms of where it is done and applied, its presentation must also have a particularity. In other words, theologising and the communication of theological thought must be done in and through concrete social, political, and other circumstances.

These observations enunciate in a rather preliminary fashion ideas the theoretical bases of which I shall presently attempt to go into.

Man has been of interest to himself for as long as he has existed, before and since Socrates adopted as his starting point the maxim "Know thyself"; after all the one kind of reality that man knows best, from the inside, so to speak, is man. Man sees the universe as having a human meaning to whose unravelling he seems to have dedicated himself. About three years ago an American writer Paul Kurtz wrote as follows in his Preface to a collection of humanist essays: "Using the powerful critical tools of science and logical analysis, modern man now recognises that the universe has no special meaning or purpose and that man is not a special product of creation." He goes on to write, "Anthropocentrism has been laid to rest." It is doubtful whether anthropocentrism can be "laid to rest" just like that. For the humanist, as well as for the non-humanist, anthropocentrism is a live issue, and indeed Kurtz goes on to write, rather surprisingly, "Modern man now realises that he is responsible in large measure for his own destiny" (*The Humanist Alternative: Some Definitions of Humanism*, Pemberton Books, London, 1973).

The truth of the matter is that man has always been self-interpreting. There is a human meaning in the universe which, it is felt by many, must not be obscured, whether by our preoccupation, for good reason, with economic systems, or by the increasing awareness of the vastness of space, or indeed by that subtle and incipient helplessness caused by our awareness of the ambivalent nature of the values attaching to the things man creates; so that for the scientist to quiz himself because some of his great achievements, such as in surgery and psychological medicine, have enabled man to perpetrate great evils in our time is to assert our pre-occupation with humanness and the transcendence of its importance to man.

In his book *Three Issues in Ethics* Professor John Macquarrie has a chapter entitled "Ethics and the New Man" in which he remarks on the multiplicity of answers to the question of who is

the man of today. He observes that the question contains the clear implication that the man of today may not be the same as the man of yesterday. There is, as any reader of Macquarrie's book soon realises, a complex array of valuations of man, and it is an essential aspect of the theological task to try continually to probe these valuations and—and this is extremely important—to grasp the interplay between them and those expressed in the biblical and other scriptural sources. The recognition of the validity of this procedure has played, and continues to play, a part in scriptural interpretation. To put it in another way, the student of the scriptures should not only be familiar with the traditional tools of criticism and interpretation; he should also constantly ask, "What is man?" and the valuation of man in any particular age should play a significant role in interpretation. It is in keeping with this that it was noted in 1971 in one of the Faith and Order (World Council of Churches) documents: "... the present generation enters into the process of interpretation in which the witnesses of that past time were also engaged. On the basis of the interpretation they have bequeathed to us, we must try to catch a glimpse of the facts which they were interpreting and to do in our situation what they did in theirs." The passage goes on,

... if the process of contemporary interpretation is seen as the prolongation of the interpretative process which is recognisable in the Bible, then considerable importance must be attached to the situation at any given time in our interpretation of the Scriptures... The questions which are put to the text play a large part in the interpretation. Of course the text has its own weight... But the situation with its given elements and open problems determines the perspective within which the biblical witness must be read and interpreted.

I have quoted this passage at length partly because it has considerable interest for me as a student of the Old Testament, a collection of religious documents which came into being by a long process, and among an ancient people who most trenchantly reflected upon humanness, and partly because it serves as an illustration of our preoccupation with meaning, to work out an inter-relation of thought, feeling and action. This is what Theology is about, or

indeed should be about. Perhaps we should at this point look at the word Theology more closely.

My Department is the Department for the Study of Religions (a rather unwieldy name that has given rise to various even less happy variations), and even though we ceased quite a few years back to be known as the Department of Theology, those of us who work in this Department are referred to, and indeed we refer to ourselves as, theologians. This is as it should be, though it is important to be certain about how the description theologian is being used.

To begin with, a Department such as mine is not a Seminary, and it is not a Chaplaincy, though people tend to think of it in these terms, particularly as we have several ordinands among the students, and several of my colleagues are ordained and do in fact serve on the University's Chaplaincy Board. Those of us who work in this Department are often suspect in the eyes of believing and unbelieving University colleagues and students. I remember the time when one Christian student told those of us who were her teachers that there was no question but that eternal life had passed us by. Believers may consider that we sound less committed and more critical than we ought to be, while unbelievers suppose that we are engaged upon religious propaganda in a secular University, particularly if such understand theology to mean dogma, and hence dogmatism. Of course, the term theology has been appropriated by the Church, so much so that even without the prefix "Christian" theology is automatically understood to refer to the study and articulation of the Christian faith. And sometimes there *is* a dogmatism that has caused unbelievers to suspect that theology is a brain-washing exercise, as when in 1947 an English Roman Catholic Bishop said, "We have the assurance of our position. We have the certainty of the possession of truth. We have the answers to all questions" (*The Tablet*, p. 55). Such a position perhaps serves as a useful prophylaxis which provides relief from tension and uncertainty; for, often there is nothing like uncertainty to bring out the dogmatic in one.

Theology, as I understand it, and in the context of the topic of this Lecture, is to be understood in much broader terms. In our Department we do speak of Christian theology and Islamic theology. This is understandable, seeing that we have for many years operated on the basis of two Options, Christian and Muslim

theological studies. However, the study of man and his religions makes us, or indeed ought to make us see Christian theology and Muslim theology as contingent aspects of Theology which is the analysis, criticism and propositional articulation of religion. I have had occasion most recently to attempt, in an article in the *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* (Vol. 4, No. 8, June 1975), a short analysis of the understanding of theology such as I am putting forward here, so I shall try to approach the matter now from a slightly different angle, though I shall not be able to keep out entirely some of the points made then.

It is significant that for decades, but particularly in very recent years, various positions have been championed, abandoned and re-stated in an attempt to arrive at a theology of world religions. The discussion, which has excited the interest of many in the third world, had been anticipated in the Old Testament where several references to the relation between the Israelite faith and others are found. Actually, the Old Testament speaks not so much of other faiths as of *men* of other faiths. In this connection it is significant that one of the most radical statements in the Old Testament, a statement which suggests a preference for what would be called pagan cults over the practice of the Israelite faith, was made by a prophet, Malachi, who lived in the 5th century B.C., by which time a community had been developing in Palestine of a variety of peoples, sometimes living in hostility, admittedly, but all the same encountering each other.

It is not my intention — and indeed this is not the time and place — to go over the great variety of views that have been put forward in the area of the theology of religions and its implications for theological education; it will be enough to refer to a few individuals in order to try and give some indications of the trend of scholarly thinking. Perhaps one should begin with the very recent exposition by Professor John Hick who calls for what he terms a “Copernican Revolution” in the theology of world religions as a result of which we will no longer think in the Ptolemaic fashion of the Christian position as the centre, but as one of a number of positions radiating from the central point of orbit (see his *God and the Universe of Faiths*; also *Truth and Dialogue*, ed. John Hick). This is not by any means a new idea, but it is given a powerful statement by Hick. Like all other views it can be criticised, but my purpose in referring to this is to make the point in a preliminary fashion that the view is being found

attractive by an increasing number of people that theology is not theology in the fullest sense of the word if it does not take account of Religion *as a whole*. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that Christians in particular have been trying for some time now to redefine theology without feeling free to admit that this is at the back of the questionings which have issued in an increasing number of publications on the subject of Christianity and other religions.

In his Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow in 1924/1925 Professor W. P. Patterson approached this subject of religions in a gingerly fashion, and eventually skirted it, in my judgement. He said then,

The questions which are naturally asked are — what has man believed about God? how did the beliefs arise? what truth, if any, do they contain? And to these correspond the tasks of description, genetic explanation and valuation, which have been undertaken from one standpoint by Theology, and from another by the Science of Religion and the Philosophy of Religion. The chief business of Theology has been to declare the knowledge of God prevalent in a particular religious community, and these statements of faith have been brought together in a comprehensive view in the History of Religions, and they have also to some extent been co-ordinated in a discipline of Comparative Theology (*The Nature of Religion*, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1925).

It is evident in this quotation that Patterson raised a matter of fundamental importance though, regrettably, the theological climate of the twenties did not encourage him to examine more closely the relation between Theology and the History of Religions. A similar statement may be made about the German scholar Joachim Wach, who in 1924 (about the same time as Patterson) published his *Religionswissenschaft* in which he tackled the problem of the relation between Theology and the History of Religions in a way characteristic of his times.

In the late fifties the issue of the meaning of Theology was insistently raised, with a significant number of the discussants coming from America, and it would not be unfair to say that the more notable opinions mirrored the ambivalence which had been apparent since the twenties. One might quote Walter Harrelson who wrote in 1958: "It would be entirely defensible to have a theological faculty oriented toward any one of the living religions of mankind." This is

in effect saying that we could have theologies — of Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religion, etc., and indeed the theological world does speak of theologies in this sense. As I have already indicated, in my Department we speak of Islamic theology, among others. Harrelson goes on to say,

A theological faculty can only exist when certain choices and decisions have been made, or are in the process of being made ... It is a matter of doubt . . . whether a faculty of theology can exercise any meaningful function on a university campus unless it acknowledges that it has a *particular* religious character (Walter Harrelson, "The Function of the Theological Faculty in the University", 1958, pp. 10-11).

Of course, it may be reasonably argued that there is no theology in general, and that there is this or that theology as there is this or that faith. Furthermore, it may be reasonably argued that there are limitations to the time, energy and competence of any collection of theological scholars, such as may be found in a theological Department. Choices have to be made — a line has to be drawn somewhere. Given the financial constraints being universally experienced, there is a limit to the variety of representation on any theological establishment. And in the light of the Western context out of which such scholars as Harrelson spoke, the homogeneity which the paucity of religious options available ensured meant that the choice was made in favour of Christian theology.

About four years ago the well-known German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, added to the discussion which is being very briefly surveyed here. In a paper entitled "Christian theology and its Problems Today" he wrote as follows:

A theology that encapsulates itself in its own tradition and its own circles petrifies and dies. Christian theology needs to have dialogue for the sake of its own cause. Its partners need dialogue with Christian theology. We should create centres for dialogue, and call upon students to study other religions and modern science. The Christian faith will not thereby be relativised, but rather be brought into relationships. A theology without relationships is a dead theology (Paper presented for a Consultation on "Doctrine and Change," 19th to 24th June 1972, Ecumenical Institute, Bossey).

I have deliberately kept to a minimum references to scholars who have joined in this debate in order not to clutter this lecture with

names, but enough references have been made to enable one to detect a wrestling with the question of whether or not we should have a more inclusive understanding of theology; I would in fact say that the more challenging theologians have been the ones who have been most aware of the inclusive nature of theology. Moltmann, whom I have just quoted, writes further, "The theologian is . . . a man among other men. He will therefore combine his certainty in God with humility in his humanity, and thus esteem the truth that is greater than himself and his best theology" (*ibid.*).

The idea of the inclusiveness of theology is an inevitable one. After all, the nature and purpose of theology, properly understood, is to articulate understanding of the meaning of existence, in particular of human existence, at its most fundamental level. As someone has expressed it, "Religion is the commitment to that which sustains, nourishes, and creates the good in human life. Theology is the intellectual interpretation of that to which man commits himself" (Perry LeFevre, "The Place of a Faculty of Theology in the University," 1958, pp. 13-14). The theologian cannot perform his task most meaningfully unless he recognises what is religious, not in terms of what gives shape to a contingent group, but in terms of what gives shape to humanity. As I recently wrote, the structures of religion must be recognised by the theologian, or he will not notice the absence of religion in his theology, and to recognise the structures of religion is to be aware of humanity. The Canadian scholar Cantwell Smith, one of whose students is now my colleague in the Department, has made the intriguing statement, "It is the business of comparative religion to construct statements about religion that are intelligible within at least two traditions simultaneously" (see Eliade and Kitagawa, ed., *The History of Religions*, The University of Chicago Press, 1959, p. 52).

What all this amounts to is that theology is being seen more and more in a new light, even though in the theological Department the traditional disciplines are still to be encountered — Church History, Old Testament, New Testament, etc. Incidentally, if I refer at this point and elsewhere to subjects traditionally associated with Christian theological education, it is in the interests of simplicity since the alternative to this would be to clutter the lecture with a great variety of course titles from the two Options, Christian and Muslim, and from the other religious systems studied.

Now, in addition to the traditional theological disciplines every

attempt is being made, particularly in the newer Universities such as ours, to diversify the theological material. This diversification has proceeded along two lines. On the one hand, there is the contextualisation of the various areas of study; this involves placing the various disciplines in a human context, a religio-cultural context, taking into account the life and thought of those being given theological education. As Perry LeFevre has observed, "A descriptive or analytical study of so-called religious subject matter does not necessarily guarantee that theological thinking is going on" (*ibid.*, p. 16); theological thinking is done by persons only in and through their presuppositions and their values. In other words, being able to recall at appropriate occasions past credal formulations and the views that have been expressed by various theological stars — and from time to time a new one appears in the firmament — does not necessarily make one a theologian. A theologian is one who has thought through religion in terms of his existence. If I may dare to provide an illustration by citing the subject of Philosophy with whose intricacies, I hasten to add, I am only very vaguely familiar, but which is taught next to my Department, the only basis of my confidence in referring to it, surely the central philosophical activity is not merely to report what someone said about a particular problem some time ago, even though it is important to be aware of an earlier solution. The primary concern of philosophy "is with unsolved problems, and the history of philosophy is important to most philosophers not for its own sake, but because it may help us with these problems" (Peter Singer, "The New Relevance of Philosophy," in *Dialogue*, Vol. 8, 1975, No. 2, p. 97). And so it is with theological study.

On the other hand — and this is the other line of diversification — new theological courses are being taught in some of the younger Universities, courses which either did not exist, or were defectively conceived in my undergraduate days. The new courses have, on the whole, been designed to create a greater awareness of humanity, and hence to save the aspiring theologian from a myopic insularity, if I may mix my metaphor.

There is yet another point to make in this connection. When the German sociologist and philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey, made the statement that to understand other human beings we should study the various ways in which they express themselves, he drew attention to another aspect of the many-faceted nature of our awareness of humanity; for, the modes of human expression are many, as a look

at the Sciences and the Humanities shows. It would be a poorer world without Classical Literature, Sociology, Political Science, Geography, Psychology and Art, to name just these which, together with Religion, have taught us in various ways to understand man from within.

My concern so far in this Lecture has been to show that there is a unity underlying the various aspects of the theological educational process, and that this unity is the human dimension. It might sound to some that in suggesting that the nature and purpose of Theology is to articulate understanding of the meaning of human existence I am underplaying that vital component of the word theology itself — *theos*. If such an impression has been created, it was not intended, for ultimately the questions asked by theology are about God. It is worth noting, in this connection, that in the modern period most definitions of God have tended to stress his immanence, i.e., his active presence within his world. Thus in seeing the human dimension as the crux of theological education I am merely recognising that it is man who expresses trust through religion, and the theological enterprise involves the intellectual interpretation of that upon which man rests his trust. Furthermore, this analysis of the theological task has given me the opportunity to refer, albeit briefly, to the links that exist between theology and other subjects being taught in the University, links that for various reasons which I shall not go into we have only partly exploited, though I might mention the time-table constraints of which we are all aware; we intend to exploit these links more fully in the not too distant future.

In order to show the bearing of all this on our work in the Department in more specific terms, I shall now direct my attention to indicating something of the disposition of the Department in terms of personnel and courses, raising in the process some related matters.

When a few years ago the University adopted a new degree structure, there was a certain amount of groaning, in the flesh and, I suspect also, in the spirit, particularly by those who, re-calling their own University undergraduate days when they pursued one subject over a period of three or four years, felt that under the new system students might gain in breadth and lose in depth. I do not wish to discuss the bases of the regret and promise occasioned by the introduction of the present degree structure; I shall merely note that I do not regret having to read English as a compulsory subject, in addition to theology, for my Intermediate Bachelor of Divinity degree in the

University College of the Gold Coast over twenty years ago. Like other Departments in the University we have reorganised our teaching. Two considerations, in particular, have guided us in arriving at the present ordering of our courses. First, we give the first year to the study of religion and its role in society; hence the courses offered to first year students: The Philosophy of Religion, and the Phenomenon of Religion and African Traditional Religion. These two courses together examine what religion is, what role it has played in society, and what role it continues to play in society, in particular ours. This is in line with what I have said about the need for theological study to be based upon an awareness of what religion is. I might add that though in my Department we have two religion Options — Christian and Muslim — no opportunity is given first year students to concentrate on the Option they might be interested in; the opportunity comes in the second year after a student has, hopefully, understood something of what religion is.

The second consideration is one of a complex of ideas which I wish I could discuss in some detail. It does not directly bear upon my theme, but in as much as I am using this opportunity to indicate something of my approach to my work it is relevant to bring it up. In my Department we have tended to be suspicious of what is known as an introductory course, if by that is meant a course which is not, strictly speaking, of a sufficiently high level to be considered as a full University course. Of course, in some situations introductory courses are unavoidable, such as when an undergraduate is faced with, say, Russian for the first time. But, barring such an unusual situation, in my Department we tend to think that first year students should be treated as University students — who have passed one level of study and embarked upon another. Introductory courses which assume that students are yet to be initiated into University work could have the effect of encouraging what we are already bemoaning — the lack of enthusiasm for reading; for, often what is really introductory is that which students could be encouraged to read for themselves. Our first year courses, then, are fully University courses, and could be given to students in other years if circumstances made that necessary. I have had more than one occasion to explain to 'Visiting' students from America, some times without convincing them, that a first year course in our Department cannot be considered to be below them simply because it is being given to first year students. Incidentally, the comments I have made about introductory courses could

be applied to what are known as pre-requisites and survey courses.

In the next two years a student studies his choice of Option. While he is taken through the main disciplines associated with theological study — Old Testament, New Testament, History and Doctrine, etc., so that it cannot be said, as some have tended to do, that our kind of contextual study leaves out of account basic theological courses, students have further opportunity to study Religion in the Comparative Study of Religion course, which is one of the compulsory courses. The term Comparative Study of Religion, or simply Comparative Religion, can be a most confusing term since over many decades different understandings of its nature and content have been advocated, some having met with such disapproval as to prompt one clergyman who was both pious and obviously exasperated to exclaim that he would rather that a female student of his acquaintance read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* than that subject! His explanation was that at least she would know, in reading D. H. Lawrence, that she was being attacked by the devil. From the point of view of some, a theological course which does not set out to indoctrinate is not worth pursuing. In our Comparative Study of Religion course we undertake an impartial study of several religious traditions with a view to helping a student gain some understanding of the "many and varied ways men have manifested their awareness of a dimension other than the temporal and 'material' . . ." (T. Ling, *A History of Religion East and West*, Macmillan, 1968, p. xviii). In this connection, some of us have had occasion to express regret over the fact that works on the Comparative Study of Religion make practically no reference to African Traditional Religion, a religion which, in its various forms, is practised by millions of people in Africa, and which affects the life and thought of many more millions who may deny that they are its adherents. Fortunately, our Comparative Study of Religion specialist is keen on redressing the balance, and I am hopeful that in course of time this very important dimension will be added to the study, and will be recognised as important world-wide.

This gives me an opportunity to say a further word about African Traditional Religion which, as I have found in my travels in both West and East Africa, is understood, quite rightly, to be a very important ingredient in theological study. Now, while in the early days of its presentation this subject tended to be caricatured by European writers, often out of ignorance, these days there is a real danger that its worst caricaturists will be Africans, particularly

those who believe, quite erroneously, that because they are Africans they are by that very fact qualified to expound it. Statements about African Traditional Religion seem to be rather easily made, even where little research or none has been carried out. As far as the presentation of material is concerned there seems to be a reluctance to depart from the methodological patterns set in earlier days; furthermore, the religion tends to be presented as an unchanging and immutable phenomenon. I have often at tutorials closely questioned students regarding ideas they were parading, and succeeded in eliciting the remark that though they themselves had not at any time observed that those ideas they were championing were in fact generally held and indeed regulated the practice of religion, they felt nevertheless that they must be valid because so-and-so had stated as much in his book. This is why we welcome this new system which gives interested students the opportunity to carry out some investigations into what is going on *now* in the area of African Traditional Religion for their Long Essays. I believe also that the excavations at Bordercave (the border between Natal and Swaziland) and the light they have thrown on the practice of African Traditional Religion many thousands of years ago (some date the findings as being about 80,000 years old) are an important development which should give impetus to the study of the history of African Traditional Religion.

It is in line with the human dimension of which I have been speaking that the subject of African life and thought should make its presence felt in various ways in our work in the Department. Our two philosophers have shown keen interest in the study of African ethical ideas; our Islamic specialists are convinced that it could give a vital dimension to their teaching to study how Islam has been appropriated by Africans. Several of my colleagues have been wrestling with what is often referred to as African Theology, which is meant to be a restatement of Christian realities in and through African thought forms. I must add that there is no unanimity in the Department on this subject; statements made by some have been criticised by others. This is as it should be, for doing theology is in a sense a very human enterprise, and it is the very unusual person who would feel that his theological stand is the only one possible. Even the biblical subjects, Old and New Testaments, have not been pursued without recourse being had, at appropriate points, to the use of African life and thought as a

pedagogical tool, thus enabling the student, among other things, to appreciate the human element in the two Testaments. The "purists" would frown deeply upon this, believing as they do that only those traditions belonging to the milieu of the ancient Near East could be involved in biblical study (particularly Old Testament study). Incidentally, it is the hope of my New Testament colleague and myself that more interest would come to be shown in biblical study in African Universities. Biblical languages tend to be neglected, or at best half-heartedly pursued, for various reasons which we cannot go into. In my Department we are about to experiment with the study of Hebrew as a living language, as it is spoken today, and there is no reason why it should not kindle enough interest in students to lead them on, at a later stage, to the study of some of the classical texts.

I wish to emphasise that important though the study of African Traditional Religion may be, it must not be pursued at the expense of other traditional theological disciplines. I have observed, and remarked upon the tendency in some places to spend so much time on this subject that inevitably some students see this as about the only theological discipline worth taking seriously. Thus in some institutions known to me all final year students have, for several years running, written their Long Essays on topics from this area; none have been taken from the other areas—philosophy of Religion, Ethics, Doctrine, Church History, Old Testament, etc. While this may be a tribute to those teachers who present the subject, it cannot be said that this *alone*, even if in a special way it contributes to our understanding of the human dimension in the theological quest, provides the full life situation for the doing of theology. It does provide a particular and very relevant life situation, but in line with the analysis made above, the doing of theology cannot be limited to the study of one contingent group.

In the final analysis, whatever one says about one's subject must be placed within ever widening concentric circles of contexts. I could discuss Faculty organisation, the University system as we experience it in this country, and indeed the country's educational system with which some of us have cause to be dissatisfied. I recognise, fortunately for my audience, that I must resist the temptation to launch into a discussion of these contexts.

Let me conclude, then, by referring to those great beasts, the dinosaurs which, though they dominated the earth for some one

hundred and thirty-five million years, did disappear because, according to some scientists, "they developed bone and armor plate beyond the limits of utility". It may be wondered why we do not have today theologians of the stature of the great giants such as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich, to name just these. These were scholars who dominated the theological scene to such an extent that aspiring theologians learnt to refer to them in conversation in order to safeguard their respectability. The world put them above all others, and from their position of eminence they handed down to students what can only be described as pre-digested theology, theology which took little or no account of the rapid change which the world for many decades has been experiencing, and the wider range of human experience which the great variety of cultural, social, political and economic situations presents. I recall reading about the old Tillich, about how on a visit to Japan he noted with bewilderment the radical newness of the cultural scene, and was depressed by the thought of having to rewrite his theology in order to make it truly catholic.

The human dimension is that element which will save theology from assuming the character of the dinosaur, imposing but disposable.



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