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The Place of Theology in Another Possible World

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Teresa Okure, SHCJ (Nigeria)

My task, as I understand it, is not to give a logically developed paper on the place of theology in another possible world, but to raise issues that can serve as springboard for our group discussions. The presentation does just this, moving freely from issue to issue as the Spirit inspires. Since what is required is my own reflections, I also draw, without apologies, from previous works, which embody my belief on how theology and theologians may help to give birth to a new and renewed world.

A marked feature of our world today is the search for roots. The famous African American book, *Roots* later produced in film, is only an outstanding example. On a smaller scale, European Americans visit Europe regularly to trace their family roots. Family members everywhere do the same even those who have never left their countries. Humanity itself is committed to discovering its own origin. In the process scientists report that every living human being can trace his or her DNA to the Mitochondrial Mother, an African woman who lived some 200,000 years ago. The assumption in these searches is that knowing one's roots or origins would help one to understand oneself better.

Another relevant feature is the "User's Manual". A product usually comes with a user's manual from its manufacturers, the purpose of which is to give directions on how to operate the product. If one operates the product differently from what is indicated in the manual, one is sure to damage the product. Moreover, if a product develops a fault, one will be most at ease that the problem will be satisfactorily resolved if one can return it to the manufacturers for repairs, knowing that they will do a better job than other technicians, authorised or not.

What applies on the individual scale and in the case of products also applies with regard to our world. The quest for the place of theology in a different possible world presumes dissatisfaction with the current world. It assumes that the Creator and Redeemer God does have a place and decisive say in this envisaged world, and that, contrary to what some may think, theology, our God-talk, can play a unique role in helping to forge this possible world "of justice, peace and freedom".¹ **If, therefore, we want a theology that will be at the service of another possible world, we will need to return to the existential roots of this world and to its user's manual, the Scriptures and Christ.**

Different understandings of theology exist, the classic one being that of Anselm and the Scholastics: "faith seeking understanding through philosophical discourse". Liberatively understood, theology is faith reflecting on and interpreting one's life experiences and finding, responding to and rejoicing in God through those experiences.² However one defines it, theology is our God-talk (*theos logos*); it is essentially our discourse about God, our understanding of and relationship with God, with one another, and with God's created world. Theology for and in another possible world would, therefore, be concerned primarily with how we see God's place in this envisaged world, and our role in making that place an

inalienable construct of our diverse efforts to give birth to this world.

Based on these premises, the discourse on the place of theology in another possible world would need boldly and clearly to redirect attention to the divine roots or origin of the world as a solid foundation of such a world by making three basic affirmations from Scripture, God's user's manual for our understanding of and operating in the world:

1. God, not human beings, created the world and for a purpose: to be inhabited by human beings (Gen 1:28; Isa 45:12, 18); God also provided abundantly and copiously for that purpose for humans and animals. Therefore any persons who want to see the world right side up (not upside down) need to return to God's created order and purpose for this world. In other words, theology in and for a different possible world would need to recognize that no other world is possible, in the sense of right and lasting, except that willed by the Creator. Therefore this theology would need to rediscover the true nature of this world and affirm its basic goodness. **Creation theology** today seeks to do this and is long overdue. This theology needs to include in its agenda not only ecology and earth theology but such issues as racism, sexism, classism and whatever obstructs the goodness and harmony of God's created world.
2. Every human being is God's creature, receives life in all its dimensions from God through birth. Every human being is thus essentially a dependent creature and all human beings together are dependent on one another. Theology for God's type of would need to emphasize the importance of accepting **the existential dependency of all human beings** on God and their interdependency on one another and nature and consequences of this. Consequently, it would need to reject outright all covert and overt efforts whereby one person or nation arrogates to itself the right to dominate, oppress or claim superiority over others. Any human being or group that acts as if it were God with others at its beck and call does damage to itself in the first place before it does the same to others, for such was not God's purpose in creating them.
3. A system that distorts and diverts God's purpose for the whole, for all, in favour of a few, bears "its own seeds" of destruction and is doomed to fail, no matter how long it may have been in existence or how "illustrious" or renowned the persons who have supported and practised it, or how "universal" its acceptance appears to be. ("Seed" here is a reference to Genesis 1 where each created plant had its own seed inside it for self-propagation). Theology for another possible world would therefore offer bold measures for a **deconstruction** of those accepted systems: social, economic, political and even religious that dehumanise by giving some the hegemony over others, with a view to **reconstructing** systems that ennoble and enhance life in all its fulness for all. Jeremiah's prophetic vocation speaks to this. The prophet was sent and set over nations and kingdoms "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow" in order "to build and to plant" (Jer 1:10).

We elaborate briefly on these affirmations.

1. Return to God's created intent for the world

God created human beings climactically in the work of creation and gave them his created earth as a heritage, making provision for both humans and other living creatures (Gen

1:28). Before God asked them to multiply, increase and fill the earth, God had already provided abundantly and sumptuously for all human beings created in the divine image and likeness. In God's created and eternal plan, therefore, long before the declaration of the **Universal Human Right**, every human being has the right to life and to all that sustains that life, in his or her own right, not as dependent on, derivative of, or indebted to another; but by the mere fact of coming into existence, whether as man or women, black or white, from the developing or developed world. The right to life and right to what sustains that life in all its dignity and nobility (as persons created in God's image and likeness) are God's endowment to every individual, not something given by the Declaration. The Declaration only regulates against abuses and human failure to recognize and practice this ontological fact.

For any human beings or group of humans, therefore, to accumulate the world's good to the detriment and deprivation of life of others is to act in an anti-God manner, commit a crime against humanity, and cheat oneself of one's imaging and likeness to God. Our God is not a hoarding God, but a God who pours out self, reaches out to, and provides for all creation. Jesus' parable of "the rich fool" (Luke 12:13-21) addresses the plight of one who acts in this anti-self, anti-life manner. The rich fool did nothing wrong, by the standards of capitalism, the ethics of globalization, free enterprise, maximization of profit and laws of the market. We are not told he cheated or defrauded anybody, as can happen in capitalistic settings. He simply hoarded what he thought was his. In the process he lost not only what he had accumulated by the ethics of capitalism, but his very life as well. "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul [this being a divine passive] and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" (12:20). This question is valid not only for the fool in the parable but for all who accumulate this world's good, claim their right to do so, and in the process neglect to provide for or share with others. The parable of "Dives" and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is yet another example. Dives apparently did nothing wrong. He simply enjoyed his goods while failing to recognize and provide for the poor Lazarus covered with sores lying at the very entrance to his house, longing in vain even for the scraps that fall from his table, scraps which dogs eat (cf. Mark 7:28). Dives dehumanized himself. He only noticed Lazarus (who alone has a name in the parable, though in society the poor are nameless while the rich have names and titles) when their lots were reversed. The problem appears to be not that one is rich but what one does with one's riches; for such riches seen in the light of creation, not through the lenses of capitalism, are not one's own in the first place, all creation belongs to God (Ps 24:1)³

To accumulate and hoard the world's goods, take pride in them and use material wealth as criteria for determining the world's number one citizen or nation is to miss the whole purpose of existence and play false to one's identity and origin in God. What greater title can a human being receive than that of being God's child (cf. 1 John 3:1-9, and //s)? "My brothers and Sisters, just think with what love God has loved us that we should be called God's children, not only called, that is what we really are!" This is fruit for thought. To take pride in artificial riches, or worse still in anti-life riches (arms, weapons of destruction, gadgets of war, latest killer technology, etc., etc.) while condemning others for possessing weapons of mass destruction (true or false) is to cheat oneself before cheating others. Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10) realised this and moved away from self-destroying isolation into communion, restoration and sharing: "I give half of my goods to the poor [an equal sharing] and if I have cheated anyone, I restore it fourfold" (three times beyond what the law required). By this bold and courageous act, he moved into a new world of relation, sharing and communion with his brothers and sisters, with the ancestors of his nation and with God: "Today salvation

[God's liberating grace], has come to this house for he too is a son of Abraham". Only those who remained stuck in their self-righteousness shut themselves out of this reign of God. Not only the accumulation of physical possessions deviates one from the kingdom, or entering into God's reign and rest; fake spiritual ones also do the same. A person or people who pride themselves or their nations as the righteous ones and condemn others and their nations as the "axis of evil", do condemn themselves first before condemning others. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-17) reminds us of this. Such persons are the first casualties of their actions because "All human beings have sinned, fallen short of God's glory" and stand in need of God's liberating grace (Rom 3:23). Or as the Psalmist says, "If you, O Lord, were to mark our guilt, Lord who would survive? But with you is found forgiveness and for this we revere you" (Ps 130:3; used for Christmas Evening Prayer II). People who pride themselves in their religious traditions while condemning others are equally casualties of their own such efforts.

Every person's life is a pure gift from God

No human being has a say or contribution whatsoever in the circumstances of his/her coming to existence, whether in terms of race, sex, class, culture, geographical location or even personal physical traits. Conversely, suicide (an anti-life action) apart, no human being has a say in how he or she will die. A basic human instinct is that of self-preservation. Often suicide occurs because the means and circumstances for sustaining one's life in an ennobling manner are lacking, so one decides it is pointless to continue living. We decry suicide, but rarely the circumstances that can drive one to commit such an anti-life act to one's self. The theology for another possible world would need to promote the right to life, not only of the unborn but of the living, where useless and reckless wars kill, maim, decimate and destroy lives wholesale and go uncensored because of the shared false ideologies, interests and profits behind such wars.

Oppressive systems will not last forever

The wages or fruit of sin is death (Rom 6:23), not only of persons but also of world systems. The rise and fall of empires built on domination, oppressions, exploitation and suppression are historical examples. Only the empire that is built on love and service to humanity, all humanity, in accordance with God's will, will stand forever. Such is the empire or kingdom of God's Messiah, sent to liberate the entire humanity and creation and bring them into communion with God and with one another at the cost of the divine self (cf. Dan 7:13-14). God in Christ reconciled the world to the divine self, not counting their sins against them. God has also entrusted to us theologians and believers the ministry of proclaiming the GOOD NEWS that they all are reconciled (2 Cor 5:17-21). It is impossible that evil (what is not), should overcome good (that which is) or that human beings can veto God's created plans and get away with it indefinitely. Apocalyptic faith, with its core belief in the ultimate prevention of the power of evil to harm God's creation, is integral to our biblical faith. Evil that came later into the world, according to Genesis, cannot, according to that same Genesis (3:15) and the biblical faith generally, destroy God's plans and purposes and get away with it.⁴

Tasks for Theology

In view of the above, theology in and for another possible world would have the following characteristics and tasks:

1. **To identify, clarify and reclaim the world envisaged by the Creator. Theology will need to promote belief and knowledge that this sought world is not a utopian dream, but the only real and truly possible world**, if the world spoiled by humans is ever to return to its roots and find healing. Every other type of world no matter how long it has lasted or how much it seeks to impose itself as the norm is a fake and inauthentic; hence it is doomed to disintegrate. This may sound like stating the obvious. Yet it is crucial. Often in contemporary discourse the impression is given that the world belongs to human beings to treat it at will or decide its fate irrespective of God. Those who believe in God's type of world are tagged utopians. But this is misleading. The case of a product that gets spoiled and is returned to the manufacturers rather than to haphazard specialists for repairs applies here. If human beings have spoiled the world God created "good" or derailed it, the only way to get it back on track or restore its goodness is to return to its maker and to the purpose for which it was created. No amount of wanting it to be otherwise and no effort to sustain such desire will succeed. If the type of world we envisage is of our construct, we will have every reason to be apologetic about it, or hesitant in promoting it.

If indeed it is God's world, the progressive onslaught of evil notwithstanding (what Matt 24:8 tags "the beginning of the birth pangs" [of the new world]), we will proclaim it with boldness without any apologies to others or ourselves. (Perhaps this is what David Bosch meant by Mission in bold humility in his *Transforming Mission*). The boldness in humility will be like that of Bilbo Baggins and his dwarf colleagues in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. These little and insignificant fellows went on unperturbedly, gently, to destroy the ring in the furnace where it was forged, completely oblivious of the hell let loose around them seeking to destroy them. They did not engage in the battle with evil, but just went on with their mission, undeterred by the wars and violence around them. A transformative theology for a transformed world needs to do the same. It needs to become aware of its God-given mission and unfailing support and get on with it, quietly, steadfastly, courageously, fearlessly, but humbly; believing not in itself, but in the God whose discourse it serves and in Jesus who commissioned the disciples to go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News, God's Good News, not a human one; who said they/we were to "Know that I am with you always, yes till the end of time", till the gospel is preached to the whole creation and all is made new; who said "Take courage, I have overcome the world (the death dealing forces in this world, what causes enmity between the woman and her seed); who assured them and us that all authority (life-enabling power) in heaven and on earth has been given to him. We were therefore to make disciples of all the nations, ask all nations to live and be alive in the world with his kind of life.

If there is room at all for apologies in this theology, it will be for our past failure to proclaim the GOOD NEWS to every creature, and for proclaiming bad news, engaging rather in judging and condemning others – those we called heathen, pagans. John Paul II did this in a true jubilee spirit in his *mea culpa's*.⁵ The biblical jubilee year starts with acknowledgment of failure to live by and up to the jubilee demands; it asks for forgiveness and makes atonement. That done, the celebration moves on. John Paul II thus follows up his *mea culpa's* before the jubilee with his launching into the deep for the catch of the millennium in his *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, with its mantra: *Duc in altum; pair out your nets into the deep!*⁶ Paul of

Tarsus had long declared that God was bigger than his conscience. So he was not perturbed even by his conscience accusing him. This is a *theos-logos* that can transform one's life and the life of the world and give one sustained energy to forge ahead in face of daunting personal and human failures (historical and current), and natural disasters like the Tsunami disaster. There is no pessimism, no fear that it will not work. *One just does it against common sense and all rules of fishing – duc in altum, in broad daylight!*

2. This theology will continuously **identify, analyze and expose the multi-faceted and cumulative causes** of the practices that over the centuries have contributed in **diverting us from the right view of the world** and benumbed our senses to accept or settle for systems (religious, political, cultural and economic) that foster our self-destruction as human species. How, for instance, did humanity ever come to accept war, with its ever more refined and sophisticated instruments of killing, as a means of settling scores and fail to see that, as the saying goes, one may win the war but not never the victory? How did we fail to see that war can never be the answer to peace, or that peace can never be the fruit of war. That which is, is itself and not something else; violence begets violence. A theology for God's type of world will not dismiss the vision of Isa 2:1-5; 11 and other similar theologies as wishful thinking. It will also accept God's own recipe for conflict resolution and for bringing into existence the new world. God's recipe for turning the world around lies in those very persons whom the present world builders have discarded as irrelevant, namely, women and children.⁷ History of salvation from Genesis 3:16 (pre-history or proto-gospel) points us to women and children, or the woman and her seed, as the divine answer for the total defeat of evil: "They found the child with Mary his Mother". Between Genesis 3:16 and Revelation 12 through the story of the Patriarchs and Matthew's and Luke's infancy narratives, God's new beginnings always lie in the woman and her children, though the men may appear to be the sole bearers of the promises and the covenant.⁸ Theology that promotes a return to God's world will need to move and motivate humanity to share the center stage of all human undertakings equally between men and women. Unless we build this world with God's building blocks, the building will not materialise or stand.

3. Theology for another possible world would be **inclusive and universal**, dismissing no one. It will address both the rich and the poor, Whites and Blacks, the developed and underdeveloped, terrorists and self-styled good guys, fundamentalists/conservatives and progressives, not in a judgmental or dismissive way, but in a genuine effort to motivate each to become aware of their own plight and so engage in a theology of self-liberation. The causes of self-imprisonment may be blinding socialization into a distorted self-conception and world-view. A life-transforming theology is that which each person or group undertakes from their own life experience interpreted in the light of belief in the divine will for humanity. Once each person becomes thus aware (as Zacchaeus did), they will leave those places, whatever such places may be, and summon up courage to return to their origin, to their Father's and Mother's house where a first class banquet awaits them (cf. Isa 55:1-2; Luke 15:11-32). Interestingly John Paul II used the parable of the prodigal son as the icon for Christians wishing to celebrate the great Jubilee.⁹ Conversely he used that of the fruitless night fishing to call believers back to fish in the right way with Jesus' enabling power, though we may have felt they had toiled all night and caught nothing. "Let down your net for a catch, in daytime, though in your natural way of fishing daytime is not the time for making a rich catch". John's account of the same or similar incident actually directs that they cast the net to the right side of the boat, i.e., that they do it right this time, not on their own initiative but with Jesus' enabling presence.¹⁰ So the role of theology in the real world intended by the Creator,

will be non-discriminatory, non-dualistic, non-oppositional, collaborative, and open to assistance and guidance from the God who created this world and who alone (not any styled powerful ruler of whatever powerful nation) has its destiny in his hands.

4. The theology for another possible world be solidly **rooted in the belief in God's love for the entire world, for every human being**. This love is the central and foundational message of the incarnation (John 3:16). God-word became a human being to redeem the world from its deviation and many false values. God was in Christ reconciling the world to the divine self. This theology will seek to rediscover the many passages of Scripture (Old and New Testament) that proclaim that God's salvation and liberation is for all of humanity, not just for a few, styled believers or the holy and chosen people, the new Israel. So far we have paid little attention to this universal dimension of the Bible, especially the NT, because we have tended to monopolize the Christian heritage. The NT declaration that Christ is God's Messiah for the whole humanity is yet to register and govern our thinking and theologizing. We are still very much partisan in our reading of these texts. God may have a preferential option for the poor. Yet for over 2000 years we have proclaimed this option without the world coming any way near the kingdom on earth as in heaven that we pray for in the Lord's prayer. Redaction criticism recalls that the formulation of the Gospel was based very much on the situation on the ground and on each evangelist's attempt to address that situation. Time has come for us to write our own gospels, using theirs as historical faith resources in the light of humanity's ever increasing self-awareness as a global family. New wine, new skins! We cannot continue to use partisan or oppositional or dualistic approaches in theology and yet expect to reap holistic and healing (shalom) results from it. What was said earlier about war and peace applies equally in our theologizing. Another possible world, another style or method in theologizing!

One cannot solve a problem by suppressing one side of the equation. For theology to assist in enabling humanity to become whole and be healed (experience peace with justice), **it will have to minister to all God's children in this world and not continue to operate on one-sided and polarized categories of the rich versus the poor, Whites versus Blacks, believers versus non-believers**. A theology for a different possible world must operate on the belief that God's salvation is for everybody. The promise in Genesis 3:16, was for the woman and her seed, named "Eve" by the man, "because she was the mother of all who live" (Gen 3:20). The promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost was poured out on all flesh. God's Spirit/wisdom fills the entire earth. The place of theology will be to recognize and celebrate this gift and goodness of God to and in creation.

5. More concretely a theology that aims at helping to bring about another possible world will be a **jubilee theology, a gospel theology**, a theology of celebration, of cancellation of debt, of recognition and thanksgiving that God in Christ has reversed our anti-self and anti world projects free of charge and that all we need to do is to take possession of this free gift, grace. In the true jubilee spirit, it will spring from a theology of atonement – one that helps us to restore what we owe or have deprived others of life, good, dignity, means of livelihood, natural resources, worth as human beings whether on the basis of race, sex or class, or colour or nation. The core jubilee passage, Lev 25:8-22 helps us along this path. Whether or not this was ever observed is irrelevant. The point is that God wanted human beings to observe such a jubilee: a return to the land, to one's roots, to the remembrance that the land and all the peoples of the earth (Jew and Gentile, citizen and foreigner, man and woman, master/mistress and men/women servants), belong to God, on equal terms and with equal rights to the

produce of the land. The land itself and the animals needed to be freed to enjoy the glorious liberty of God's children or of their creature-hood (Rom 8:21). This jubilee to be observed by humans is only an inkling of the foundational jubilee, the liberation God promised to our proto ancestors, Eve and Adam in Gen 3:16; and which God fulfilled in Christ (Luke 4:18-19), Mary's son. Unless our theologies motivate people to return to this original vision of God, they will play little or no role in bringing to birth this possible/authentic world willed by God. Isaiah 2, and 11 with other "utopian" dreamers draw attention to this biblical faith. The dreamers are right. We do wrong to give up on the dream, to give up on ourselves and our God-given world and thus create room for the reign of the darkness. Yet the light of Christ, God's redemption of humanity and creation, shines and continues to shine in the darkness and the darkness remains incapable of overcoming it (John 1:5). One needs faith to tap psychically into this victorious divine energy.

6. It will be a courageous and bold **theology rooted in the truth** with no fear of persons. This theology of truth will be liberated and liberating: of God (we tend to make in our image and likeness), of persons we tend to give the importance they do not have, and of theology itself (from abstract, primarily classroom exercise of scholars speaking to scholars, citing one another and forming coalitions to push and defend their views),¹¹ to a theology placed wholly at the service of life, springing from life and impacting life, challenging to fullness of life, that of the theologian and his/her audience. This theology will need no apologies for sticking to the christological/gospel truth: the truth that God's grace is offered free of charge to all human beings, irrespective of sex, race, color, class, geographical location, based on God's goodness, not human achievements and prowess, or the correctness of one's traditions or theologies. In short, it will be rooted in the truth of God's general amnesty to the entire creation proclaimed as GOOD NEWS by Jesus and proved, poured out concretely by his loving unto death and resurrection (Luke 4:18-19; John 10:10-11). The heart of this GOSPEL is that God canceled the debts of all humanity, which *had no means of paying back* (Luke 7:41-42). Jesus proclaimed this theology, a jubilee theology, in his inaugural mission sermon (Luke 4:18-19); he then practiced it faithfully throughout his ministry. His enemies recognised it during his lifetime ("Master we know that you have no fear of persons but teach God's ways equally to all and sundry"); his disciples gradually became aware of it after his resurrection: "The truth I have now come to realise is that God has no partiality, is no respecter of persons, but that anybody of any race who fears God and does what pleases God is acceptable to God" (Acts 10:34; cf. Gal 2:6).

This theology of truth also holds a key to a liberating inter-faith theologizing and relationships. All said and done, salvation is of God, not of human beings, no matter how much we may feel we are God's guardians of this salvation or even arrogate its dispensing possibilities to ourselves based on our historicity as a church or political power as a nation. It is sobering to recall that Jesus told Peter that **he, Jesus** (not Peter) would build **his** (not Peter's) Church. He gave Peter the charge to feed his sheep, and comfort, restore and strengthen the brethren (as Jesus himself had comforted, fed, restored and strengthened Peter himself), not to rule them with a whip. Peter do you love me? Feed my lambs; tend my shearing. Little sheep need TLC, not hammer and cudgel. "Feed my lambs, tend my shearing, just as I have fed, tended, forgiven and empowered you to live fully and do what you could not do on you own vaunting and boasting, namely truly love me.

We define the desired world as one where justice and peace, tranquility and prosperity and freedom reign for all on equal or equitable basis. This is fine, but on whose terms and for

what purpose? We do not determine the categories of the truth of the Gospel. Often one hears that religious freedom means one could do whatever one decides and God will be bound to subscribe to that. Nothing could be more false and imprisoning! A theology of truth that serves to bring to birth God's true (real) world will need to awaken humans to their tacit but concerted commitment to serve the god Mammon whose diversified economy conflicts with that of God,¹² in the guise of economic growth, prosperity, increase in productivity, profit and so forth. When all have arrived at possessing all these goods, what next? A theology of truth will need to expose the lie that tends to believe that the human being or nation is no more than a commodity to be rated in terms of riches and power. The powerful and rich are the norm, the poor and weak are the subhuman. When the powerful are corrupt and terrorist in their approach to and relationship with others, the lie tags them Saviour of the world. When the marginalised, oppressed and deprived seek to defend their positions (using destructive means), they are tagged terrorists. This theology of truth will need to expose the lie in each of the two positions; it will also need to unmask the exploitative lie that hides under the guise of globalization and global village (more correctly tagged "global pillage"). Only the truth of God in Christ will set free this world to be free indeed, and for all to enjoy the desired freedom in God (John 8:32-36). A theology of truth will not subscribe to the many subterfuges that govern and enslave our churches, political and economic systems and relationships; it will unmask even the personal, national and regional interests that inform a number of so called aids to the developing countries.

7. It will be a theology of hope rooted in grace (God's free and unmerited gift to humanity); **a theology convinced of the triumph of grace over sin.** Ironically we have tended to give sin power over grace. Our prayers and spiritual exercises generally do not demonstrate concretely our belief that grace coming from God ("*while we were still sinners*") can be as powerful as (even more powerful than) our sinful acts. Psychically, we have given sin the hegemony over our lives by labeling ourselves "sinners", not saints as our NT ancestors did. By courting sin, preaching sin over grace and managing sin in diverse ways, even in the Eucharistic setting, we weaken (in our consciousness) God's transformative power over our lives and the life of the world. We need not continue thus. Rather theology of grace must be full of invincible faith that as a human family we have been freed of sin by God in Christ, and that we can live a life of holiness in God; that we were not created to permanently allow ourselves to be ruled, guided and defeated by evil and all its death-dealing forces. It must be a theology built on hope and rooted in hope: that we will indeed make it to this desired world, **because we have Emmanuel, God with us**, and that this hope is not wishful thinking; because it was given to us by God as a free unmerited gift.

8. It will be **a dialogical theology** (*dia-logos*; through the word, creative, respecting and transforming word). At the service of the Word, this theology will be open, respectful, rich in hospitality, giving the other the room and the freedom to be, attentive to the Spirit at work in each person, experience, situation, faith and the interpretation of that experience and faith so that the dialogue partners can advance in their positions, and together move forward to a different, all embracing, hence better position, world and future. "Everything moves that goes", says the pessimist. Dialogical theologies that continue to remain as signposts (pointing the way to go but refusing to budge from their positions), will not serve as good mid-wives to give birth to this new world. Commitment to a dialogical theology will include rejecting the artificial separation between church and state, while respecting the role and duty of each to care for the citizens of this new world, aware that the citizens themselves belong to both the church and the state, including the political and ecclesiastical leaders and the theologians

themselves.¹³ The Church/state dichotomy tends to produce schizophrenics, or split personalities in peoples which then spills out into a split world. A dialogical theology will help to heal this wound at the very core of persons and of humanity as a whole.

9. Above all theology for a new world will be a **celebrative theology**. It will constantly rejoice in and thank the God who created this world to be lived in, who continues to provide copiously for this world despite our wastage of the earth's resources. A theology of celebration will penetrate our liturgical rites and rituals with joy and hope. It will commit itself to expose and eliminate whatever in current rites and rituals exclude and marginalize certain members of the community, especially women and the poor. The liturgy, where God's people celebrate their common identity in God and draw strength from the same for living the ministries outside the celebration will be a special forum for making visible the reality of God's kingdom and will "on earth as in heaven" as we pray daily in the Lord's prayer, itself a jubilee prayer.

A Question of Method

The theology for another possible world will take the **human being as the route and goal which it must travel**.¹⁴ This fact cannot be overemphasized. God's kingdom is within and among persons who then set up systems. If theology does not impact life, it will not succeed in impacting the systems and economies which human beings set up for themselves and one another. There were schools in Jesus' day but he carried his theologizing to where human beings were, in the synagogues, in the market squares, in the farms, in people's homes on the seashore in the Temple, at wells, in short, in the places where human beings spent their daily lives and earned their living.

Consequently, it will be a theology conducted in **suitable and sustainable language** appropriate to each addressee and situation, one that will involve the people in the act of theologizing or that will **theologize with, not for the people**. Jesus used this method throughout his ministry in proclaiming God's reign among different classes of people: leaders, lawyers, farmers, fishers, domestic workers and so forth. In this effort to find suitable language for the audience, the theologian will need to make a **personal contribution**, die to self, dispossess self (as Jesus did Phil 2:6-11) in order to become one with the people and serve them in their diverse situation. Paul did this when he spoke of becoming all things to all people and entering the race himself (so as not to be disqualified 1 Cor 9:24-27), making up what was wanting in Christ's sufferings (his birth-pangs, John 16:21) for the sake of his body the church, the *ekklesia* of God (Col 2:24). Theologizing collaboratively with the people, it will of necessity have faith in the **power of the people for good** (God-given power and capacity of the people, irrespective of whether they are rich or poor, white or black, from north or south). A theology that takes the human being as the route and goal of its enterprise will seek to meet people in their own specific life-contexts, to challenge and encourage them to seek and find God in those particular contexts, the only one they have. It will seek to awaken the theological instinct in all, in the liberative sense in which we defined theology at the beginning of this presentation.

This method will essentially be one of **accountability** to God and to the people. It will not be concerned with promoting the status and prestige of the theologian at the expense of

truth, the people and God. It will be a **steward-type of theology that seeks to foster life in all its fulness**, not excluding that of the theologian (most theologians today do not believe, and life issues appear to be no concern in their theologizing). It will be a **theology that is not self-serving**, but will be a proclamation of one's faith in God, a faith shared among other believers, the *ekklesia* of God, whatever the nature of their belief in God. Part of its accountability will be the staunch belief in God's power to continue to look after his own creation till the divine plans and purposes for it are fulfilled.

However diverse the methods used, they need have in view the mission to serve with God in the project of reconciling to the divine self all of humanity and creation ("things in heaven and things on earth, making peace by the blood of his cross"; Col 1:20). This implies that theologians cannot serve in this ministry of reconciliation and yet not enter fully into it themselves in their relationship with other theologians and with all peoples irrespective of race, creed, class or profession or sex.¹⁵

In Conclusion?

For theology to be at the service of another possible world, it must be true to what is embodied in its name, *theos - logos*. The language about God must speak the same language as God, namely, the language of love. It must speak the same creative, enabling and ennobling language that God has spoken to humanity in the person of Jesus. God loved the world so much as to give his uniquely beloved Son to save it. "This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes away our sins" (1 John 4:10). Our love is not to be mere talk but something alive and active. The one who speaks this language of love becomes bread and wine to feed and nourish humanity into a new creation, and does so as Eucharist, an act of thanksgiving to God for the surpassing divine love and one's privileged participation in it. Food is not accidental to this type of theology. The Eucharist is its summit. A theology that collaborates with others to bring about another possible world will need to promote in all the desire and action to break the bread of one's life so that others may eat and have life in all its fullness.

In about 1987 my Egyptian Muslim neighbour in the flight from Cairo to Lagos remarked during our conversation: "The earth is for you and I, religion is for God". This was in the days of the Maitasane Muslim riots in Northern Nigeria (Muslims killing Christians and even Muslims on the basis of orthodoxy). Asked to explain his statement, he answered: "What you believe is between you and God, and what I believe is between me and God, but the earth is our common gift from God, and we have a duty to till and cultivate it together to make it habitable for both of us". Did he read Gen 2:5; 3:23? Would a theology that believed in this common duty to care for the earth to make it habitable for everybody not be at the service of a different world modeled after God's own heart? "**The earth is for you and I to till, religion is for God**". "All this I give to you". "And God saw that it was very good"! This statement is creation theology at its best. It sums up all that we desire not only about the theology of creation but also about inter-faith dialogue: As we till the earth together, we may find it in our hearts to talk to one another about and discover in one another the one and only God we all believe in, the one God that each of us obeys, not manipulates in the name of religion; the only God who can unite us in him, in his Son Jesus, God-Word become a human being to show us how to live as God's children in all our relationships, values attitudes and desires. May we have the courage to engage in doing theology that will promote and

celebrate the goodness of creation and of all human beings made in the image and likeness of their Creator. Without such a celebration, sharing, rejoicing, hospitality, returning to our roots in God and cancelling all debts (not just the money debt where it is unclear who borrowed for the debtor nations, on what basis and for what purpose or where the money was actually spent), but the debts whereby we label one another, deprive people of their God-given humanity, steal from them their God-given land, material resources, personal and national worth and dignity consequently dehumanize ourselves.

Today is the feast of the conversion of St. Paul. He leaves us a witness that with personal faith in God's saving and transforming power a different life is possible. If we want our theologies to be at the service of a new world, and a new creation as his was, we will all need to personally become living witnesses of this new world in ourselves, attitudes, values and relationships with one another and with all others irrespective of their origin, race, creed, class and so forth. Jesus did the same. If our theologising does not lead us to do this, we might as well forget about discussing the place of theology in another possible world. Yet God will bring about this world with or without us and our theologies. If God did not consult us before creating the world, God will not be helpless without us in bringing the divine plans and purposes to an end. Revelation celebrates God's decisive action in bringing about a new heaven and a new earth. Only the lamb that is qualified to open the seven seals is sole agent of this final denouement, because he had personally lived the Good News of God's love and salvation for all to the point of death and resurrection. For our own theology to participate in the birth of this new heaven and earth, we will have to personally live and be the GOOD NEWS that we proclaim in our theologies. No other theology will be effective in bringing about another possible world, after God's own heart.

NOTES

¹*Concilium* 2004/5: *A Different World Is Possible* (Luiz Carlos Susin, Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred, eds; London: SCM, 2004) devoted to the theme of this Forum affirms this. See in particular the Introduction by Luiz Carlos Susin, 7-14, where the author announces plans to hold this Forum. So, too, does this World Forum on Theologies of Liberation.

²Cf. T. Okure, "The Diversity of Theological Language in the New Testament", a Foundational Paper given at the Second IACM Assembly, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 29 September - 4 October 2004.

³ In the interpretation of this parable in "Reading With", Black South Africans who suffered the loss of land and personal dignity under the apartheid regime noted that the rich man who owned landed property and put his crafty steward to take care of it for him deprived others of their right to life sustenance in the first place – like master like steward! The children of this world know how to deal "with their own kind". The children of light, of God's kingdom, need to operate differently.

⁴As I have noted elsewhere, the Bible does not actually proclaim the destruction of evil, for such is not its concern. What it proclaims is the prevention for good of the power of evil to continue to harm God's creation. In the new heaven and earth, evildoers, sorcerers, liars or people with false speech and false life (people who claim to be what they are not, who live inauthentic lives) will have no place. They will be confined for good to the lake of fire, that burns, incapacitates and prevents from roaming about to harm God's creation (Rev 20:14-15; 21:15). See T. Okure, "From Genesis to Revelation: Apocalyptic in Biblical Faith", Sean Freyne and Nicholas Lash, eds, *Is the World Ending? Concilium* (1998/4), 21-30.

⁵ Luigi Accatolli, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpa's of John Paul II*; translated by Jordan Aumann, OP (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998).

⁶ Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001. This is his Apostolic Letter to the Bishops, Clergy and Layfaithful at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, a truly inspiring and hopeful document.

⁷ Cf. T. Okure, “‘The maiden is with child’ (Isaiah 7:14): A Divinely Human Recipe for Conflict Resolution” paper presented at the 13th *Theology Week of the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA): The Church and Conflict Resolution in West Africa 28-22 April 2002*.

⁸ We speak naturally of the God of our fathers but not of our mothers, yet without the mothers, there would be no fathers and some of the promises would never have been fulfilled, humanly speaking.

⁹ Cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994) being his Apostolic Letter in preparation for the Great Jubilee 2000; see AAS 87 (1995).

¹⁰ Cf. T. Okure, “John” in *International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, W. R. Farmer, et al, eds. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998); *eadem*, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42* (WUNT 2/31; Tübingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988), esp., 221.

¹¹ Cf. T. Okure, “‘I will open my mouth in parables’ (Matt 13:35): A Case for a Gospel-Based Biblical Hermeneutics” *NTS* 46 [2000] 444-463.

¹² The IX IAMS Conference in Buenos Aires, April 10-19, 1996, had as its theme, *God or Mammon: Economies in Conflict*. First announced in *Mission Studies*, Vol. XI-2, 22 (1994), 153-154, subsequent issues of the journal carried articles on this topic up to the actual conference.

¹³ See further, T. Okure, “The Church in the World: A Dialogue in Ecclesiology” in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*; BETHL CLXXII; Jacques Haers and Peter de Mey, eds. (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2003), 393-437. The rich and diverse articles in this volume with its focus on “a relational theology” have a great bearing on the place of theology in another possible world.

¹⁴ John Paul II underlines this fact in his first encyclical of 1976, *Redemptor Hominis* and in various ways in his subsequent encyclicals.

¹⁵ See further T. Okure’s comment on “Colossians” in *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, gen ed., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004, pp. 490-499; also *eadem*, “Hebrews: Sacrifice in African an Perspective”, *ibid*, pp. 535-538.

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