

focus

Christianity and African religion in dialogue

Laurenti Magesa

After centuries of being sidelined as non-existent or irrelevant, this article argues that the time is overdue to take African religion seriously as a dialogue partner with Christianity. But for this to happen, there are certain requirements to be observed. They are the conditions for true dialogue. They include identity, mutual respect, readiness to listen, and willingness to learn. If these are genuinely present in each of the conversation partners – that is Christianity and African religion – then both stand much to gain in terms of their understanding of the Sacred, and Christianity has a greater chance of influencing African converts profoundly.

The future of the Church in Africa

It has been predicted of Christianity for some time now that both the future of the Church and the Church of the future lie in the southern hemisphere of our planet – and there particularly in Africa. What is the substance of this claim and on what is it founded? Does it stand up to scrutiny?

The first aspect of the claim – pertaining to the *future of the Church* belonging in the South – may be discussed in terms of statistics. Numerically, all sociological forecasts worth any attention since the last half of the 20th century maintain that the Christian Church of the South will, certainly within the present century, outstrip that of the North. This is premised on present demographic trends continuing unchanged, and there seems to be no demonstrable sociological indication at all to-date why they should. Let us elaborate a little on this.

Experts observe that while the Church in the North currently remains somewhat at a stand-still, depending for new members almost exclusively on dwindling numbers of infant baptisms on account of the low birth rate in the northern populations generally, in Africa, to take one example in the South, there is a steady flow of adults seeking membership in the Church. Nigeria is a remarkable instance here. It already boasts of the largest number of members of the Anglican/Episcopalian communion in the world and, again, in the foreseeable future, things seem unlikely to change in this regard.

In addition to adult persons seeking membership in the Anglican Church in Nigeria, the children of adult Nigerian Anglicans will as a rule be baptized in the same Church and most probably will, as adults themselves, follow the faith of their parents. Moreover, the Nigerian population, as is the case with the populations of almost any other country in Africa, enjoys a rather high rate of birth in comparison, say, to Britain, the original birthplace of Anglicanism. Therefore, if anything, the number of members of the Anglican Church in Nigeria will with time increase at a faster rate than in Britain. The same rapid rate of growth can be forecast of practically any other major Christian denomination in the southern hemisphere.

The second aspect of the claim – that *the Church of the future* lies in the South – may be considered in relation to the Church's inner quality, its enthusiasm and energy for evangelization and its theological productivity. This has to do especially with the readiness of African Christians, at all levels, to defend their faith, to envisage new ways of worshipping, to develop theological thinking that is novel and pastorally-orientated, and to accept new ways of doing things and being Church. More than elsewhere, it is frequently observed that this is happening in the South, even if some strong conservative tendencies, the desire to identify with the European Churches, may also be noted. But the latter seems to be doomed to failure in the long run. Circumstances are likely to force change in the African Churches in this regard and resistance to it will not last.

For whereas the Church of the North, because of its long historical existence, tends to take for granted and continues to live in somewhat settled theological and pastoral ways, with faith and culture rarely challenging each other any more, in the African Church, again as an example in the southern hemisphere, the situation is different. Just as in the Church of the first few formative centuries of its existence, when the Christian communities were trying to find out exactly which way their faith might go in society through trial and error, here in Africa the faith is similarly being

challenged by many things. It is confronted not only by new cultural realities it encounters on a day-to-day basis, but also by new political and economic and, therefore, social environments. Obviously, it must somehow deal with these situations to which there are no ready-made answers. And in dealing with them there emerge necessarily and inevitably new understandings of the faith and of the Scriptures. New theoretical formulations and practical expressions of faith in Jesus also appear as a result.

The difficult birth of African theology

Taking into account, therefore, this plausible claim about the Church in Africa in the days ahead in its dual dimensions, the unavoidable question is this: Where in the landscape of human life in the South will the hinges, the rational and secure foundations, for this future Church in its entire scope be erected? Where might one begin to survey the land and draw a blueprint for the building? And how may one begin the construction of the building, and for what purpose?

The answer to this cluster of questions is not easy and, as with all questions important to human survival and development, cannot be expected to be. Speaking specifically for Africa from now on in this reflection, the effort towards a satisfactory answer has been slow in coming. It has taken the better part of forty years to come up merely with clear outlines for an answer concerning the shape of the Church here, and the process is not over. It started in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the birth of the phenomenon we now easily identify as African theology.

If we may, for a brief moment, employ a biological metaphor apt for this phenomenon, we have to say that the pregnancy of a theology with an African face was not an easy one. Of course, there were certain advances in the process of conception of this genre of theological reflection, but there also were setbacks; there was some nourishment for this theological foetus to be called African theology, but the food, in terms of intellectual energy, time investment and hierarchical and structural encouragement in general were clearly not enough to ensure that its life would be sustained and grow, worry-free. It surely was at that time not a certainty that the child – namely, theology made in and for Africa – would be born, let alone as a healthy child.

Theologians committed to the idea of an African theology in the fifties and sixties were, after all, few and far between. They had access to precious little funds or time for research and writing. There were practically no academic institutions to speak of and then to develop the idea. To

many African bishops or, rather, bishops in Africa, it seemed ludicrous to talk of an *African* theology. At worst, it appeared almost blasphemous. For them, theology was theology; it was universal – by which was meant originating from the West. Western theologians offered no encouragement for African theology either. The majority of the African laity couldn't have cared less one way or the other because they were not sufficiently exposed to the need for it, nor did they see themselves as having a role in such discussions and processes in the Church. As far as they were concerned the Church was the leaders: their role was to pray, pay and obey. Given this situation and the obstacles it faced, perhaps the miracle is that African theology was born at all.

Of course, everyone is very well aware that the birth of a child is not the end, but only the beginning of the process of human existence in the world, and in Africa it is still today a precarious one. Any child born must be nurtured into maturity, a task which is as difficult, if not more so, than merely caring for the pregnancy. Pregnancy requires mainly physical care, the mother-to-be taking care of herself also for the sake of the baby. The born baby, however, calls for the added burden of psychological and social nurturing and guidance. Anyone who has had to raise a child to man- or womanhood will appreciate that this responsibility is not always at all a piece of cake, as the saying goes. It is a difficult task to carry out well. (As an example, try reining-in the seemingly indomitable energy and often dangerous curiosity of the toddler or the stubborn independence of the teenager, and you'll understand what is meant here).

Though largely a joyous exercise, bringing up a child does not therefore lack its moments of anxiety and often some considerable frustration as well. At times it is even a source of estrangement between parents and children, as can be often heard in the cryptic complaint from adults all over the world: "what's it with today's kids?" This says it all. It has a tone to it suggesting that all is not right with "today's kids", that there is something wrong with them. Similarly, not a few "mother Churches" of the African Churches, that is to say the Churches of Europe and America, as well as some Christians in Africa itself, are expressing the same concern, anxiety and often enough, frustration. "What's it with the African Church?" they enquire rather despairingly, especially of the orientations of inculturation and liberation that African theology has taken and is urging the African Church to adopt. "Where is it headed to?"

Christianity and the identity of African culture

The concern, anxiety and frustration coming from different quarters and addressing the situation of the Church in Africa in its relationship with missionary Christianity are genuine and cannot be brushed aside as of no consequence either to African theology or to the African Church or, for that matter, to Western Christianity. They are sentiments that call for dialogue within the Church as it finds itself in Africa today and in its relationship with other Churches, especially those of the North.

One area where there can be fruitful conversation between Western Christianity and African religiosity is culture. And here there is a path to follow, one which establishes both the ground rules for the process as well as indicates the desirable end result. These two elements – the rules and the destination – are basic to mature and beneficial contact between religions and cultures. Unfortunately, in Africa, up till now, little serious attention has in practice been paid to these two areas in the relationship between missionary Christianity and African culture. It is therefore necessary today to bring them into as sharp a focus as possible because they hold a central theological and pastoral import in the Christian faith.

The ground rules in the conversation between Christianity and African culture are the same as those between or among any other partners in conversation for any kind of endeavour. These include identity, mutual respect, an attitude of listening and a ready willingness and openness on each side of the conversation to learn from each other and to accept new ideas and new ways of doing things. The goal of any conversation should not be to destroy the partner but to help in the process of her or his development to maturity. Because of the general human and cultural inclinations to dominate others "who are not like us", "who are different from us", however, this is not always easily achieved. But let us first discuss the rules basic to authentic dialogical engagement.

The first requirement is *identity*. There can be no dialogue whatsoever between individuals or cultures without the fundamental element of identity. Identity is the aspect of difference in existence or, perhaps better put, it is the element of diversity between two or more realities, an aspect or element which makes possible dialogical contact between them and can help in each one's growth. With the parts of the human body, as in nature in general, this is easy to see. St. Paul had a great deal to say about this in his writings. Each part of the human body, he explains, functions in its own particular and even peculiar way, that is, each one has its own identity in

nature and function. Nevertheless, each works for the sake of the entire body. So also, he insists, should be the human community.

Without fear of being off course, we may apply the same argumentation St. Paul advances about the human community to the planets, mammals and other creatures, and all organisms constituting the universe. Since each one of them enjoys a separate identity, they can come together in mutual collaboration – sometimes in a very paradoxical manner of seemingly "destroying" each other, something that on the surface is not easy to understand positively – but all of which is, in truth, designed to make possible the smooth functioning of the universe. Unlikely as it may seem, to obliterate identity, that is, to destroy radically diversity and variety in human beings and in creation in general, is equivalent to bringing about chaos and, among human beings, making useful dialogue impossible. Uniformity or sameness is not conducive to development. If we observe the world of technology, for instance, we see that no functioning machine consists of identical parts only.

Consequently, it is a fundamental requirement, a *conditio sine qua non*, that in the process of contact between Christianity as developed in Western Europe and North America and African culture, the identity of African culture be preserved and not annihilated. This must be emphasized again and again because missionary Christianity tried to destroy it in the 19th century. Although it did a lot of damage, it fortunately did not succeed in its intentions completely. African culture managed to resist to some extent this assault against it. However, in the form of globalization, African cultural identity is today faced with an even bigger and much more serious threat than it has ever faced before. Paradoxically, it is incumbent upon a hopefully more enlightened Christianity of the 21st century, through its organizational form of the Churches, to counter this attempted annihilation of the cultural identities of African peoples by political, economic and social forces.

Mutual respect

Together with and flowing from preserving identities goes the attitude, also essential to dialogue, of *respect*. This is the second requirement of authentic dialogue. One will refrain from tampering with cultural identities only if one respects them. This is a cardinal issue because the reasons and motivations for attempting to annihilate cultures are covered by the attitude of disrespect. Africa has had, through the centuries, more than its fair share of this experience, from slave trading days for over 300 years, through almost

100 years of colonialism and missionary activity, to social-political and economic globalization now underway with full speed and power.

Underlying cultural disrespect of any kind lies the mind-set of considering the other culture inferior, unworthy or, at worst, non-existent. It has another dimension, however: The people constituting this other, different culture are also inevitably taken to be inferior, and consequently fair game for subjugation and exploitation in all manner of ways. Wasn't this the reason behind the experience of slavery and the slave trade, not only in Africa but elsewhere as well? Wasn't this the rationale behind the 19th century imperialist movement by European countries in their invasion and subjugation of Africa? In advocating substituting African slaves for the Amerindian for the Spanish Conquistadores in the gold mines of Mexico, for instance, the Dominican Bishop Bartholomé de Las Casas was well-intentioned. But in pitying the Amerindians, he must have had in mind this gradation of peoples and cultures, considering Africans more suitable for brutal labour, more energetic and physically more disease-resistant than the Mexican natives. The consequences for the African people were tragic, as everyone knows.

The justification for colonialism was no different, and you don't have to go very far to find it if you read the accounts of any early Western traveller to Africa, such as David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley, as well as the local colonial and missionary apologists for the European colonizing monarchs such as King Leopold of Belgium who took possession and pocketed the riches of the Congo. "Civilizing" the natives and extracting gold and ivory from the vast, and so-called "empty" (!), expanses of Africa, that is, "Commerce", constituted their mantra. To these was soon added another capital C – "Christianizing" the Africans. The distinction among the three was as a rule very difficult to see, certainly by the brutalized Africans themselves, leading to the saying, for a long time popular with many an African, that there is no difference between the missionary and the colonizer.

Although globalization comes with a subtler and less explicit claim to domination and expropriation, the hidden intent is actually no less different than its historical predecessors. The "slave-raids", the "slave catchers" and the "gun ships" are certainly there in the globalizing movement, both literally in terms of weapons of war, and metaphorically in the form of modern-day merchants of contemporary "beads", the peddlers of glittering consumer goods manufactured elsewhere but dumped widely and indiscriminately into Africa, goods which are meant to capture and enslave the minds

and souls of Africans. Moreover, as was the case during the slave trading and colonial days, disregard for Black African life is also stark and clearly evident in modern times. This is demonstrated by the failure of the world community to act in time in situations of conflict in Africa, such as during apartheid South Africa in the last century, during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and today in the civil conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, the Sudan as a whole, and the Darfur disaster in particular, to mention only a few cases.

But what is the point of all of this? The point is that cultural and human disrespect negates the process of dialogue from the start. Theologically, it denies the divine spark guaranteed by creation in the other person and arrogates all divine qualities and virtues to oneself, saying, in fact, that the other person does not exist, does not deserve to exist, that it was a mistake (on God's part?) that she or he was created. There can be no dialogical partner in a situation of this kind. And since for a long time this was part of the attitude of the Christian mission in Africa, it is no wonder that no real dialogue between them took place, and why it is even now very slow in coming and taking root.

Thirdly, *listening* to each other and willingness to *learn* from the other are fundamental aspects of identity and respect, and are similarly essential to dialogue, development and growth toward human and cultural maturity. The question for each of the partners in conversation in this respect is this: What does my partner in dialogue possess that I do not? And even if I, too, enjoy the same thing – which in human situations may more often than not be the case – how does my partner approach it that is different from my own approach? Might this different approach help to amplify and improve my own? Diversity, if properly understood, appreciated and accepted, is the very essence of human growth and development.

Accepting difference is difficult, however. Difference is unfamiliar and to many individuals often does present itself as threatening. That's why for some people diversity is best suppressed so that uniformity or sameness, seen as recognizable territory, may prevail. Nevertheless, as we have indicated previously, uniformity rarely presents adequate challenges to stimulate the mind and promote novelty in thought and behaviour. Theologically, inhibiting the function of the mind in terms of thought, which uniformity does, thwarts human ability to reflect and imagine. But these are activities which are perhaps the greatest divine gifts of all to humanity, gifts that give human beings their peculiar identity in creation and distinguish them from all other creatures.

Difference and diversity must be cherished not as sources of division, but, with the members of the human body which are different but work together, as a source of communication and mutuality for the sake of the larger whole. Difference underlies the very survival of the human species, as we can see, for example, in human gender differentiation which makes the multiplication of the human species possible. This is also the case with the entire universe in terms of the innumerable chemical and molecular forces so organized as to make life and all that exists possible, as we have pointed out above. For cultures, diversity is, once again, the basis of identity. It inspires cultural cross-fertilization and growth. It is a source of complementarity and, as such, can bring about mutual understanding and peace among people. Diversity in creation is something with which humans must work to achieve the goal of universal harmony.

For a liberating authentically universal Christianity

Given, then, these conditions and requirements of authentic dialogue between Christianity and African culture, what are the areas in which cross-fertilization would be desirable in order to achieve, on the one hand, a true African Christian identity and, on the other, a liberating, non-oppressive, more authentically universal – i.e. Catholic – Christianity? We might mention two overarching basics of human existence pertaining to this: namely, morality and worship. These interconnect and are the foundation and goal of religious practice.

Moral values in Christianity, as generally in culture, are always an attempt to answer the question of how people should live. Specifically, in religious terms, the question may be formed thus: How should people behave before God? Or, how does God require people to behave? As answers to these questions, moral values are a result of long experience and reflection by any given human group, conditioned by various factors in their social, political, economic, and geographical environments. Although they are ultimately directed toward God, they are matters which deal more immediately and essentially with human relationships. Human relationships are, of course, mundane, primarily having to do with ordinary behaviour, but although ordinary and this-worldly they *are* in the final analysis transcendent and spiritual, and have everything to do with God.

The Christian Scriptures could not be more specific about this matter, explaining in great detail that to be at peace with God means to be at peace with one another as women and men in this world, and vice versa. As the Scriptures see it, any other claim is untrue and does not constitute religion.

True religion, the Scriptures say, and in so many words, means to care for one another, especially to show practical concern for those who are underprivileged and in need. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, uses the images of "widows" and "orphans" to describe this category of people it sees as the most vulnerable members of society. It is incumbent on religion worthy of the name, according to the Old Testament, to see to it that these are helped in every way possible. In the absence of this, the Old Testament insists, all other acts of religion – "prayers", "sacrifices" and "burnt offerings" – are of no use.

In the Christian Scriptures, the New Testament, people to attend to whom constitutes true religion are likewise described variously as the "naked", the "thirsty", the "prisoners" and the "sick". The goal of the liberating work of Jesus Christ – his religion, precisely – is for these. He came for no other purpose than to "change" their existential condition, we are given to understand. The "poor" are the purpose of his mission. Through their eventual freedom of spirit, mind and body, which Jesus offers, the whole of the human race and the whole of creation will be freed, "saved" or "redeemed", that is, reconciled with God. This is the "communion of saints", the final Reign of God, of which Jesus is the messenger, message and executor.

The goal of Jesus' life was nothing else but creating communion of saints or constructing God's Reign, which is what dialogue is all about. Communion is the union in harmony of differences, even opposites. The Church is, or is supposed to be, communion, a community of diverse peoples united – without losing their particular identities – into "one flock under one shepherd", to use the metaphor of St. John the Evangelist. Dialogue is what facilitates this process of constructing communion. For, if the mutuality of communion itself presupposes shared understanding in difference, how can it come about without reciprocal knowledge? And how can reciprocity occur without the dialogue made possible by diversity? To bring about communion in Africa, which means appreciating the work of Jesus Christ on this continent, dialogue between Western Christianity and African religiosity is therefore the only approach. It alone can bring about mutual knowledge, mutual appreciation and growth of both realities.

In Catholic Christianity at least, but to some extent or other in most Christian denominations as well, the teaching is that mutuality that forms the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ is symbolized most vividly by sharing the Eucharist together, symbolic of a meal of friendship and unity, communion. In Catholicism this sharing, this participation in Eucharistic

communion, is not permissible, legally and morally, if one is not "worthy". Being "unworthy" in this case simply means that for the individual concerned human relationships are not what they should be – that, interpreting the theology of St. Paul, the parts of the Body of Christ are not in mutual harmony. Disharmony in the Body of Christ, the Church, which by extension implies potentially all human beings, is what immorality means, and according to Catholic teaching Jesus will have none of this. To remain in disharmony is to desecrate his Body.

Dialogue as a moral obligation

Dialogue between Western Christianity and African culture, in so far as it brings about mutuality and harmony without destroying diversity in the Body of Christ is, therefore, a moral obligation. Not to pursue it in the case of Africa so that African Christianity remains an alienated entity in the community of the worldwide faithful – which in actual fact would then not be a "community" at all in the Christian sense of the word – would be immoral. We can consequently say that the kind of dialogue we are referring to here is not an option for the Churches. It is required by the nature of the Christian faith itself which they profess.

Worship in African language of signs and symbols

This brings us to the aspect of worship, an aspect of religious practice which is part and parcel of morality and separate from which it is robbed of its full meaning.

What does worship mean and imply? In worship, human beings bring themselves before God in an act of petition, thanksgiving or penitence. They ask God for favours needed, thank God for favours granted and ask pardon for transgressions committed. Although penitence may more directly reflect admission of human failure before God and, therefore, seems to have a more direct link to morality, petition and thanksgiving are aspects of morality no less. If the Christian belief is that God is the giver of everything, life itself included, the prayers we offer God are invariably for the purpose of benefiting our own life as individuals and as communities. But God is the giver not only of *our life* but of *all human life* and *all life* generally; in fact, God is the provider and underwriter of *all existence*. (That is why preserving the cosmos is such a central moral duty in Christian belief). And if this is the case, then all existence is intertwined together, and to pray for ourselves in petition and thanksgiving before God implies the responsibility to pray for the needs of others as well, and to act accordingly to

supply them. (That is why violence and war, the ultimate destruction of human life, are always objectively such immoral acts).

The very notions we use to describe the inner intention of worship, namely, petition, thanksgiving and penitence, are terms that reflect dialogue between God and humans, or vice versa, on the very practical level of human needs. One important issue for dialogue between Western Christianity and African culture involves the level of language of signs and symbols used for and in worship. Again, need these be uniform throughout the world, or is there a legitimate and necessary need for cultural diversity and difference in expression? Does dialogue make sense – indeed, can it be said to exist in any meaningful way – if one of the partners in conversation does not understand what is being said and done?

The language of worship is ordinary human language *sacralized*, that is, set apart and made holy for God. Similarly, sacred spaces, be they cathedrals, churches or groves, are otherwise basically ordinary places set apart for use in conversation with God. Essentially, though different in structure and magnificence, they have the same dignity because they are intended for and serve the same human-divine purpose. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome or Westminster Cathedral in London are no more worthy as a worshipping space than my nondescript, corrugated iron-roofed church in Tarime, Tanzania. This applies to symbols, signs and body postures: They will be different from culture to culture, but their purpose is the same, to facilitate conversation with God. To force them into some kind of artificial uniformity runs the risk of making dialogue impossible, because unintelligible.

We are implying something very significant theologically and pastorally by this. We are saying that Christianity in Africa must not be hesitant or unwilling to take local symbols and incorporate them within itself so as to root itself very deeply into African religious soil. Can these be enriched by cultural symbols offered by other non-African cultures? Well and good. Hopefully, African symbols and symbolic language will also be able to enrich worship in other parts of the world. But that can be determined only if the rules and conditions of dialogical engagement we have outlined above are observed by and on all sides of the conversation.

Problems with the concept of inculturation

Which brings us to a very difficult point, regarding the meaning of inculturation in Africa today. Inculturation has been described by theologians as well as the teaching authorities of the Churches as being the process

whereby the Christian faith already rooted in one culture meets another culture, is taken up by it and deeply becomes this second culture. It has been called a process of "incarnation" whereby Christianity does not remain "foreign" in a cultural environment but becomes part of it. But what does this really mean in practice?

Several understandings of inculturation have already correctly been rejected as not quite capable of capturing the meaning of the notion, among them acculturation, contextualization, adaptation. They have been rejected on the basis that all of these notions assume the priority in importance of non-African expressions of faith in Jesus Christ, which are then expected to be somehow incorporated into African religious perceptions. The problem with these notions of inculturation is that they tend to destroy one partner of the dialogue, African culture in our case, in favour of prior Western formulations and expressions of the Christian faith. But this, as we have seen, would be immoral.

The life of Jesus is the best example, from the Christian point of view, of the proper understanding of inculturation. Jesus, though God, was born a human being like every one of us. This is what the doctrine of the Incarnation, common to all Christian believers, means. But in being born a human being, Jesus did not lose his dual identity – he was both divine and human. As God – the Christian teaching is that he is distinct from the Father and the Spirit – he has his own "personality" apart from the other "persons" of the Trinity. Likewise as man, he is a distinct person, an individual, Jesus the Jew, who lived at a particular time and a particular place, but who shares a common humanity with all of us. In both the divine Trinity and the human community, both of which Jesus is part of, diversity and unity is thus preserved, and dialogue is thus enabled.

"As they see themselves ..."

We therefore need to be careful that, in the process of dialogue between Christianity and African culture, the uniqueness of either is not tampered with by external forces. This is the challenge both of dialogue and inculturation in Africa. Change, worthy of true dialogue and authentic inculturation, must come from within African culture itself on the one hand, and within Christianity itself on the other, and this can only happen after a period of adult-to-adult communication and mutual observation between the two realities. Such communication goes beyond words; it involves a way of life. It has to do with values and modes of belief, morality and worship. It is essentially the end point of a process addressing the question of

what elements in the other reality help to promote the wellbeing of the members of a different community *as they see themselves*.

The phrase "as they see themselves" is crucially important to the dialogical and inculturation processes. No dialogue, no inculturation worth the name can be imposed by fiat. Such would be a contradiction in terms. Coercion and dialogue are mutually contradictory processes. On the contrary, freedom and understanding are at the core of the dialogical process. In dialogue, individuals and communities will be at different stages of understanding and of appreciating the values and ways of life under observation. This is how they will see themselves and issues under observation at the moment. Again, patience and respect for the existing view of things by the partners in dialogue are key factors for any significant movement in dialogue from here to a different level. Again, this is the challenge constituting authentic dialogue. The mistake would be – and has in Africa historically been – either to despise the point of view of the other partner in dialogue or, worse, to pretend that he or she does not have one. However, all morality and all modes of worship represent points of view which must engage each other in dialogue.

There is only one conclusion one can draw from this: In the interests of dialogue and the inculturation of Christianity in Africa, Western Christianity has a legitimate and necessary life of its own, on the one hand, and African culture and religiosity have a legitimate and necessary life of their own. Both deserve and need to exist; they must not be collapsed together. Since they belong to different places and cultures, it is immoral to try to transplant either to a different locality and environment. They must be allowed to exist in their uniqueness and diversity. So dialogue between them may be possible to the mutual benefit of both of them.

To resist the temptation of forced uniformity between Africa and Europe and America in matters of theology, moral expression and worship is the core challenge that faces the encounter between Western Christianity and African Christianity today.

Laurenti Magesa
P.O. Box 237
Tarime/Tanzania
Dmagesa@netscape.net

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.