

The Rise of Intercultural Theology and its challenge for Western and Non –Western Theologies

Paul Lancaster

Abstract

The last twenty years have seen a growing interest in intercultural theology alongside the rise of interculturalism as an increasingly important dynamic in wider society. For many there is a lack of understanding as to what ‘intercultural’ means as distinct from ‘multicultural’, especially when it comes to theology. This paper will outline some of the current definitions of intercultural theology, examining non-western theologies and their challenge to western theology e.g. eastern orthodoxy, indigenous theology, Palestinian liberation theology and intercultural feminist/womanist theology. These are often described as contextual theologies based on an assumption that ‘there is theology and contextual theology’, implying Western-Eurocentric theology is superior to contextual theologies.

However, it is now being asserted, particularly from the Global South, that ‘all theologies are contextualised’ and always have been and need to be seen in this way. Theology (i.e. western euro-centric) as well as bringing scholasticism, has from an indigenous and contextualised historical viewpoint often led to subjugation, injustice and untold suffering. In today’s world, unchallenged theologies from an intercultural perspective often contribute to polarisation, division and alienation. On a positive note however, intercultural theology can enrich existing understanding contributing to societal transformation, whatever the theological context.

Given the scope of these issues, this paper can only be a broad outline and the examples chosen are rather limited, acknowledging that there is much more to investigate, but it raises important questions to be considered for now and the future.

Background

My interest in presenting this paper is not just predicated on theory and information, but stems from an ongoing experience of intentional interaction with thirty plus nationalities within the city of Leeds (England). For many years I organised prayer gatherings and street festivals, with various cultures and ethnicities performing songs and dances, involving the use of a huge banner with over 120 flags of the nations represented in the city,

carried into the main shopping precinct during these events. The initial intention was just to organise one celebration, but it continued for ten years somehow capturing the imagination of many and new cross-cultural relationships were established. Many of these relationships continue to have a productive impact in the city. This has also led to intercultural dialogue and various forums- based around diversity advantage, what it means to welcome the stranger and how this could bring holistic benefit to the city.

Relationships also were established with one of the city's universities and many courses on intercultural competence have been delivered. Running parallel with these developments the socio-political dimension of interculturalism within cities was emerging, recognising that the state's policies of multiculturalism were failing in bringing positive interaction between different cultures and ethnicities. During this same period, I recently discovered research papers and books were being written about intercultural theology. This interesting confluence of emphases has led me to explore more fully recent developments in intercultural theology.

I believe intercultural theology is particularly relevant to the development of a politics of love or kenarchy¹ especially that of "*Welcoming the stranger*". So often what keeps us at a safe distance from the *stranger*, amongst other factors, is our understanding of theology. How far do we welcome the *stranger's* theology; do we really understand their contexts that have shaped this? What are the socio-political implications? From a Eurocentric western perspective, often still influenced by colonialism, are we hardwired in our superior attitudes? What can we learn and how can we be enriched by intercultural theology? These are some of the important questions that will be considered. Seeing through an intercultural lens challenges polarised mind sets and gives further insights into socio-political aspects of kenarchy such as, instating women, advocating for the poor, reintegrating humanity and the environment.

Interculturalism v multiculturalism

Before examining some definitions of intercultural theology, it is important to distinguish in general terms *interculturalism* from *multiculturalism* as they are often conflated. *Multiculturalism* refers to different cultures and ethnic groups coexisting, passively, separately and independently alongside each other but not necessarily

¹ See kenarchy.org

cooperating or interacting. As a policy this has been seen to fail to create an inclusive society. On the other hand, *interculturalism* points to not only the existence of other cultures but encourages dynamic interaction. It promotes the communication of ideas, learning from and valuing each other, intentional engagement, promoting a deep understanding and respect for all cultures; furthermore, encouraging the possibility of transformative change within society.

What is intercultural theology?

When it comes to theology, even within a Christian framework, it is important to ask the question therefore whether there is an intentional intercultural interactive aspect, or simply a passive recognition of different contextual theologies which at the most can be compared?

W.Hollenweger², writing from a Pentecostal perspective, defining and making the case for intercultural theology, in the late 70's, maintained that all theologies are contextually conditioned. He suggests however, it may take others and their theological perspectives to show how conditioned we are, and in today's world it is difficult to ignore the different voices. He states that "the real point of contact between western traditions and the Developing World are the scriptures and although there will be a creative tension, it is only through such an interaction that all theologies be developed"³. He further elaborates on this as he develops a broad definition of intercultural theology:

- i) intercultural theology may reflect particular cultural dimensions without absolutizing them;
- ii) no tradition should be ruled out or seen as the most important;
- iii) that narrative theology of a given culture is open to other cultures to learn from;
- iv) that there could be more of an 'experimental approach to intercultural theology which has tended to elude Western academic theology;

² Walter Hollenweger, '*InterculturalTheology*' Theological Renewal 10, (1978). 2-14

³ Hollenweger, Theological Renewal 10, (1978), 2-14

v) intercultural theology is not 'pop theology' but rather makes the task of intercultural theology more challenging, demonstrating the important contribution of theology to the world.⁴

Wrogemann suggests intercultural theology is not only concerned with academic theological based texts but with other creative expressions.⁵ He begins by stating it should not be seen as ecumenical studies or inter-religious theology and be subsumed into pluralistic arbitrariness. Furthermore he posits that intercultural theology needs to be distinguished from studies focused on world Christianity (the big picture) and the anthropology of Christianity (one local variant)⁶. Wrogemann explains intercultural theology as 'In-between Theology.'

"Intercultural theology reflects the boundary crossing interactions of the Christian witness of faith motivated by the claim to universal validity of its message of salvation. In the interplay between the respective, cultural, religious, societal and other contexts and actors, these interactions lead to the formation of multiple strands of local Christianities."⁷

He identifies how intercultural theology operates in some of the between spaces, for example between academic culture and grassroots when issues such as justice, honour and dignity all indicate space where intercultural theology can have a facilitating role. Other intercultural in-between spaces are expressed through song lyrics, the poetic, dances and their symbolic meaning and stories reflecting social order within communities.

Van Den Toren sees intercultural theology as a three-way conversation emphasising moving beyond western dominance of its own discourse, taking into account theological insights from non-academic texts, oral traditions and practices. He states that intercultural theology can only "engage in true dialogue if it becomes a three-way conversation by joint attention to God as He has been revealed in canonical scriptures..."⁸ Van Den Toren also differentiates intercultural and contextual approaches. "...Contextual theology mainly

⁴ Hollenweger, 'Intercultural Theology', *Theology Today* 43, (1978). 28-35

⁵ Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology as In-Between Theology*. *Religions* 12: 1014 <https://doi.org/103390/rel12111014> (2021).

⁶ Wrogemann, 2.

⁷ Wrogemann, 3.

⁸ Benno Van Den Toren, *Intercultural Theology as Three Way Conversation* www.researchgate.net/publication/279278139 intercultural theology as a Three-Way Conversation (2015), 10

focuses on the relationship between theology and specific contexts, but intercultural theology enables a critical consideration of that relationship by engaging in a conversation, but between different contextual theologies.”⁹

Wijsen suggests that some say intercultural theology has no future, since our world is subject to the processes of globalisation and homogenisation of cultures.¹⁰ He sees the place for an intercultural hermeneutic, but acknowledges it does not exist as yet. Although this may be an honest appraisal there are identifiable attempts at bringing some definition to intercultural theology. These demonstrate that there is a reaching out to not only acknowledge the importance of different theologies, but a recognition of the need to go beyond western dominance, in bringing us into a more holistic and enriched understanding.

Key Influences on Western/Eurocentric theology

My starting point when teaching intercultural competence, is not to begin by trying to relate theologically cross-culturally but to understand the deep influences of our own culture of which we are not necessarily conscious. This is particularly important for those of us from a western context. Many would agree that Western theology has imbibed much Hellenistic philosophy and thinking, in particular that of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, the emphasis is very much on the transcendence of God, as the highest and most perfect fashioning a universe that is eternal and uncreated. He acknowledges there are flaws in the universe- God is not the one responsible for evil- but is the one that punishes the wicked. Aristotle suggests that since God is the highest being, He focuses on himself and therefore is unaware of the world and does not care for it, ‘being an unmoved mover’. His Neo- Platonic God is understood as impersonal and can only be described in terms of what he is not. For him evil has effect but with no form. Even though Hellenistic thinking had a clear influence there were however mixed opinions amongst early Christian theologians as to its importance. Justin Martyr in particular saw Christian theology as “compatible with the highest and best Greek thought, whereas Tertulian dismissed philosophy, saying that Jerusalem (faith) could have nothing to do with Athens (philosophy).”¹¹

⁹ Van Den Toren, 3.

¹⁰ See Frans Wijsen article, Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church. Academia edu (2001).

¹¹ Brian Morley. *Western Concepts of God*, Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. The Masters College USA. (2002), 4.

In early Christian thought, Augustine (354-430) is generally regarded as having the major influence on theology during this period. Much of western theology has been shaped by his assertion concerning original sin arising from free will. The fact that 'free creatures made out of nothing' are responsible suggests that they are not free from an ontological perspective and therefore God as the Creator is ultimately responsible for the Fall. During the Medieval to Modern Period, theology from the western part of the Roman Empire wielded a stronger influence than Eastern theology. Roman influence is seen particularly in seeking to homogenise much of the literary and scholarly writings and this shaped the theological thinking of the West. "The language of ancient Rome...became the liturgical, literary and scholarly speech of western Europe."¹²

The Renaissance period saw a shift from seeing faith grounded in reason and a focus on science. Bruno (1548-1600) "emphasised God as immanent in the universe as an active principle..."¹³ The Reformation brought an emphasis on the 'fallenness of the will' which led to a distrust of reason as a "source of information about the spiritual realm"¹⁴. In contrast the Enlightenment saw reason as its source of knowledge of God, influenced to some degree by a Newtonian view of the universe, precise and predictable, with 'no room for outside causes'. "Deism ... held that God caused the universe but did not intervene thereafter. Prayer and miracles were unnecessary because of God's supreme engineering."¹⁵

If progress is going to be made in understanding western theological influences I suggest that not only is a 'deep dive' necessary but also being prepared to receive the insights of those outside western culture, even though they may have been influenced by it. Joe Kopolyo suggests " ...western theology is founded on biblical ideas, filtered through Greek philosophical methods, married to rationalism and the enlightenment ideology, focused, but not entirely, on objective discussion of ideas (cognitive and informative). Because of the prevalence of individualism....there have been two major weaknesses , silence and collusion."¹⁶ He describes 'silence' as typical of 'individuating cultures' for example when the colonised have been at the receiving end of greed and

¹² Philip A. Pecorini, Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity CC BY-NC-ND, (2022), 2

¹³ Morley, 8.

¹⁴ Morley, 8.

¹⁵ Morley, 9.

¹⁶ Joe Kopolyo. Theology and Culture: An African Perspective, (Oxford: Whitley, 2019), 8.

injustice. Along with silence there was ‘collusion’ with the whole western economic and political imperialistic agenda.”

The challenge of Eastern Orthodoxy

Eastern Orthodoxy may be a useful place to begin when seeking to adopt an intercultural approach, comparing the two theologies but seeing particularly how Western Theology is being challenged. Compared to Western theology, Eastern theologians over a long period have challenged, and modified Hellenistic thought. The East takes more of an apophatic approach to theology while the West leans more towards a cataphatic one. Eastern theology proposes that God is unknowable in his essence with a stronger emphasis on the mystical, Even with its stress on the mystical it could be said that the East *does* theology as distinct from a more abstract study, adopted by the West, which can be described as cataphatic in its approach within a scholastic framework.¹⁷ An interesting practice which affirms this in the Orthodox tradition can be seen in ‘*standing before the mystery of God*’ as distinct from kneeling. “We stand before God...the first step in the pursuit of Orthodox theology, is the rediscovery of this sense of standing before God.” (Louth)¹⁸. The use of symbol or image (*eikon*, the icon) also takes on the Genesis account of creation drawing attention to God making humankind in his own image, “so in making images human beings are only imitating God.”¹⁹

The soteriology of Eastern Orthodoxy is acknowledged to be different from the West in that it sees salvation in the process of *theosis*, suggesting the incarnation is the most important event in God’s redemptive activity. The Western emphasis would be very much focused on the crucifixion, with some pointing to the resurrection as the central event. Eastern Orthodoxy would perceive Western theology in terms of the “God of the West as an angry God full of wrath for the disobedience of men... What is salvation for Western theology? Is it not salvation from the wrath of God?”²⁰

¹⁷ See Ken Graham’s article What are the key differences between the Western and Eastern Christianity? (2017).

¹⁸ Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* SPCK, (2013) 4.

¹⁹ Louth, 102

²⁰ See article What are the key differences between Western and Eastern Christianity? Christian Stack Exchange. (2012)

With many western theologians attracted to eastern orthodox theology at this present time the question arises as to whether adopting an intentional intercultural approach could result in an enriched understanding of both contexts.

Indigenous Theology and the Western Theological Worldview

In his recent book Randy Woodley²¹ presents a clear and comprehensive picture of how indigenous theological thinking differs from that of a dominant western worldview and yet points to the possibility of intercultural engagement. He starts by identifying two main particularities, *pedagogy* and *narrative*. Pedagogy infers teaching from an unequal position, similar to that of an adult teaching a child. Indigenous teaching styles are much more centred on relational co-learning, without undermining the experienced understanding of the teacher or seniority. Within the indigenous tradition there are copious amounts of stories and so narrative theology has been passed down orally, reinforcing the values of indigenous communities. In contrast, Western communication starts from a propositional position and stories are used as an illustration.²²

The theology of indigenous groups has been shaped by understanding themselves communally and as part of the land. Western thinking is more individualistic without reference to the land. This has been expressed from an indigenous perspective as “I am because we are” whereas in Western thinking “We are because I am.”²³ (the African term for this being *Ubuntu*. The indigenous worldview sees all of life as spiritual, beliefs although important are not the main focus, but rather observation, participation and practices being the way to understand spirituality.

Eurocentric/ /American theology is generally characterised by dualistic spirituality (sacred and secular) even though some might say that this is an over generalisation. Beliefs and doctrine are strongly to the fore. What characterises indigenous worldviews is a “creation based theological foundation that emphasises harmony and balance, being centred and seeking co-operation.”(Woodley)²⁴. Furthermore, through ceremony and mutuality that the Creator- Son relationship based in the Trinity is experienced. In contrast Eurocentric/American theology focuses strongly on redemption, seeks to rule over nature

²¹ Randy Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview a Decolonised Approach to Christian Doctrine*. Baker Academic, (2022).

²² Woodley, ix-xi

²³ Woodley, 83

²⁴ Woodley, 62

and tends towards conquest and subjugation. The socio-political ramifications of this view are plain to see. Beliefs and doctrine are strongly to the fore. Furthermore, through ceremony and mutuality the Creator –Son relationship based in the Trinity is experienced. In contrast Eurocentric/American theology is focused on redemption, seeks to rule over nature and is about conquest and subjugation. The socio –political ramifications of this view are plain to see. “Colonial religion from a Western viewpoint is thought “to bring hope through salvation, development, security and civilisation. But what is actually delivered to indigenous peoples is imbalance, oppression, violence and destruction.”²⁵

The relevance of this to intercultural theology can be seen when Woodley raises the question as to whether there are shared values amongst the different indigenous North American communities and beyond and whether these can foster long term change in a Euro/Western mind set. After extensive research Woodley discovered that there was a fundamental understanding of what harmony was²⁶. Referring to his own people, who call it *eloheh*, meaning “everything in harmony-everything in balance. The ground is producing ...nobody’s at war, and people are generally happy.”²⁷ He discovered ‘harmony’ was a foundational concept in other tribal groups and this was reflected in ten values that he describes as the *harmony way*. Amongst these are *tangible practiced spirituality, based on a belief in the Great Mystery Creator; lives governed by harmony, through seeking peace; community being essential with women regarded as sacred, children loved and elders respected, everyone relationally integrated; feeling of cooperation/communality which includes high tolerance –dissension respected, diversity giving strength and balance to life; oral communication and traditions; fluidity between past and present; meaningful work only as needed great hospitality and natural connectedness to the whole of creation.*

These values all reflect the concept of *shalom* which Brueggemann defines as “...the end of coercion... the end of fragmentation...the freedom to rejoice... the courage to live an integrated life in a community of coherence.”²⁸ More especially these values are central to Judeo/Christian teaching and tradition. Woodley suggests that the story of America’s indigenous peoples and their *harmony way* ‘was broken severely by Europeans’ stating that

²⁵ Woodley, 65

²⁶ Woodley, 91

²⁷ Woodley, 91

²⁸ Woodley, 96 quoting Walter Brueggemann, (2001) *Living towards a Vision*. (St. Louis: Chalice)

Western theologies are too disembodied, separating the secular from the spiritual, believing God is at work more in the church than in the world.

²⁹ In restoring the 'harmony way' he states that the Creator is the most vulnerable being that exists, exemplified through the incarnation, the lifestyle of Jesus, always leaning towards the poor and the marginalised and ultimately through the cross. The opposite of this is seen in the wrong use of power and control. Whilst admitting that structural change is needed, (e.g. decolonising) there is a deeper need for a change of thinking which can be identified with firstly *relationship building, discovering mutually accepted ways of communication, trust building, equality, empowerment, diversity of opinions, acceptance of traditions, vulnerability and acceptance of our common humanity.* ³⁰ Intercultural theology whilst keeping a Christo-centric focus can not only create the space for engagement, but help in enabling a recognition of where a Western dominant worldview has broken the shalom of indigenous peoples and in affirming the above factors, be a means of socio-political change.

Palestinian Liberation Theology

Perhaps one of the most critical contemporary situations where an intercultural theological paradigm needs to be adopted is the Palestinian situation. In her recent book, *Justice on the Cross- Palestinian Liberation Theology, The Struggle against Israeli Oppression, and the Church*,³¹ Kathleen Christison identifies the Palestinian cause with the concept of liberation theology.. 'a quest for God's justice and mercy against the highly political injustices imposed by Israel's oppressive system of domination...' ³² firstly by British colonialism and then for the last 75 years the Israeli state. Added to this, the Western Christian church, in many cases identifying with Zionism, has largely been oblivious to it, romanticising the Holy Land in Palestine-Israel as '*a kind of Disneyland, without real people.*'³³

So what characterises Palestinian liberation theology? Ateek, described as the 'principal formulator of Palestinian liberation theology'³⁴, states, "For Palestinian Christians, liberation theology is anchored in Jesus Christ as liberator. Indeed, liberation theology is a

²⁹ Woodley, 99

³⁰ Woodley, 105

³¹ Kathleen Christison, *Justice on the Cross – Palestinian Liberation Theology, the Struggle against Israeli Oppression, and the Church*. Wipe and Stock: Eugene, Oregon (2023)

³² Christison, 9

³³ Christison, xiii

³⁴ Christison, 68

Christ-centred theology that focuses directly on the Palestine-Israel conflict.”³⁵ He states that Christ himself, exemplifying the love of God, is the hermeneutic which makes the biblical text relevant in today’s context. How might this apply to the central pressing issue of the land, “...it is no longer the land that is significant but Jesus Christ. The land is no longer the vehicle through which God expresses his faithfulness to people...the land no longer has any covenantal importance. The new covenant...is based on the person of Jesus Christ.”³⁶

Ateek’s Palestinian liberation theology covers seven dimensions of justice. Firstly, a theology of *justice with love*-, the two qualities being inseparable, always seeking the good of the other not their destruction. Secondly a theology of *justice with mercy*, since justice can be harsh; thirdly a theology of *justice with truth*. Palestinians are only too aware of false narratives that predominate, distorting the truth. Fourthly a theology of *justice and security*. Security only exists where there is true justice and therefore *justice is seen in nonviolence*. It is a *theology of justice and peace* but peace can only be achieved if justice comes first. Most importantly, it is a *theology of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness*.³⁷ Identifying with the suffering of Christ (a Palestinian) on the cross, is a strong focus for Palestinians. Finally, a theology of *hope* is expressed in terms of not giving in to evil, confronting injustices, remaining strong in resistance and steadfastness.’

There are not many Christian theologians who promote justice for the Palestinians but Walter Brueggemann and Colin Chapman are two who have given voice to their support. Brueggemann speaks of being accused as anti-semitic if Israel is criticised and urges Christian leaders to “move away from earlier romanticised images of Israel and look honestly at today’s realities on the ground..., unrestrained abuse, exploitation and ruthless assaults on the vulnerable.”³⁸ Chapman addresses the fear held by Christian Zionists of ‘replacement theology’. He states that the ‘church is a continuation of, not replacement of Israel’, not taking over their privileges, but rather a ‘continuation’ of them. Jesus fulfils all the hopes of Israel, throwing open membership of the chosen people to every human being of

³⁵ Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation, The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* Orbis Books (2017), 44

³⁶ Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, Orbis Books (2008), 101

³⁷ Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation, The Bible, Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict*. Orbis Books, (2017), 119-120

³⁸ W.Brueggemann, edited by Wagner, D.E, Davis, W.T “*Forward*” *In Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*. Eugene,OR: Pickwick (2014), xiv-xiv

every race and this being the true essence of Christianity.³⁹ The intersectionality of these theological emphases provide the space for an exploration of intercultural perspectives at such a critical time.

Intercultural Christian Feminist Theology

Within intercultural feminist and 'womanist' theology there is also strong emphasis on liberation and the struggles of women experiencing different aspects of oppression.

Kirsteen Kim in her chapter *Gender Issues in Intercultural Theological Perspective*⁴⁰ provides a broad overview differentiating between theologies from the North and West with those from the South and the East.⁴¹ Kim identifies a vital turning point in the twentieth century, "when it became recognised that earlier theology had oppressively silenced women."⁴² Since their voice has been recovered, feminist theologians have been re-evaluating status quo theology, challenging it and in some cases rejecting it, but positively contributing from their own experience, feminist theory and other traditions from the world at large.

Feminist theology has had a longstanding multicultural and intercultural dimension to it, even though it emerged in Western societies and particularly amongst Roman Catholics in the USA in the 1960's. Rosemary Radford Ruether, although disagreeing with foundational doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, was influenced by Latin American liberation theology and promoted the formation of 'feminist based communities'. Described as the leading feminist theologian of her generation, she also went on to develop 'ecofeminist theology', a theology of earth healing and non-violence.⁴³ Latin American feminist theology was responding to two aspects of oppression, poverty and sexism, largely as a result of the cult of *machismo* (exaggerated masculinity influenced by the *conquistadores*, who plundered the land and raped the women.⁴⁴

³⁹ Colin Chapman, *Christian Zionism and the Restoration of Israel: How should we interpret the Scriptures?* Eugene, OR: Cascade, (2021) 86-88

⁴⁰ Mark J. Cartledge & David Cheetham, D. (Editors) Kirsteen Kim, *Intercultural Theology Approaches and Themes*. scm press, (2011), 75-92

⁴¹ Kirsteen Kim, Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, (1988), 77

⁴² Kim, Muers, R. *Feminism, Gender and Theology*, in Ford, David F. (ed) (1997), 77

⁴³ R.R. Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earthkeeping*, New York: Harper Collins (1994)

⁴⁴ S. Chant. with N. Crask, *Gender in Latin America*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press (2003), 15-17

There were similar developments amongst Protestants in the USA, for example Letty Russell whose theology was shaped by the civil Rights Movement as well as Latin American liberation theology. Sally McFague focused on new metaphors and models of God, using biblical and ecological sources. In Europe, German theologian Dorothee Solle in her theological reflections confronted authoritarianism from a feminist position. Much of these influences spread to other parts of the world particularly through WCC organisations. In the 1990's eco- feminism took centre stage with many feminist theologians from the global South e.g. Aruna Gnanadason, an Indian theologian, directing campaigns against the destruction of forests and construction of dams. Chung Hyun Kyung, a Korean Theologian became a leading voice of Asian feminist theology, especially (drawing on Minjung (people's) theology).

African feminist theology (largely influenced by Ghanaian, Amba Oduyoye) begins with the story telling tradition of Africa and the Bible. Historical theology is not important as it does not seem to be relevant to their context. African women have a much stronger connection to traditions than men, who tend to lean towards modernisation. Their theology emanates from the centrality of marriage, family life and child bearing nurturing, mentoring, life-enhancing and community building. African women's theology is concerned with bringing wholeness, which is 'all that makes for fullness of life, and makes people celebrate life.'⁴⁵ Being made aware of these perceived distinctions, an intercultural approach can provide a bridge to reconciled understanding and an enhanced theology.

Whilst North/Western feminist theologians felt that Jesus' maleness was such an obstacle that there needed to be a feminist alternative mode of thinking, Asian feminist theologians were able to look beyond this, in seeing Jesus as a fully liberated human being⁴⁶. The more Eastern Asian feminist theologies do not start with the Trinity, (as in the West) when debating the existence of God but rather that God is seen as the source of life, creative and sustaining the universe⁴⁷. Adding to this Kim suggests that such an emphasis provides a 'stimulus' to a greater understanding of pneumatology, which she feels is still lacking in the

⁴⁵ M.A.Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (2001), 34

⁴⁶ M, Orevillo- Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books (2006),56-57

⁴⁷ P.Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (2000), 66

West.⁴⁸ All these contextually diverse feminist theologies have made a significant contribution to socio-political issues of worldwide concern through global intercultural dialogue.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Having explored some aspects of intercultural theology and how this brings challenges to a predominant western theological outlook, it is perhaps important to ask whether Western theology is still needed. Since the history of the twentieth century is about the ending of colonisation and empire and the emergence of globalisation in all its multicultural manifestations, these movements have had important consequences for global theology. Although Western theology has had a long history of influence, it now needs to be recognised that the polycentric and multicultural nature of the church is clearly reshaping theology. It could be said that the legacy of Western theology cannot be discarded and Christians generally from across the world would want to preserve the best that the West has offered, building on it, but importantly, recognising its weaknesses too.

Intercultural theology can no longer accept a Western worldview uncritically, nor other theologies from the developing world, critically examining their own theology. Intercultural theological competency can be developed especially when theologies are seen to be culturally conditioned rather than universal. Furthermore, in considering the positive value intercultural theology offers; it opens up a wider approach to talking about God; it provides new resources and brings new light to bear on key biblical concepts such as incarnation, suffering, pneumatology, and eco-theology; it could be a means of releasing and promoting reconciliation. Much has been written in recent years, (beyond the scope of this paper), reflecting African, Asian, Arabic and Indian theologies to name a few and there is much more ground to explore.⁵⁰

Maybe intercultural theology can contribute more to fulfilling the Apostle Paul's prayer "...being rooted and established in love, **together with all the saints**, to grasp how wide and how long and high and deep is the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...-that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God."⁵¹

Bibliography:

⁴⁸ Kim, The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation, Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books (2007) 2

⁴⁹ Kim, (2007),91.

⁵⁰ See bibliography

⁵¹ Ephesians 3v 17-19.

Archer, K. A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty First Century, Spirit, Scripture and Community, London: T&T Clark, (2004)

Athyal, J. 'Theology in India' *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Wolfe, B. N [https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Theology in India](https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Theology%20in%20India), (2023)

Ateek, Naim. A Palestinian Cry for Reconciliation. Orbis Books, (2008)

Ateek, Naim. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation. Orbis Books, (2017)

Awad, N. G, *Arabic Christian Theology* [https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Arabic Christian Theology](https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Arabic%20Christian%20Theology). University of St Andrews, (2023)

Braverman, M. Theology in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Revisiting Bonhoeffer and the Jews. *Theology Today* 79, (2022)

Brueggemann, W. edited Woodley by Wagner, D.E, Davis, W.T. "*Forward*" *In Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy land*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, (2014)

Cartledge, M.J & Cheetham, D *Intercultural Theology. Approaches and Themes* scm press, (2011)

Chan, S *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up*. IVP Academic (2014)

Chant, S with Crask, N. *Gender in Latin America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, (2003)

Chapman, C. *Christian Zionism and the Restoration of Israel: How should we interpret the Scriptures?* Eugene. OR: Cascade (2021)

Christison, K. *Justice on the Cross. Palestinian Liberation Theology, the Struggle Against Israeli Oppression, and the Church*. WIPF& Stock. Eugene, Oregon (2023)

Dyrness, W. A, Garcia- Johnson, O. *Theology without Borders. An introduction to Global Conversations* Baker Academic, (2015)

Graham, K *What are the key differences between Western and Eastern Christianity?* Christian Stack Exchange, (2012).

Hollenweger, W., 'Intercultural Theology' *Theological Renewal* 10, (1978)

Hollenweger, W., *Intercultural Theology*, *Theology Today* 43.1, (1978)

Kim, K Gender Issues in Intercultural Theological Perspective. Chapter in Intercultural Theology Approaches and Themes Cartledge, M. J and Cheetham, (2011)

Kopolyo, J, Theology and Culture: An African Perspective, (Oxford: Regents Park College, 2019)

Louth, A Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology SPCK, (2013)

Mitchell, R.H *Towards a political theology of nations*. The Kenarchy Journal, **3**, 29-45 (2022)

Moe, D. T. Intercultural Theology in the Multicultural Context of World Christianity: Issues, Insights and Interactions Currents in Theology and Mission 46.3, (2019)

Morley, B *Western Concepts of God*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The Master's College USA, (2002)

Ngong, D '*Theology in Africa*' *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Wolfe, B. N et al <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/TheologyinAfrica>, (2023)

Rosen, Rabbi B *Judaism Beyond Zionism: Towards a New Jewish Liturgy a Blog*. <https://rabbibrant.com/2021/06/03/judaism-beyond-zionism-towards-a-new-liturgy>, (2021)

Sizer, S. Christian Zionism Road –map to Armageddon? IVP, (2004)

Stinton, D.B.(editor) *African Theology on the Way Current Conversations* SPCK (2010)

Toren, B, van den. *Intercultural Theology as Three-Way Conversation*. [https:// www. Researchgate.net/public/279278139- Intercultural-Theology-as-a-Three-Way-Conversation](https://www.researchgate.net/public/279278139-Intercultural-Theology-as-a-Three-Way-Conversation), (2015)

Wijsen, F Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church. Academia.edu (2001)

Wijsen, F. What is Intercultural About Intercultural Theology. GEMA TEOLOGI, Vol. 38, No2, (2014)

Woodley, R.S *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*. Baker Academic, (2022)

Wrogemann, H. *Intercultural Theology as In-Between Theology*. Religions2021,12,1014. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel1211101>, (2021)

Fourth Lecture: *The Holy Spirit in Different Cultural Contexts* Yu Shan Theological
Journal No 25 (no date or author given)