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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, ed., *Practising Reconciliation, Doing Justice, Building Peace. Conversations on Catholic Theological Ethics in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2013. Pages: 135. ISBN: 9966-08-740-0**

This book is the collection of papers presented at the expert seminar, “CTEWC in Africa after Trento: Engaging the African Synod,” organised by Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC), in August 2012 in Nairobi, Kenya. The seminar was organised as a follow up of the Second African Synod (2009) and the Second Cross-Cultural Conference of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church at Trento, Italy (2010). A select group of thirtyfive African theologians gathered at Nairobi to discuss the key themes of the Second African Synod, namely, Reconciliation, Peace and Justice, viewing them through the lens of CTEWC. The seminar was organised under the leadership of James F. Keenan, SJ, Chair of CTEWC, Elias O. Opongo, SJ, Chair of the African Regional Committee of CTEWC, and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, member of the African Regional Committee of CTEWC.

The book has three parts, focussing on the three central themes, namely, reconciliation, justice and peace. In each part there are six papers: A lead presentation outlining the contexts and perspectives of synodal themes; four respondents discussing opportunities, challenges, contexts and pastoral/ethical issues in the context of African Churches; finally, a narrative by an ecclesial leader, engaging dialogue with Catholic theological ethics.

“Between Violence, Reconciliation Rituals, and Justice in Northern Uganda: The Church in Africa and the Challenge of Post-Conflict Reconstruction,” the lead article in Part I by Elias O. Opongo, enters into a conversation on reconciliation with a case study of post-conflict Northern Uganda, namely, how to overcome the tension between those who advocate reconciliation and those who favour justice as the means of settling the problems from rebel insurgency which had millions of

victims. Opongo refers to the local practice of forgiveness and healing rituals like *mato oput* as helpful in resolving this tension. *Mato oput*, which literally means drinking bitter juice from the roots of the *oput* tree, is a reconciliation ritual between clans following killings by a member or members of one clan of in the other (page, 26). These rituals were communal, in the sense that the offence by the individual was owned up by the community, and rather than punishing, the purpose of the ritual was to cleanse, heal and restore broken relationships. Opongo argues that the Church needs to reflect on how it can contribute to retributive-restorative justice debate, especially, making use of the African rituals of reconciliation in situations of extreme violence (page, 28). Responding to Opongo, Richard N. Rwiza, in his paper "Opportunities for Reconciliation in Africa," underscores that "we cannot achieve reconciliation in a cultural vacuum; we must read the signs of the times and be attentive to local cultural and anthropological systems" (page, 30). While agreeing with Opongo's proposal of utilizing rituals like *mato oput*, Rwiza underscores the need of integrating the value of forgiveness (pages 35-36). "Challenges to the Church in Africa and the World in Its Reconciling Mission," by Kifle Wansamo highlights further the complexity of the African situation the Church has to face in its reconciling mission. While pointing out the necessity of involving local, national and international parties in the process of reconciliation, he underscores that the Church "needs to stand as a reconciled and united family to present itself as a symbol of reconciliation" (page, 39). Elisée Rutagambwa in his "Between Justice and Reconciliation: Paths towards Complementarity," underscores the necessity of reconciliation, but warns against the tendency to reduce reconciliation to the relationship between the believer and God disregarding horizontal relationships to other human beings (page, 44). Similarly, he holds that reconciliation and justice are complementary, that is, justice cannot be ignored (pages, 46-47). Onyema Anozie's "Some Pertinent Ethical-Moral and Pastoral Issues in Reconciliation in Africa: A Way Forward," argues that "there is need to augment the Church's sacramental reconciliation with the traditional African reconciliation system" (page, 49). While agreeing with the necessity of reconciliation, he also considers some form of restitution important (page, 50). Concluding the discussion on Reconciliation, Archbishop John Baptist Odama in his paper, "Acholi Religious Leaders Peace

Initiative (ARLPI): Practising Reconciliation in the Context of Northern Uganda,” commends the work of ARLPI in peace building and calls for the continuation of peace talks.

Part II, “Justice,” opens with the lead presentation by Peter Henriot, namely, “Justice as a Consequence of Love.” According to him, justice is “the concrete situation in which societal structures reinforce the relationships of charity that enable the fullness of life of individuals in community” (page, 61). Henriot affirms the link between justice and charity and identifies six serious tasks for ensuring justice (page, 66-67). David Kaulemu (“New Opportunities for Justice for the Church in Africa and the World”), points out the need of deepening and widening its collaboration with others of similar minds and values (page, 70). Anne Arabome, in “Making Justice at Home or Justice Begins at Home,” opines that the tenets of Catholic social teaching have to be communicated in ways that appeal to the educated and uneducated, which means relating the CST to the cultures of Africa (page, 73). Philomena N. Mwaura (“The Sociocultural Context in Which Justice Is Sought in the Church in Africa”) says that the numerical growth of Christians in Africa is not matched by the moral transformation of people. She highlights the need of gender justice: “Faith seeking justice calls for dismantling these patriarchal notions and power structures because they prevent people from experiencing the redemptive power of God” (page, 80). Peter John Pearson, in “A Pastoral Paradigm: Harnessing Agency and Assets in Pastoral Situations to Enhance Justice,” calls for pastoral activity that contributes to healing the wounded dignity, ruptured relationships and social pathologies (page, 83). According to him, it is important to balance the appeal for justice with recognition of the agency that the poor already deploy to improve their lot in the society. Bp. Eduardo HiiBORO Kussala (“Practising Just Peace in the Context of South Sudan”) holds that the role of the Church in the process of building peace is commendable (page, 89). However, he is realistic in assessing the complexity of the current challenges and says that the Church should seek collaboration with civil organizations in building up a better future. Above all, he emphasises that “reconciliation is a gift of God and a source of new life” (page, 96).

Opening the discussion on “Peace” in Part III, Victor Boudjou Adangba (“God Writes Straight Lines on Peace: Theological

Perspectives for Peace in Côte d'Ivoire") points out how the Second African Synod and CTEWC Conference in Trento have led to articulating peace from the new ecclesiology for African Christian communities that find themselves members of the Church as a family of God (page, 99). Risen Christ's message of "peace" is the basis of our aspirations for peace. He proposes hospitality, for example, as found in Akan tradition, as a pathway to peace (page, 102). Alison Munro, in "Peace: Addressing Gender Violence: A South African Perspective," highlights the implications of the call for peace in the concrete situation of HIV/AIDS in Africa, namely, how "violence against women and girls fuels the spread of HIV and entrenches in society positions of gender and power imbalances that runs counter to true reconciliation, justice, and peace" (page, 105). She asserts that our call as Christians committed to peace must begin in our homes, families and neighbourhoods (page, 108). Nathanaël Yaovi Soédé ("The Challenges of Peace and of Christian Renaissance") discusses the challenges of peace on two grounds: the conception of the Church as the family of God in terms of a renaissance and the response due to the challenges of peace. In "Context of Peace: Transformation of Human Relationships and Peace Education," Achieng Anne Celestine Oyier says that, "Peace can be achieved only by fully addressing the structural causes of violence, which are diverse and context-specific" (page, 113). According to her, the Church has a creative role in designing peace education. Roger Afan ("Key Pillars of Peace in Africa") is optimistic of the possibility of healing and peace, but affirms that conflict resolution will be successful only if it includes a healing process that involves victims and perpetrators alike. He holds that, "Forgiveness is not the negation of wrong but the participation in the healing and transforming love of God, who reconciles and heals" (page, 117). "Conflict and Peace in Nigeria: Between Despair and Hope – The Role of Religion," the narrative in the third part by Cardinal John Onaiyekan focuses on the role of religion as a vehicle of peace, especially in the context of Nigeria. While narrating the conflict and violence in Nigeria, aggravated in recent years by the terrorist group *Boko Haram*, he points out that the situation is not as bad as the outside world thinks, since, in general people live in harmony. He speaks about the contribution of the Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC) and

many other similar initiatives in building peace and underscores the importance of interfaith cooperation.

The introduction to the book by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, the editor, is extensive and excellent. Besides highlighting the focus of each presentation, the introduction also gives the perspective with which the individual presentations are to be considered in the context of the total conversation. The book concludes with an insightful conclusion by the editor.

The whole book extends itself to 135 pages only, but is very rich in content. Some of the unique features of the book are: 1. The whole process of the conference (and hence the papers in this book) is unique – the style is conversational; there is representation from different cultural contexts; perspectives of theologians and the members of the hierarchy are integrated; a considerable number of women theologians are present in the conversation. The organizers of the conference and the editor deserve our appreciation, 2. Though all the participants in the conversation acknowledge that the situation is complex, there is an optimism that reconciliation, justice and peace are possible, 3. The participants in the conversation think that the Church has a role in the process of reconciliation, peace and justice, but at the same time, they point out that the Church has to seek the collaboration of the civil authorities and organisations in this process, 4. This collection is an excellent example of contextual theology, as well as the process theology has to adopt to be more contextual and relevant, 5. There is no attempt to bring about a uniform vision of conclusion. This is not a defect, but adds to the value of the process, namely, the conversation is still open and is to be continued.

It is a unique contribution to theologising in Africa, and a model for theologians elsewhere as to how to make theology more contextual. CTEWC under the leadership of James F. Keenan and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, the editor of this book deserve our sincere appreciation.

**Shaji George Kochuthara** (kochuthshaji@gmail.com) DVK,  
Bangalore