



Richard TAMBWE M.

# **Towards an African Ecclesiology in Stones**

**A Theological Cry of an African Newborn Child**

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## Dedication

*I dedicate this "ragissement théologique"*

*\* To a big brother called Bator and to a friend nicknamed Maître Lis, whose lives have shaped mine, while witnessing my struggle with God through beauty*

---

<sup>1</sup> Theological Cry of a Newborn Child.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all those who, in one way or another, contributed in writing this book, for their advice, encouragement and support. Special thanks are due to the late Professor Alex García-Rivera (1951-2010), who read and commented on every chapter, while fighting the cancer that finally prevailed. I will always cherish his “aesthetic insight” that allowed him to navigate all kind of theological controversies with the spirit of reconciliation, freedom, and orthodoxy. Professor Mia M. Mochizuki’s detailed criticisms, orientations, and suggestions helped to shape my ideas and sustained me in the belief that it is possible to reconcile the twin imperatives of writing about theology and architecture, in an African context. I am particularly indebted to her for her dedication and sense of humanity which proved invaluable. This work also benefited from the perspicacity and intellectual depth of T. Howland Sanks who enriched me more than I can possibly articulate.

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Last but not least, I have reserved my deepest and fondest words of gratitude for my best friend Claudia K. Mwaku and my young sister Jacquie Tambwe. I acknowledge here the importance of their unflinching love and trust, without which I would have already given up. The journey continues and the struggle with it, in hope of reaching the place of our redemption, at sunset and rise, within the garden.

*“No, I shall not die; I shall live to recite the deeds of Yahweh.” (Ps. 117:17)<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> The font “*Garamond*” italic in the body of the text will be used for all Scriptural quotations and Church’s official documents such as Second Vatican Council’s Constitutions.

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## Introduction

### 0.1. Open Questions and the Goal of this work

The origin of this work can be traced back to three years ago. In 2008, while finishing my BA in theology at Hekima College in Nairobi, I was involved, as an architect, in the renovation of the “small chapels” of that Jesuit Institution.<sup>3</sup> Under the leadership of the then Rector of Hekima Jesuit Community, Fr. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, we were looking for ways to make the chapels feel more comfortable and help people encounter God easily there. At least, that was our ambition and it was clearly decided that the renovation should aim at both architectural and theological rehabilitation. Hence, the seats and the carpets were replaced, the tabernacles redesigned, the ceilings improved, the lighting modernized, and the windows transformed in such a way that each of the seven small chapels became associated with one of the seven sacraments: Baptism for *Shaidi* community, Eucharist for *Ushirika* community, Confirmation for *Karibuni* community, Matrimony for *Pamoja* community, Holy Orders for *Maisha* community, Reconciliation for *Kwetu-Kwenu* community, and Anointing of the Sick for *Huduma* community.<sup>4</sup>

The process of renovating, however, was not that easy. Since the height of these chapels was small (approximately 9 feet), I proposed installing mirrors in the ceilings in order to obtain the impression of a double volume (Fig. 1). The idea was adopted, but it raised much controversy: some found the project unnecessarily expensive; others saw it as too modern; and still others genuinely alleged that the mirrors would remind one of a nightclub.

I succeeded in defending the project by suggesting that my critics should think of the chapels while in the nightclubs and not the other way around. Nevertheless, I started pondering the objections theologically and realized, for instance, that encountering God is somehow an experience of oneself—it is a kind of reflection of oneself in a mirror.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Jesuit School of Theology in Nairobi, Hekima College, presently has eight chapels: a big one in the middle of the compound and seven smaller chapels in each of the seven hostels of the Jesuit community.

<sup>4</sup> Since the names in *Swahili* of the different communities were taken into consideration to coincide with a specific sacrament, it may be useful to know their meaning: *Huduma* [servant, from the verb *kuhuduma*: to service somebody, to provide a service], *Karibuni* [welcome], *Kwetu-Kwenu* [our-place-is-yours-as-well], *Maisha* [life], *Pamoja* [togetherness], *Shaidi* [martyr or witness], and *Ushirika* [cooperation, the spirit of community]. See more about the renovation and meditative prayer on the sacraments in Shete Wangira (Ed.), *Signs of Grace* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009). This brochure fosters devotion; it is a booklet about prayers, but a systematic theological treatment of the renovation is still lacking.

<sup>5</sup> Here are some biblical examples where the presence of God is unveiled to the person who experiences it and reveals who he or she really is: Gen 3:8-13; Gen 12:1-4; Gen 15:1-21; Ex 3:11-12; 1Sam 3:1-20; Ps. 138 (139); Jer 1:4-6; Lk 1:26-35; Jn 1:43-49; etc. When one searches for God, one finds oneself and, then, recognizes God within and beyond the self.



Figure 1: John E. Walsh, *Hekima College: Ushirika Small Chapel*, 1984, Bricks, Glass. Nairobi, Kenya. Renovated by A. Mugo [Stained Glass] & R. Tambwe [Floor, Ceiling, Lighting, Furnishing] [Photo: Richard M. Tambwe, SJ]

Whether or not the mirrors currently incorporated in the ceilings of the small chapels at Hekima College convey the above theological insight, the process of installing them developed in me the need to examine the relationship between architecture and theology. Thus, the following open questions: Is it appropriate to do theology through architecture? Can sacred architecture reveal God by speaking well of God (theology in art), as opposed to speaking correctly of divine matters (discursive theology)?<sup>7</sup> Or, the reverse, can God reveal God-self through the architecture of churches<sup>8</sup> and places of worship?<sup>9</sup> What do the gestures (of kneeling, signing oneself with holy water from a

<sup>6</sup> A brief explanation by the artist on the significance and meaning of the various features of the stained glass is as follows: "The grapes signify the wine whereas the white bread at the centre signifies the body of Christ. The tree takes a central part of the design as in the African culture people shared a meal under a tree. There are green leaves at the base of the tree to signify the life of communion with each other. There are tongues of fire on the sides of the tree to signify the Pentecost when the apostles were together waiting for the Holy Spirit." Cf. Wangira, *Signs of Grace: "Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist: Ushirika Community."*

<sup>7</sup> According to Richard P. McBrien, theology may emerge in many aspects and among them in two main recognizable forms: discourse (spoken or written words) and art (painting, music, dance, architecture, etc.). However, McBrien warns, "none of these forms can ever do justice to the reality they strive to express. All theology is limited and imperfect, because its object, God, is ineffable and utterly mysterious." Cf. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: Completely Revised and Updated* (New York: Harper, 1994), 41.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this work, *church* (lower case) refers to the building, while *Church* (capitalized) points to the community of Christian believers as people of God.

<sup>9</sup> One of the theological disciplines which address the question of how one does theology is Fundamental Theology. "Fundamental theology," Avery Dulles observes, "must ask not only how we get to God but how God comes to us. It must maintain a theological as well as an anthropological focus." Avery R. Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 56-57.

baptismal font, singing, or whispering a prayer, etc.) and other marks of devotions—that a believer (not a tourist) manifests when entering a church—tell us about faith and how are these gestures and devotions shaped by the building? What are the main issues in the relationship between liturgy and architecture? How can architecture enhance liturgy, and how can liturgy advance architecture? How does a church (made of inert stones) build the community called Church (as living stones)?<sup>10</sup> Is a church “the house of God” or “the house of God’s people” or both? In sum, how can architecture build a community of Christians or, should it happen, destroy it?

All these broad interrogations will be deepened in this work, although with so few answers, and merged into a single project: contributing in words, drawings, and, hopefully, in stones, to the question of how churches and worship places should be built in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, in the near future.

In fact, the Archdiocese of Kinshasa plans to either build a basilica<sup>11</sup> or expand the current cathedral, as a visible sign of the flourishing community called Church in Congo, within Africa. Therefore, beyond addressing a specific need of sacred architecture, this work modestly aims at taking architecture seriously in order to sketch an “African Ecclesiology in Stones.” Specifically, I plan to demonstrate how architecture in African ecclesial context can truly be, in Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator’s terms, “theology (as) faith in search of understanding, love, and hope.”<sup>12</sup>

## 0.2. Method

For that purpose, I use Alejandro García-Rivera’s method of interlacing<sup>13</sup> and the art history tools of visual attention to form, symbol, and function as a basis for

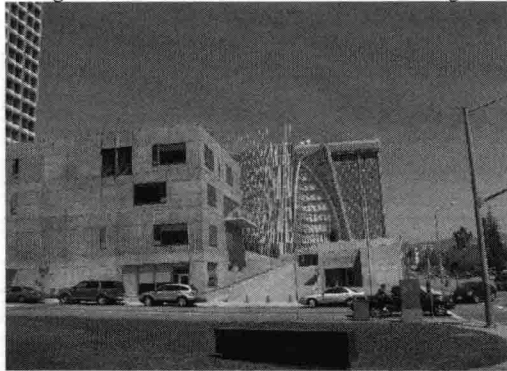
<sup>10</sup> I am referring to the Document *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> There is no doubt that a basilica receives its status from the Holy See which honors some churches with this title. To the best of my knowledge, there is yet no evidences that the Holy See has granted such a title to any church in the Congo. However, that the Congolese episcopate has thought of building a basilica means that there may have been a promise of that kind. In any case, from an architectural point of view, there is a style similar to the basilica that a church can take without an official title: an oblong structure with columns, having ambulatories, and receiving light from above. Basilica (“royal hall,” hall of the King, aka Jesus Christ, King of Kings) also refers to a beautiful hall with rich ornamentation: ciborium (*baldaachino*), *ombrellino* (a red and yellow striped umbrella), and *tintinnabulum* (a bell recalling those once used to warn people of the approach of a papal procession). Cf. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02325a.htm> [Accessed on September 7, 2009] & Richard P. McBrien (Gen. Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 144.

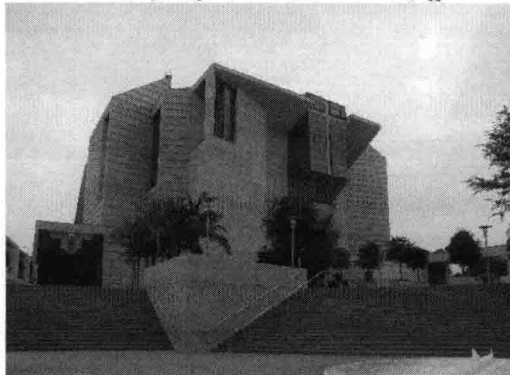
<sup>12</sup> Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 15–21. Taking into account the definition of theology by St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Orobator associates three Gospel stories (the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus in Jn 3:1–21, the challenge put by Jesus to the unnamed young man in Lk 18:18–25, and the request by James’ and John’s mother to Jesus for the destiny of her children as accounted in Mt 20:20–23) with the thought that, besides understanding, theology is also a matter of love and hope.

<sup>13</sup> García-Rivera defines the method of interlacing” as “the artful weaving of various perspectives across disciplines to gain an insight greater than any of its components.” Without being “a perspective *per se*,” “interlacing” weaves across perspectives, aiming at gaining “a greater vision,” greater not because its arguments are strong as a chain, but because the outcome is stronger than each individual argument working toward the final result. The process is comparable to slender fibers forming a cable, “provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected.” Thus, interlacing Charles Pierce’s way of “reasoning,” Josiah Royce’s idea of “religious insight,” and Christopher Alexander’s notion of “center,” as “that nexus of relationships which makes a whole out of many parts,” García-Rivera comes up with what he calls “aesthetic insight, marked by breadth of perspective, coherence of vision, and personal touch.” Cf. Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Garden of God: A Theological Cosmology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009), ix–xi. See also Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu’s

theological aesthetics and ecclesiology. This method “interlaces” various approaches using formal analysis as an “interpretant” to create an interpretative “web” of insights that are both theological and aesthetic. The work develops on an implicit comparison and contrast of two famous Catholic cathedrals in California: Craig W. Hartman, *Cathedral of Christ the Light*, 2008, concrete, glass, stone, wood. Oakland (Fig. 2) and Jose Rafael Moneo, *Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels*, 2002, concrete, glass, stone. Los Angeles (Fig. 3). Then, bringing African theology as an interpreter in the comparison between the Oakland and Los Angeles cathedrals, a resulting third model is imagined in an in-between a cathedral and a basilica, from an African point of view. In other words, I will interpret these buildings in terms of an architecture that has theological meaning.



**Figure 2: Craig W. Hartman, *Christ the Light Cathedral*, 2008, Concrete, Glass, Stone, and Wood. Oakland, CA. [Photo: Richard M. Tambwe, SJ]**



**Figure 3: Jose Rafael Moneo, *Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral*, 2002, Concrete, Glass, Stone. Los Angeles, CA. [Photo: Richard M. Tambwe, SJ]**

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understanding of interlacing. Cf. *García Lorca as Theologian: The Method and Practice of Interlacing the Arts and Theology*, A Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Coordinated by Alejandro García-Rivera (Berkeley, CA: GTU Library, 2007), 2 vol., 489pp.

### 0.3. State of the Question

This work is at the junction of many fields: art history, theological aesthetics, and African theology.

Scholarly literature in all these three fields is vast. Echoing Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, I shall “summon this or that author according to the requirements of the argument, without concerning myself with the epoch,”<sup>14</sup> or the specific domain of thought (philosophy, architecture, history, etc.), inasmuch as everything contributes to paint a rainbow of faith seeking understanding, love, and hope. In other words, my undertaking will be eclectic and no author, thought, or art should be excluded out of principle.

Some art historical “interpretants” I plan to use are Erwin Panofsky and Henri Focillon. I draw upon Panofsky’s implicit interrogation in demonstrating the profound correlation between architecture and philosophical thought in 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries: why does Gothic architecture look like it does?<sup>15</sup> Can this question be the lodestar which helps understand the boldness of the contemporary architecture of the Oakland Cathedral as a visible and tangible sign of the still growing theological aesthetics and the post-Vatican II impetus towards local ecclesiologies?<sup>16</sup> In other words, can the idea of constructing local ecclesiologies be reflected in architectural style? Moreover, can architecture be one of the “theological possibilities of phenomenology” as suggested by Jean-Luc Marion—the “saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, that of Revelation?”<sup>17</sup> I will also wrestle with Henri Focillon’s idea that artistic style changes over time according to an autonomous formal mutation (in opposition to political, social or economic determinants).<sup>18</sup> Applying this dynamic change to sacred architecture, I deem it my task to show how the same and the different can be seen together, the past, the present, and the future can be thought of at the same time, and the artwork itself conceived with many layers of understanding, relationships, and representations.

In architectural theory connected to theological aesthetics, I am challenged by Christopher Alexander’s observation that “most of the wonderful places of the world

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York: Meridian Book, 1957). Of the same vein is Otto von Simson’s book *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962).

<sup>16</sup> I grew aware of the notion of “local ecclesiologies” in my participation in the International Conference on *Many Tongues, One Spirit: Local Ecclesiologies in Dialogue*, JSTB, Berkeley, CA, May 28-31, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, Translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 128-162.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Zone Books; distributed by MIT Press, 1992). “It may well be questioned,” Focillon writes, “whether the theologian who dictates the program, the artist who executes it and the devotee who subscribes to its lessons all understand and interpret form in quite the same way. For in the life of mind, there is a region in which forms that are defined with utmost exactitude nevertheless speak to us in very different languages. (...) Iconography may be understood in several different ways. It is either the variation of forms on the same meaning, or the variation of meanings on the same form.” Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, 36. He goes further saying, “The life of forms is not the result of chance. Nor is it a great cyclorama neatly fitted into the theater of history and called into being by historical necessities. No. Forms obey their own rules—rules that are inherent in the forms themselves, or better, in the regions of the mind where they are located and centered—and there is no reason why we should not undertake an investigation of how these great ensembles, united by close reasoning and by coherent experiment, behave throughout the phases that we call their life.” (52).

were not made by architects but by the people.”<sup>19</sup> In this sense, convinced that architecture is not just an art and technique, but also an expression of a mindset and value system, I see myself (in my quality of Christian and architect venturing in theology) as a facilitator aiming towards an African ecclesiology in stones, guided by Ricoeur’s double intentionalities: imagination and memory.<sup>20</sup> This perspective of involving African Christians in the building up of their community through architecture coincides in the place where theological aesthetics, at least in the Balthasarian version, tries to preserve the liberating power of judging artwork on its own, without falling into an unfettered optimism or a disenchanted nihilism.<sup>21</sup> Having this reconciliation of human liberation and love-bond-with-transcendence in mind, I shall call upon Richard Kieckhefer’s insightful thoughts in church architecture, while hesitating in embracing his claimed “liberal Anglo-Catholicism” tendency.<sup>22</sup> In the same vein, I shall let myself be inspired by the well-documented books by Lindsay Jones and Mark Torgerson on sacred architecture.<sup>23</sup> Where Jones seems to emphasize ideas and the transcendence of God in sacred architecture, Torgerson asserts that modern sacred architecture portrays the divine immanence or the coming of God close to us. Although I feel closer to Torgerson’s preoccupations of “worship and ministry today,” it seems to me that, in order to attain this purpose, the mind of the architect must be nurtured by philosophical and theological ideas such as those Jones expresses. But, most importantly, it is such spirit as that which is emerging from the recent series of conferences on Theological Aesthetics in the United States which will best guide the architectural endeavor in sacred architecture.<sup>24</sup> Hence,

<sup>19</sup> I am referring to the core thesis of the threefold study by Christopher Alexander and his team: *The Timeless Way of Building*, *A Pattern Language*, and *The Oregon Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). These authors affirm that “people should design themselves their own houses, streets, and communities. Now, if it is so in social life, it must be the same in religious setting with churches and places of worship.

<sup>20</sup> “The guiding idea in this regard is the eidetic difference, so to speak, between two aims, two intentionalities: the first, that of imagination, directed toward the fantastic, the fictional, the unreal, the possible, the utopian, and the other, that of memory, directed toward prior reality, priority constituting the temporal mark par excellence of the ‘thing remembered,’ of the ‘remembered’ as such.” Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Alejandro García-Rivera affirms that Kant’s and Hegel’s philosophizing of aesthetics not only freed the artist from Church discipline or dogmatic intervention, but also permitted non-theologians to participate in the criticism of art. However, this liberation that proudly brought artworks to museums lost the spiritual ingredient that was devoutly entertaining them in churches. This loss was both in the form of the unfettered optimism of Prometheus, who seized the secret of fire from the gods, hence exalting human spirit potentialities, and in the form of the disenchanted nihilism resulting from the ambitious Dionysian tendency of modern humanity to escape the limitations of existence. Thus, Hans Urs von Balthasar identifies “love” as the unifying element between the human and God, through the “primal phenomenon of the beautiful.” “A theological aesthetics,” García-Rivera states “recognizes that it is God’s glory that is the transcendent dimension of worldly beauty.” Cf. Arthur Holder (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 345-362, at 358-359. Let me not fail to mention here, just for its pleasurable reading, Aidan Nichols’ analogy that von Balthasar combines “the mind of St. Thomas with the heart of St. Augustine, all in the spirit of St. Ignatius Loyola.” Quoted by García-Rivera, “Aesthetics” in Holder (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, 359.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), viii.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison*, Vol.1 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000) & Mark A. Torgerson, *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today* (Michigan, Cambridge, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Initiated by Oleg Bychkov and Xavier Seibert in 2004, three conferences have been held on Theological Aesthetics in the United States. The first on the theme of “Beauty of all things beautiful: Theology

what Bychkov calls “aesthetic theologians,” i.e. architects, masons, and artists, have the mission of creating spaces “truly sacred and suitable for the divine presence,” with both the cultural imprint of the context, and the timeless nature of religious architecture. More specifically, Richard Vosko’s observation that “church buildings in the USA are changing because attitudes toward religion and religious practice are changing”<sup>25</sup> offers the lens through which the reality of sacred architecture in Congo can be viewed and its future projected. And by doing so, not only does the work contribute to the building up of the community called Church in Africa through architecture, but it also reads afresh its theology.

Indeed, this work assumes that an architectural vision can help make concrete the current various strands of African theology: Inculturation, Liberation, and Reconstruction.<sup>26</sup> Orobator remarks that there is a “wide-ranging” variety (or should I say a cacophony) of African theologies which “have hardly gone beyond preliminary clearing of the ground,” and “far from being fully matured branch of the tree of universal theology.”<sup>27</sup> But, with hope and optimism, since “the sky is wide enough for two birds to fly without their wings touching,” he contends with Desmond Tutu that “much of the task of theological reflection in Africa lies ahead, not in a misty irrecoverable past.”<sup>28</sup> My work inscribes itself in the line of steps for the future of African theology by involving art in the debate. Where the three strands of African theology are sometimes at odds with each other, the question of beauty and architectural space can help overcome the conflict. It is true that already in the 1960s, Engelbert Mveng, SJ advocated for the African authenticity in architecture, but it was still a pious wish of “Christianizing the culture,” and not a real pledge to engage a domain in which theology can emerge, as a place of revelation and a field of a living faith that loves and hopes.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, if some parts of the African continent have been sensitive to the Inculturation of the Gospel message in local cultures, with special reference to the liturgy, as the result of the inspiration drawn from the Second Vatican Council, everywhere such a liturgical move has been observed, the architectural innovation did not follow. The churches continued to be built as before, in such a way that one cannot really tell from their style which are the pre-Vatican II churches and which are post-Vatican II. In fact, there was and is still a dichotomy

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and the Arts” took place at St. Bonaventure University in New York (May 19-23, 2004) and has been edited by O. Bychkov and J. Fodor in the volume *Theological Aesthetics After von Balthasar* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). The second was held in Denver (May 25-28, 2006) under the general theme: “Theology beyond Balthasar.” Its outcome generated Sigurd Bergmann (ed.), *Theology in Built Environments: Exploring Religion, Architecture, and Design* (New Brunswick, NJ.: Transaction Publishers, 2009). The works of the third conference are not yet published. This third event “Beauty: The Color of Truth” took place here, at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, CA (May, 29-June, 1, 2008). Although I did not attend the conference, I have greatly benefited from the teaching and writings of its architect, Professor Alejandro Garcia-Rivera. In any case, among the three series of conferences, *Theology in Built Environments* is the most determinant document on the relationship between theology and architecture.

<sup>25</sup> Bergmann (ed.), *Theology in Built Environments*, 223-245, at 244-245.

<sup>26</sup> According to Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, Inculturation (quest for cultural emancipation), Liberation (struggle for political freedom), and Reconstruction (Nehemiah’s cry: “Let’s rise up and build!” Ne 2:18) are the three major trends in African Theology. Orobator, “The Sky is Wide Enough” in *Hekima Review* No. 40 (2009): 34-44.

<sup>27</sup> Orobator, “The Sky is Wide Enough,” 34-35.

<sup>28</sup> Orobator, “The Sky is Wide Enough,” 36-37.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Engelbert Mveng, *L’Art d’Afrique Noire: Liturgie Cosmique et Langage Religieux* (Tours, France: Mame, 1964), 9.

between the flow of the liturgical celebration and the setting in which it takes place. This dichotomy reveals a problem in the way the liturgy fits in architecture.

This work expands the wings of Inculturation to architecture. Indeed, if “the need for and responsibility of Christians to make their response to the gospel as concrete and lively as possible” merges into “constructing local theologies,”<sup>30</sup> how do these take form architecturally? The quest for liberation with its political involvement, at least in the literature of African theologians, has mainly taken an ethical path and truth interest, while the beautiful is neglected. That is at least, what the South African theologian John W. De Gruchy confessed when he declared: “For some reason the connection between aesthetics and social ethics, between beauty and social transformation, was not apparent to those of us who were engaged as theologians in the struggle against apartheid. We were concerned about truth and goodness rather than beauty: about theology and social ethics rather than aesthetics.”<sup>31</sup> It is my belief that beauty is a powerful tool for reconciliation, justice and peace.<sup>32</sup> Seeing things in this way provides more feathers to the wing of Liberation trend in African Theology. Hence the ambition of this study is to contribute to the debate—through architecture in particular and aesthetics in general. A theology of architecture becomes essential in the African context and it goes without saying that an African theology of architecture will be a reconstructive one or it won’t exist. Indeed, for such theology to become relevant and credible, it has to ground its claims on the African cultural authenticity.

The African sees the basic religious impulse in the belief that the macrocosm of the cosmos is interconnected with the microcosms of the soul. To use García-Rivera’s wording, the average African did not lose yet the sense of intimacy with the cosmos: she or he can still see the ether tremble with intelligence; she/he still senses the connection to the cosmic nature.<sup>33</sup> This is reflected in communal living and in the African hope in the resurrection of the body. This hope in the resurrection of the body arising from the African context lends itself to a theology of architecture as giving theological guidance as to what place ought to be prepared for the resurrection. Such a theology has the potential to mediate the three major strands in African theology today. I strongly believe that, with a renewed audacity of faith, love, and hope, architects and theologians can engrave an African ecclesiology in stones.<sup>34</sup> At the end of the day, the implications of this study are not limited to African theology, but have also important ramifications for ecclesiology at large.

Moreover, this study can clarify how American churches can better serve a diverse community which in itself can be of interest, when one considers the unity in

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<sup>30</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Although I would prefer using “call” instead of “right” and the notion of “gift to be received” instead of “a commodity to be purchased,” I think of Patrick T. McCormick’s interesting article “A Right to Beauty: a Fair Share of Milk and Honey for the Poor” in *Theological Studies* 71 (2010), 702-720.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 2-6.

<sup>34</sup> I share Mveng’s conviction that, while analyzing traditional African prayers and art, one notices that they express a vision where the world, humankind, and God correlate: “Pour l’homme d’Afrique, la division de l’homme et du monde est un mystère essentiellement religieux, et qui se situe plus haut que la nature brute, plus haut même que l’éthique, dans la rencontre de Dieu et de l’homme.” He goes further stating that “it is not a matter of asking whether African Christian language is possible. This language exists or will exist necessarily. It is for us to know if we want it to be authentic.” Cf. Engelbert Mveng, *L’Art d’Afrique Noire*, 6-8.