

Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed. *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016. 272 pp. \$35.00. ISBN: 9781626982031.

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The essays in this collection originated from the Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa, which took place between 2013 and 2015. The colloquium was a theological research project initiated to coincide with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Vatican II. A.E. Orobator, the well-known African Jesuit and editor of the volume, observes that a primary objective of the colloquium was to “develop, model and sustain a new and innovative methodology and process of theological reflection, research, and study at the service of the African Church and the World Church” (xi). The project aimed at pan-African participation, and lay and religious women comprised nearly half of the participants. Sixty essays from the colloquium were published in three volumes. This anthology represents a selection of eighteen of those essays, along with an introduction by Orobator and a brief epilogue written by Mercy Amba Oduyoye

The volume is divided into three parts: “The Francis Effect and the Church in Africa”; “Critique of Theological Methodology and Ecclesial Practice”; and “A Church that Goes Forth with Boldness and Creativity.” As Orobator observes, “[t]hroughout this volume the personality and presence of Pope Francis looms large” (xxix).

Engagement with the ecclesial vision of Pope Francis is evident in the essay by Anne Arabome found in Part 1 and titled “When a Sleeping Woman Wakes: A Conversation with Pope Francis about the Feminization of Poverty.” Arabome points out that poverty in Africa has a woman’s face, and she underlines the prevalence of HIV infection among young women. Though appreciative of the contributions of the pope, she observes that there is little or no recognition in *Evangelii Gaudium* that women are forced into the role of subordinate human beings. Arabome argues that the non-recognition of women in the church contributes to their impoverishment and that Pope Francis “does not seem able to fully recognize the discrimination against women in the church” (59). She wonders why African women were largely absent from the preparations for the Synod on the Family, and she encourages the pope to initiate hearings on issues that matter whenever women’s voices can be heard without fear of reprisals. Arabome affirms the statements of Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* about the importance of listening in the church, and she concludes on a hopeful note: “It is fair to hope that the Francis effect will lead to change for African women” (62).

Laurenti Magesa addresses issues around inculturation in “Truly African, Fully Christian? In Search of a New African Christian Spirituality” (found in the second part of the volume). Magesa suggests that “there may be a basic and general reluctance of the church in Africa to become culturally both Christian and African” (81). He argues that a “new Christianity” – an inculturated Christianity – “emerges from an intricate process of synthesis between the centuries-old Christian understandings (or traditions) of the liberating work of Jesus Christ and the

African people's equally time-honored, God-given cultural ways of being" (82). Attending to the issue of theological language, Magesa points out that conceptual language is not the exclusive means of communicating theology. In African cultures, stories, testimonies, participatory dance, songs, and rituals play a vital role in expressing a people's relationship with God.

Emmanuel Katongole contributes an essay in the third part of this anthology – “The Church of the Future: Pressing Moral Issues from *Ecclesia in Africa*.” Instead of reflecting on African responses to global moral issues, Katongole begins his discussion with the specific sociological reality of the African church. He delineates a number of salient issues that African bishops should discuss at “Vatican III”: what it means to be a poor church in a continent where illiteracy and unemployment abound; the call to be a nonviolent community in the midst of the violence that has been a perpetual feature of social life in Africa; the challenge of incarnating the gospel as “a quiet revolution of righteousness, justice, and shalom” (168) in places inundated with noise pollution; the call to the churches to be rooted in African soil and thus ecologically responsible; the summons to be a community of servant leadership in societies where “big man” rule (171) has been predominant; the challenge of promoting the leadership of women in the African church; and the call to explore the possibility of married priests in a continent where “widespread compromise in clerical celibacy undermines the church's witness and voice on matters relating to the body and human sexuality” (173).

As with other such collections, this volume displays a variety of methodologies, and the quality of the essays is somewhat uneven. Nevertheless, it succeeds in offering readers a wide spectrum of views from African theologians, and it elucidates pressing issues faced by the African church. It will serve as a helpful resource for courses in ecclesiology and intercultural studies.