Guest Editor Preface

African Theologies: Methodological Considerations for a Growing Field

JUDITH GRUBER AND GERARD NNAUNGHA
KU LEUVEN; TANGAZA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

judith.gruber@kuleuven.be; nnamunga@yahoo.com

The first approaches to African Theologies emerged in the mid-twentieth century, and since then the field has grown and diversified significantly. In light of the increasing thematic and institutional impact of African theologies on a global scale, there is a dire need to clarify the wide-ranging methodological issues that are at stake in practicing theology from/for/in African perspectives: Who are the subjects of African theologies, what are their objects and objectives? Where can we do African theology? What are its sources and hermeneutical procedures, and what makes these distinctly “African”? (How) can we define African identities without falling back on essentialist notions of cultural purity? How do African theologies relate to other (so-called) contextual theologies? Clearly, any consideration of these questions is deeply entangled into the contested politics of knowledge production and cannot be pursued independently from the legacies of colonial power/knowledge regimes that continue to shape imaginations of Africa.

This special issue pursues this search for a methodological tool kit for African theologies by focusing on the historiographical and hermeneutical questions that are at stake in defining the field. It looks for ways of investigating conflicting interpretations of Africa’s precolonial, colonial and postcolonial past, and maps different conceptual frameworks for understanding their impact on theological knowledge production. Its contributions develop models that allow us to understand the field of African theologies in its global historical entanglements, and they offer constructive theological proposals for conceptualizing the impact of African theologies on wider theological discourses. A roundtable discussion zooms in on the politics of knowledge production that are at play in constructing African theologies. It investigates the intersectional power asymmetries at
work in the politics of representation that give shape to the field, and crucially, it looks for ways to decolonize theological practices in academic and ecclesial institutions world-wide. Together, the contributions offer a rich, interdisciplinary set of lenses that allow us to better understand and further develop the field of African theologies. Further, by proposing methodologies for doing theology from, and for, African perspectives, they also provide resources for addressing contested issues in the broader discourses of intercultural theology and global Christianity.

The contributions to this issue grew out of the project “History matters for the Study of Africa’s Present. Exchanging Methodologies and Sources”, that was organized by the Centre for Liberation Theologies, KU Leuven, in collaboration with Hekima University College (Nairobi) and Tangaza University College (Nairobi). Two symposia – one in Nairobi (November 2018) and one in Leuven (December 2018) – brought together scholars from Hekima University College, Tangaza University College and Catholic University of Eastern Africa (all Nairobi, Kenya), the KU Leuven (Belgium), Université de Montreal and Bochum University, Germany. Coming together across post/colonial divides and along global itineraries, they performed African theologies in the making, with a particular focus on its Anglophone traditions.

**Note from the journal editors**

An article by Najib George Awad follows the features focusing on Africa. Awad elaborates on questions concerning interreligious rituals. In the context of Christian-Muslim engagement, he critically examines whether interreligious worship is a reliable epistemic medium of the religious faith of the worshipping subjects.

In his review essay of Hans Gustafson’s edited volume *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*, Younus Mirza analyses the array of short essays on the emerging field of “Interreligious Studies” (IRS).

This ISIT volume includes a brief report on the ESITIS webinar held March 2021 on The Pandemic as Challenge for Intercultural and Interreligious Relations. This volume ends with an In Memoriam dedicated to the life and work of former ESITIS Chair and co-founder of ISIT, Ulrich Winkler, and another In Memoriam for a long-time friend of this journal and its predecessor, Robert Schreiter, both of whom passed away this year.