
Recently the concept of solidarity has been subjected to renewed theological reflection. This development is inspired by the process of globalization which raises critical questions about solidarity in our globalizing but still divided world. Relying on the title *African Theology of Solidarity* I was hoping that the Nigerian theologian Chukwuemeka Emmanuel Umeh with his book would contribute to this reflection from an African theological perspective and/or by focusing on the context of the African continent. The introduction makes clear that Umeh, who currently serves as a parish priest in Germany, aims to contribute to the development of African theology rather than to global theological discussions. Outlining the program of the book, in the introduction Umeh argues that the scope and sources of theology have to be enlarged: not only Scripture and tradition, but also experience, local cultures and social realities must be included in order for theology to deal with people's way of life and perception of reality. Hence he argues to bring together the two major trends in African theology: inculturation and liberation. In his opinion, when one starts to theologise from people's lives it is impossible to separate the cultural and the social dimension. Therefore Umeh proposes an African theology of solidarity which, on the one hand, 'recognises the African cultures, world-view, values and communalism of African social system' and on the other hand takes into account 'the serious problems of poverty, sickness like AIDS, discrimination, constants wars as they exist in today's Africa.' (p. 2-3).


Throughout the book Umeh develops his African theology of solidarity, although the contribution of particular chapters to this theology is not always clear, and although the concept of solidarity itself is hardly explored in an elaborate way. From traditional religion he takes the insight that solidarity includes the relationship between the living and the dead.
and thus has a cosmic dimension (unfortunately, the significance of this insight is not explored). Likewise, from African cultures he takes the sense of community as foundational for an African theology of solidarity. The third chapter offers a brief historical outline of Christianity and African cultures, and seems to function as an introduction to the chapters on African theology that follow. Chapter 4, on inculturation theology, presents the African theology of solidarity as being inculturative because it seeks to help African Christians to be authentically African and truly Christian. In the next chapter, African theology of solidarity is presented as being liberative, as it recognises the social aspect of the gospel and the need for social action to alleviate human suffering. It is striking that chapter 6, that lays the foundations of African theology of solidarity, draws from European 18th and 19th century philosophers to explore the concept of solidarity, rather than from the resources in African cultures and religions. The second part of the chapter points to African values, but in quite a restorative way: it calls for a rediscovery of the lost African cultural values. This corresponds with the project of the African Renaissance initiated by some political leaders, but it does not take into account that one cannot simply restore history, nor does it explore how lost values should be re-valued in the context of modernization and globalization. Chapter 7 offers a critical evaluation of some traditional cultural issues, such as polygamous marriage, female circumcision and widows’ right of inheritance. It notices that most African cultures use to serve male interests, and hence it states that African theology of solidarity calls for gender equality. Although this is sympathetic, the meaning of gender equality and how it relates to the concept of solidarity is not explored. The next chapter deals with some urgent social issues, like HIV & AIDS, poverty and democratization. It denounces discrimination of people living with HIV and AIDS, the continuing poverty on the continent and the lack of respect for democracy and human rights. Hence Umeh calls for change and especially calls on the church to take its responsibility. This, again, is sympathetic but unfortunately the argument is not presented in a profound theological way.

Reading the book it strikes one that little reference is made to recent African theological publications. The founding fathers of African theology are mentioned, such as Charles Nyamiti, John Mbiti, Idowu Bolaji, and Jean-Marc Ela. However, it is almost ignored that after these great names a new generation of theologians has arisen. Likewise the groundbreaking work of African women theologians is hardly taken into account. Umeh refers to Mercy Oduyoye as ‘a famous African feminist theologian’ but in spite of her fame only one of her numerous publications is mentioned, being an article from 1979! The work of women theologians could have contributed to Umeh’s argument, because they already bring together for years the two trends of African theology that Umeh seeks to unify, being inculturation and liberation. Further, in the section on HIV & AIDS not one reference is found to the flood of literature on the epidemic that is published by various African theologians in the last decade. I do not know whether Umeh has written the manuscript in Nigeria or Germany, but in both countries this literature will be available at least partially. Contrasting with the absence of references to recent African theological publications are many the references to Vatican documents and papal letters. Therefore, Umeh’s book is more interesting when it is about the reception of Vatican Catholicism in African theology, than that it contributes significantly to the development of African theology itself.