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# Human Rights, Cultural Difference, and the Church in Africa, by Aquiline Tarimo

Paul J. Fitzgerald S.J.

Fairfield University, [pfitzgerald@fairfield.edu](mailto:pfitzgerald@fairfield.edu)

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this very problem. They understood well the environmental implications of particular policies, the benefits and drawbacks of certain positions, and the reasons for and against these positions, but they often had difficulty deciding how the cases ought to be resolved and articulating the normative moral criteria applicable to each case.

Those with an interest in matters theological or religious might also wish for a more extensive and explicit treatment of these topics than is found in this book. Chapter one devotes a section to religion, and a few of the case studies mention religious perspectives, but one finds nothing approaching sustained attention to religion or theology. I mention this not as a criticism—the book seems more at home in the arena of philosophical ethics, and the authors are appealing to a very broad readership—but only to note that those seeking to understand how religious or theological considerations affect environmental thought will need to look elsewhere.

Despite this reservation and limitation, *Boundaries* deserves high marks in a number of categories. It covers important issues that will become ever more pressing in the future. It is clearly written, and the exposition of complex moral concepts and positions is intelligible to the nonspecialist. It presents a wealth of empirical data on a number of environmental issues, while consistently showing why the data are relevant. Its case method approach is highly needed in a field that has been driven largely by theoretical concerns. Overall, this is one of the better casebooks on environmental ethics and is a good choice for an upper level college course. The book will be helpful to anyone looking for an accessible port of entry to the field of environmental ethics.

*Villanova University, Penn.*

MARK GRAHAM

HUMAN RIGHTS, CULTURAL DIFFERENCE, AND THE CHURCH IN AFRICA. By Aquiline Tarimo, S.J. Morogoro, Tanzania: Salvatorianum, 2004. Pp. xii + 279. N.p.

The problems of Africa are as numerous as they are daunting: warfare within and between nations, economic underdevelopment and massive impoverishment, health crises aggravated by crumbling social infrastructures, environmental degradation, human rights abuses, and endemic corruption that sorely weaken civil society. This important book by an up-and-coming African theologian goes beyond a mere cataloguing of social problems; it attempts to search out and identify root causes and to suggest the philosophical and theological underpinnings of renewed social structures that will be apt at establishing and advancing the common good.

Despite best efforts by the current generation of African thinkers to join fundamental notions of human rights and thick conceptions of the common good, Tarimo finds that there is a link missing between personal rights and social obligations in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. Imported Western notions of human rights fail to take root in African soil because academics and practitioners do not adequately take into account fundamental African

cultural differences with the West, especially concerning notions of the human person and of human community. Nor do many policy makers appreciate the potential of religion in general and Catholic Christianity in particular to bridge this gap.

T. engages his study with tenacity and rigor. In conversation with Western thinkers whose work often sets the terms of the debate about human rights and civil society, T. points out essential weaknesses in African appropriations of human rights discourse over the past 30 years, underlining Western thought's general failure to inspire a crossover in Africa from theory to praxis. Liberal theories of rights, with their emphasis on the unencumbered individual, do not mesh with African notions of communitarian humanism. Cultural studies to unearth a genuinely African social character by such scholars as Kwasi Wiredu and Francis Deng have indeed discovered the deep roots of respect for, and articulation of, human rights in traditional African cultures, but these scholars have yet to demonstrate how to incorporate old customs into modern institutions. Charting a course between Westernization and traditionalism, T. finds promise in Catholic social doctrine, but only to the extent that this tradition can be read from within varied, dynamic, and battered African historical and cultural realities.

T. seeks solutions to Africa's most vexing social problems by a constructive and critical borrowing from other parts of the world. "We must continually move back and forth in interactive dialogue with other cultures, taking into account the backgrounds of particular cultures and societies, and go beyond our own particular self-interests" (34). In the thinking of liberation theologians, among them Ignacio Ellacuría, T. finds the most helpful methodology for the construction of a connection between rights and duties: the historicization of human rights (71). Unhistoricized human rights discourse tends toward a mystification and an ideologization of abstract concepts, a process used by the powerful to vitiate the transformative power of human praxis for justice. Only by interrupting the discourse of the elites can the poor hope to interpret and defend their own rights as human beings in community. Dangerous as this may be, it is only by such costly grace that salvation in history is born (84, quoting Jean-Marc Ela). Yet the poor are not called to vanquish the rich—this failed pattern has led Africa down many sad paths.

The heart of the book is T.'s discussion of social reconciliation. Beyond revenge or punishment, reconciliation, rooted in a truly religious decision to forgive one's enemy and thereby to transform him into a friend, is seen as Africa's best hope for social progress. "Forgiveness can overcome pain, go beyond legal justice, and empower victims . . . humanizing [them] and breaking the vicious cycle of counter-violence" (106).

However, forgiveness is a religious rather than a political virtue, and here is where religion in general and Catholicism in particular can best serve Africa, for religion's task is "to play a public role by being prophetic, to inform public conscience, to denounce injustice, and to call for self-examination and reform" (139). All of these measures precede and support

a humble human spirit that presupposes the goodness of every person and seeks to reform every culture according to the universal human capacity to envision the good and to work together toward that ideal horizon.

This book is a fine introduction to an impressive body of African theology. It is appropriate both for intercultural and systematic explorations of ethics and public theology at the advanced undergraduate and graduate levels.

*Santa Clara University*

PAUL FITZGERALD, S.J.

**SACRED SONG IN AMERICA: RELIGION, MUSIC, AND PUBLIC CULTURE.** By Stephen A. Marini. *Public Expressions of Religion in America*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2003. Pp. xiv + 395. \$34.95.

This volume originated as a 1991 commission from the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Funded by a Lilly Grant, the work was part of a series exploring "Public Expressions of Religion in America." Stephen Marini is a historian of American religions and self-professed "lifelong performer of sacred music" (ix). In the introduction he admits the daunting nature of the task, not only because the topic is immense, but also because it required his acquisition of new research techniques and pushed him outside his ordinary *métier*, "early American Protestantism" (ix).

Three major concerns fuel M.'s inquiry in his acoustic trek across the United States: (a) the definition of sacred song, (b) the meanings and functions of sacred song in representative religious communities, and (c) the contribution of this inquiry to a larger understanding of religious culture (2).

Halfway through his study M. provides the best overview and rationale for the book's design (163). Part 1 examines sacred song in "America's most enduring religious traditions." These include the sacred-song traditions of Native America, the Hispanic Southwest, Sacred Harp singing, the Black Church, and the Jewish Music Revival. While these are immense topics, happily within each chapter M. offers something of a case study providing some focus to each. Thus when considering the Hispanic Southwest, he gives considerable attention to El Santuario de Chimayó in New Mexico, while the chapter on Black Church song richly describes Chicago's Apostolic Church of God.

In part 2 M. turns his attention to sacred song in religious communities and movements that flourished during the last decades of the 20th century. This unusually diverse collection of chapters addresses topics ranging from New Age, Wiccans, and Neo-Pagans to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Even for those conversant with the subject of sacred music, the book is an eye-opener. Chapter 7, "Contested Praise: a Tale of Two Hymnals," for example, is a fascinating stereoscopic consideration of how the Southern Baptist Convention's *Baptist Hymnal* (1991) and the United Church of Christ's *New Century Hymnal* (1995) were produced. Specifically, M.