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ADOPTION METAPHORS

See NEW BIRTH (REGENERATION).

AESTHETICS

The field of aesthetics is commonly defined as the philosophy of fine art, critical theory, and aesthetic experience. Its development is recent; in the eighteenth century a poetic theorist coined the term “aesthetics.” That was the golden era of aesthetics, when British and German thinkers stated the defining characteristics of beauty, taste, artistic genius, and the sublime. But the foundations of aesthetic theory lie in the thinking of Plato, Aristotle, and other classical philosophers.

Early Christian and medieval theology was profoundly shaped by aesthetic interests. **Augustine**’s early writings (ca. 386–400) describe Being and all existence as consisting of a numbering (ratio) that gives measure, form, and order to all things. Augustine was responding positively to Plotinian and Pythagorean aesthetics but negatively to Manichean antimaterialism. Denys the Areopagite (late fifth to early sixth century) expanded the vision of numbered order leading to God. His cosmology describes a created hierarchy of Being/Beauty/Goodness. God, as Highest Beauty, gives each creature a subjective perfection or beauty relative to its location in the scale/chain of existence. Bonaventure (1221-74) expanded this aesthetic by applying it to humanity’s cultural and intellectual disciplines. As the soul journeys *anagogically* (ascending understanding) “up” the ladder of Being, it draws closer to union with divine Beauty. **Thomas Aquinas** (ca. 1225-74) described Beauty as harmony among the three transcendentals: Unity, Truth, and Goodness. But his writings on the **metaphysics** of divine Light and earthly color are equally important as expressing then contemporary Gothic aesthetics (e.g., soaring cathedral design and luminous stained glass).

Reformation iconoclasm (destroying icons) established a rule of aesthetic austerity. Not until nineteenth-century idealism and romanticism was the rule broken. However, **John Calvin** recommended creation as the “book of nature” for educating and inspiring the elect. Jonathan Edwards was an important exception to rejecting aesthetic methods and themes. His writings describe God philosophically as Primary Beauty and Being itself. By his aesthetic worldview, ideal human existence consists in harmonious “consent” of individuals to themselves, others, existence itself, and God. Life is most perfect and holy when centered in and at peace with divine Beauty.

John Wesley developed a basic aesthetics, utilizing the work of Addison, Shaftesbury, Gerard, Duff, Edwards, and possibly Hume and Hutcheson. Believing the physical senses serve their five spiritual parallels, Wesley located beauty in a tripartite hierarchy: (1) appreciation of physical beauty engendered (2) moral sense and beauty, which (3) then encouraged a “taste” for God. Wesley never denied natural and artistic beauty’s inherent values, although he regretted how their “pleasantness” distracted from evangelism. His sermons warn against detectable and imagined worldly pleasures (1 John 2:16). Nevertheless, this educated man of taste felt qualified to write aesthetic essays on genius, taste, and music’s power.

Twentieth-century aesthetics became an isolated and specialized branch of critical philosophy. Interest in transcendental ideas and art’s relationship to other disciplines (e.g., ethics and metaphysics) dissolved. Discussion now focuses on aesthetic experience, originality, **hermeneutics**, semiotics, multiculturalism, and voices/perspectives of the “Other.” Christians must learn the new vocabulary to employ contemporary aesthetics in liturgical theory and practice. Additionally, evangelicals have yet to incorporate theological aesthetics into systematic theology.

See also Liturgy and Worship; Music/Hymns/Hymnology.

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AFFECTIONS

See TEMPERS AND AFFECTIONS.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN METHODISM

People of African descent belonged to the first generation of Methodists in American society. After they arrived in New York City in 1766, Betty, a slave, may have been the first Methodist convert. Moreover, the earliest black

preachers in the Methodist movement, Harry Hoosier and Richard Allen, both former slaves, attended the Christmas Conference in 1784 in Baltimore, where the denomination was established. Because of their Wesleyan spirituality, antislavery convictions, and readiness to license blacks to preach, Methodists attracted hundreds of African-Americans in the late 1700s. Because blacks were founding ministers and members of the Methodist movement, they viewed themselves as legitimate critics of Wesleyan whites and their flawed religious witness. Richard Allen, for example, recalled that clergy at the Christmas Conference wore vestments in imitation of pretentious Anglicans. He described this practice as a sign of spiritual declension that presaged increased racism and retreats from abolitionism. Hence, the founding of autonomous black religious bodies, though expressed as responses to racism and pro-slavery practices, also owed to black perceptions that white Methodists were losing their spiritual fervor.

Between 1787 and 1821 black Methodists, mainly in the Northeast, organized scores of separate congregations and formed three autonomous denominations. Richard Allen and other Philadelphia blacks in 1787 founded the Free African Society (FAS). After whites at St. George Church, also in 1787, mistreated them, Allen led a remnant out of the FAS to form Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, dedicated in 1794. Despite persistent white efforts to control the congregation, Allen in 1816 united Bethel with other congregations to found the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Allen was elected and consecrated the first bishop. Similar racial troubles in New York City compelled blacks at John Street Church to withdraw and establish their own congregation in 1796.

In 1821 another group of congregations formed the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church with James Varick as their first superintendent/bishop. Peter Spencer led a third group of black Methodists out of Ezion Church in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1805, and they founded the Union Church of Africans (UCA) in 1813. Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth, originally AME and AMEZ evangelists, mainly starting in the 1820s, encountered intense sanctification/perfectionist experiences and explicitly articulated these core Methodist doctrines. All three bodies (AME, AMEZ, and UCA) and those blacks still in the Methodist Episcopal Church operated mainly in the North and Canada. After the Civil War, all of these groups, except the Spencer churches, evangelized among ex-slave blacks in the South. They competed with the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, a body formed in 1870 out of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. These initiatives placed most black Methodists in the AME, AMEZ, and CME bodies, though significant numbers joined and were segregated, for a time, in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

African-American Methodists pursued a liberationist theology focused on freeing slaves, fighting for black civil rights, and identifying with Africa. Their emancipationist ethos, grounded in Wesleyan social holiness, aimed at renewing American society to reflect equity and justice. Wesleyan blacks who realized these liberationist legacies included A. Philip Randolph, founder of the March on Washington Movement in 1941, and Rosa Parks, who inspired the Montgomery (Alabama) bus boycott in 1955. Black Methodists, regardless of denomination, became carriers of a freedom tradition.

See also Black Theology; Methodism, American; Social Ethics; Social Justice; Wesley, John, Theology of.

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AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CHURCH THEOLOGIES

Defining African **indigenous** church theologies is a complex task. The complexity appears immediately upon discovering that (1) African indigenous churches (AICs) do not share the Western practice of writing theology or even articulating clear boundaries between **orthodoxy** and heresy and that (2) African involvement with Christianity has produced over eight thousand theologically diverse movements, with over nine million members. Consequently no single definition of AICs is adequate. Nevertheless, some recurrent and characteristic emphases are identifiable.

First, AICs revere one supreme God, a reverence often combined with belief in a hierarchy of lesser spirits or beings through whom believers approach God. African indigenous churches consider the one supreme God as the Creator, Source, and Support of life. The lesser spirits or beings are God's emissaries, often having mediatory responsibility.

Second, AICs emphasize the power of the **Holy Spirit** to inspire particular individuals and endow them with powers of **divination**, **healing**, and prophecy. For example, Isaiah Shembe, founder of the Nazarite Church (1911), had visions before starting his church. Engenas Barnabas Lekganyane, founder of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) (1924), received instructions from God to start a new church while praying on Mount Thabakgone.

Third, AIC theologies are committed to maintaining social and communal order rather than encouraging personal salvation and developing doctrinal dogmas. They emphasize that **ubuntu**, the community, rather than an individual, has priority. God, the intermediary beings, humans, and even

animals form a network of mutual support in which community and tribal identity are paramount.

Fourth, AICs stress the importance of **ancestors**. It is commonly believed that ancestors are closer to God and also continue to be related to their ongoing families as guardians. They remain part of their respective families until removed by the expanding gap created by succeeding generations. Therefore, just as one must respect living members of one's family for the sake of order and harmony, so one must also respect members of one's family who are now ancestors.

See also Folk Religion; Indigenization; Indigenous Christian Groups; Indigenous Theologies.

Resources

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AFRICAN THEOLOGY

African theology, like other theologies, is the study of God and God's people. The primary task of African theology is to articulate the Christian faith for Christians living in the African context. African theologians interpret the Christian faith while carefully studying contemporary currents affecting the lives of Africans. They work to make the Christian faith relevant to African life while maintaining fidelity to apostolic Christianity.

African theology brings the Christian faith into dialogue with **African traditional religions**. Commonalities between the two include a creator God, an emphasis upon community, the reality of evil, the unseen realm, and God the Covenant Maker. Hence, African theology is Christian and African. Wesleyan theologians use the Wesleyan emphasis on tradition as a bridge between the past and present for African Christianity. Church fathers such as **Augustine**, Tertullian, and Cyprian compose part of African Christian history.

Gwinyai Muzorewa has summarized current African theology by pulling together some of its major themes. African theology is theological reflection on and an expression of African Christianity (John Mbiti); a contextual African biblical theology (Francis Appiah-Kubi); a theology emerging from the life, culture, tradition, and faith of the African people in their particular African context (Rogate Mshana); a theology based on the biblical faith that speaks to the African soul (All Africa Conference of Churches [AACC]).

In its efforts to address the full range of African life—political, social, economic, cultural and religious—African theologians are open to shifts in

theological methodology. African theology and theologians were heavily influenced by the end of colonialism and the birth of African nationalism after World War II. It was also heavily influenced by Pan-Africanism, the context within which a distinctive African theology arose. It emerged within the context of the church and so is now the backbone of the rapid growth of the Christian faith and the deep spirituality of indigenous churches.

The AACC maintained that the spiritual dynamics of the African revolution derives from the impact of the gospel and Christian education. It held that the church must provide spiritual direction for the revolution. This means that African independence from colonialism was largely motivated by proclaiming the Christian gospel and by interpreting the Christian faith for Africa through Christian education.

The purpose of Pan-Africanism is to give all persons of African descent a sense of identity, self-determination, and emancipation. This has provided a context for African theologians to formulate African Christian theology. African nationalism promoted freedom.

The gospel of Jesus Christ can be effectively communicated only when taken seriously by a people and their culture. African theologians believe that “enculturation” of the gospel is an essential aspect of liberation. This has become a principal focus of African theology. Enculturation promotes Christian emancipation of culture under the inspiration and impact of the gospel. Enculturation also means that African theologians work to provide a genuine African understanding of God, human life, and the world. This is in contrast to the Western missionaries, who usually viewed African culture as an incarnation of evil needing to be replaced by Western civilization.

Many Africans see in the Christian Scriptures a platform for addressing the multiple challenges Africans face. Wesleyan theologians see this conviction as consistent with John Wesley’s insistence that the Scriptures are the primary witness to God’s self-disclosure, a spiritual guide, and the source of human liberation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has described the Bible as an unintended gift of liberation Europeans and North Americans gave to Africans. To paraphrase Bishop Tutu, “When the white man came to Africa, we had the land and he had the Bible. The white man said, ‘Let us pray.’ When we opened our eyes, he had the land and we had the Bible. But who says that was a bad bargain? When we were given the Bible, we received the one thing that most powerfully subverts oppression and injustice” (see Gish 2004, 101).

See also Contextualization; Contextual Theology; Evangelism; Global South; Indigenization; Indigenous Theologies; Postcolonialism; Scripture, Wesleyan Approach to; Syncretism, Religious; Westernization of the Gospel.

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AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

The title African traditional religions (ATR) is nomenclature used for studying several traditional religions indigenous to Africa. Thinking of Africa as a single culture has been superseded by a more accurate consideration of how diverse African peoples understand and live within the spiritual dimensions of creation.

In spite of the diversity of African cultures, some features are common among the various African traditional religions.

The *first* common feature is a concept of one God, the Creator of all there is. This God alone is worshipped. Missionaries did not bring this concept to Africa but rather found it already present in many different linguistic groups. Each group had its own name for and traditional theology regarding this God.

Second, the one God communicates with human beings through several layers of lesser deities and other spirits, including ancestors. They maintain a mediatory function, and they influence daily life among the people. These beings are highly respected and/or feared but not worshipped. Spirits may take on human form as needed. This feature of ATR found affinity with forms of Christianity that presented saints and angels as intermediaries.

The *third* feature common to most ATR is the role of the ancestors as mediators between their family and the lesser deities. People do not actually die; as spirits they continue to participate in a community's life, according to the level of respect they receive after they "die." An expensive funeral is often part of that respect.

The *fourth* feature is witchcraft. According to F. O. Awolalu, witches are humans who have very strong, determined wills with a diabolical bent. Witchcraft is understood as evil, as connected to evil spirits. When found out, people who practice witchcraft are punished. Traditional healers (formerly called witch doctors) fulfill the function of discerning who in a society is performing witchcraft and of bringing them to discipline. Traditional healers are also responsible for discerning the spiritual, social, and physical causes of illnesses. They use rituals and knowledge of herbs to provide cures.

When divorced from the spiritual rituals and other fetishes associated with them, many of the herbal cures are quite effective and scientifically sound. Medical missions found a ready audience for the presentation of the gospel by bringing together the spiritual and physical aspects of healing.

Many elements of Christianity were seen as somewhat compatible with ATR. However, the presentation of Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for sins does not fit into the theology of most ATR. Some African theologians are experimenting with presentations of Jesus that might generate greater compatibility.

See also Ancestors; Traditional Religions.

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AGNOSTICISM

See ATHEISM/AGNOSTICISM.

ALIENS AND SOJOURNERS

See CHURCH (ECCLESIOLOGY); ISRAEL.

ALTRUISM/NATURAL MORALITY

The role of natural morality in Christian tradition generally, and the Wesleyan tradition particularly, is complex, largely due to **Augustine's** anti-Pelagian writings. Pelagius, a British monk, supposedly taught that we already possess adequate natural resources to fulfill God's will and achieve what is good. Augustine thought this diminished the role of baptism in healing the will before properly desiring God and the Good.

John Wesley thought Augustine may have misinterpreted Pelagius. He did not defend **Pelagianism**; he questioned whether Pelagius truly taught Pelagianism. Behind Wesley's concern lay the rigid Augustinianism of certain kinds of Calvinism that almost always saw in Wesley a form of Pelagianism. Calvinism's insistence on total depravity, forensic justification, the denial of any human cooperation in salvation, and a doctrine of double predestination seemed to call into question natural morality altogether. If there is no good remaining in human nature, how could any natural morality be possible?

Augustine famously said pagan virtues were only splendid vices, which appears to make no room even for the natural morality of the ancients like Aristotle. But this is not Augustine's complete story. He also used the ancient virtue tradition to explain Christian morality, as did Wesley. Aristotle taught that every nature is given an end (purpose) and with it comes the natural means to achieve it. The end of human creatures is happiness, a natural moral end that includes friendship and fulfilling one's nature. Virtues are the cultivation of habits that give one the ability to achieve one's end. Because happiness is our end, we have the *natural* means to achieve it.

Aristotle's natural morality is called eudaemonistic, which is from the Greek term for "happiness." Although **Thomas Aquinas** found much to appreciate in Aristotle's eudaemonistic ethic, he also taught that our true end is friendship with God and that this cannot be achieved without supernatural grace. Nature is the presupposition for grace; grace comes and perfects a nature by supernatural virtues, gifts, and fruits from the Holy Spirit, and the beatitudes. But nature in itself can at best achieve only limited moral goods.

Later Catholic scholastic theology emphasized natural morality and divided it from the supernatural, arguing we have the natural means to achieve moral goods. Oddly enough, many see this as one of the origins of secularism. Toward the end of his life, Wesley worried about what this natural morality was doing, calling it nothing more than atheism ("The Unity of the Divine Being," *Works*, 7:270-71). Wesley also held to a eudaemonistic ethic and certainly had a place for a natural morality within God's gracious initiative. But for him, true morality requires happiness *and holiness*. That comes from the work of the Holy Spirit, to which the believer must freely respond.

See also **Fruit of the Spirit; Hospitality/Hospitality; Justice; Poverty; Rights, Human; Social Justice; Virtues; Works of Mercy.**

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ANABAPTISTS

The name Anabaptist (rebaptizer) identifies a number of similar "radical" movements emerging out of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. While there is no single historical source for these groups, the most prominent is the Swiss Brethren, which could be found in and around Zurich during the mid-1520s. Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz were leaders of an expanding group dissatisfied with the Zurich reforms initiated by Huldrych Zwingli. Persuaded that Zwingli was unwilling to follow the call to reform without compromising with the civil authorities, and increasingly influenced by more radical thinkers such as Thomas Müntzer and Andreas Karlstadt, they broke formally with Zwingli and the Zurich reform in January 1525. They publicly rebaptized believers on the basis of their confession of faith and created an independent congregation.

Because the Zurich reforms (as in all the magisterial **reformations**) were closely tied to civil authority, religious dissent was, by definition, civil dissent. As a result, arrests and prosecution (and persecution) of the Anabaptists soon followed. The Peasants War of 1525 also heightened fears of anarchy and the prospect of the breakdown of social order. The threat diminished civic tolerance for religious dissent. In 1534-35 a radical strain of Anabaptism tried to establish a spiritual kingdom (a New Jerusalem) in the city of Münster. The resulting social disorder, highlighted by introducing polygamy and practicing communism, validated general fears of the destructive effect of Anabaptist influence.

While the different streams of Anabaptism reflect a diversity of theological and political understanding, there are recurring themes that may serve generally to identify this tradition: (1) a common emphasis on personal faith and commitment to Christian discipleship (which forms the basis of adult baptism), (2) an affirmation of the church as a voluntary association of confessing disciples that recreate the primitive NT church, and (3) an expectation of lifestyle changes that reflect Christian commitment. Implicit in all three is an affirmation of the freedom of the will and the decisive role of human response to God.

While early Anabaptists (e.g., Hubmaier, Grebel) hoped for a civic Anabaptist reform, the negative experiences of Anabaptists quickly moved them to adopt a posture that opposed **secular** powers. Reflecting this self-understanding, and based on their experiences in the world, martyrdom and the expectation of persecution became part of the Anabaptist worldview. An ethic of peace also became a recurring theme.

The Anabaptist affirmation of the primary authority of Scripture is neither unique nor distinctive but is tied to their practice of an egalitarian and literal **hermeneutic**.

In the twentieth century a scholarly reconsideration of Anabaptist history and influence highlighted its significance since the sixteenth century in shaping Christian doctrine and practice. The Anabaptist tradition directly influenced **John Wesley** through his relationship with the **Moravians** and their witness to vital personal faith.

See also Church and State; Free Will; Moravians; Peacemaking; Persecution and Martyrdom; Radical Reformers.

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