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THE QUESTION OF METHOD IN THEOLOGY: AN AFRICAN RESPONSE TO  
BERNARD LONERGAN USING BANTU THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

A Thesis by

Andrew SIMPASA

Presented to

The Faculty of the

Jesuit School of Theology of

Santa Clara University

In partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

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Berkeley, California

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Committee Signatures

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Thomas Cattoi,                      Director                      Date

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## **Abstract**

### **The Question of Method in Theology: An African Response to Bernard Lonergan Using Bantu Theological Anthropology**

**By Andrew Simpasa**

The question of method in theology has become the locus of contemporary intercultural and cross-cultural theological investigations. For any theological system to claim credulity in the public opinion of theological discourse it must demonstrate credible methodological processes inherent in its epistemological process to affirm the validity of its knowledge claims. It is method in theology which is among the criteria used to evaluate the theological integrity of an epistemic system. This paper, therefore, endeavors to explain the existence of method(s) not only in discursive and formal theologies but also in the theologies of ordinary people and communities alike. The paper demonstrates this affirmation by way of bringing Lonergan's method in theology into conversation with African Bantu theology by contending that there is an inextricable link between epistemology and theology. Doctrines in theology are first and foremost subjects of revelation which are processed through a particular method. Hence, both Bernard Lonergan's method and Bantu cultural theological anthropology become legitimate sources of theological knowledge production.

Although both epistemic systems affirm the primacy of the consciousness of experience as the first starting point of theology they nevertheless differ in regard to function of theology and the operative process it uses to affirm its statement of faith. Whereas Lonergan's is individuated and highly speculative Bantu theology is relational, communitarian and overtly functional. Further, Lonergan's system contends that God can

be objectively known by way of authentic subjectivity. Bantu theology, in contrast, posits that God can be known and experienced through participation in the vital force of life.

In summary, this thesis contends that in the enterprise of theology there exists a multiplicity of epistemic systems and methodologies which serve specific purposes for a given theological enterprise. It is the foregoing that constitutes the scope, purpose and results of this study.

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**Thomas Cattoi, Director**

## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this work to my grandmother eBibi Rahab Namonje  
Who by wisdom of hindsight,  
I have now come to know and understand  
that she lived and practiced contextual theology  
far more than I could ever articulate it in these pages*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

- AI Artificial Intelligence
- ATRs African Traditional Religions
- DNA Deoxyribonucleic acid
- GS Gaudium et Spes
- SC Sacrosanctum Concilium
- SCCs Small Christian Communities



## 1.0 Introduction

In this paper I will investigate the existence of method in African theology by exploring the sources, articulation models, strategies and hermeneutics of African theology in general and Bantu theology in particular. I will use Bantu theological anthropology for purposes of developing my whole thesis and argument. In undertaking this exercise, I am operating from the premise that theology is rooted in a people's way of being, that, is their anthropological and culturally oriented worldview. My goal is to argue that African theology does follow some specific theological hermeneutics and method as it sets out to articulate anew the legacy of traditional theology. This epistemic system is rooted in the being of the Bantu people.

The epistemic system of the Bantu people follows the human cognitive structure of consciousness, which stems from the phases of experiencing, understanding, judgement and deciding. This epistemic system over relies more on the created world and historical consciousness than the alleged rationality premised on transcendental empiricism. Hence, in African theology, which is by and large communitarian in orientation, such a system as that of Bernard Lonergan, which relies on rationality to prove the existence of God, will be applicable to the world of experience.

Accordingly, John Mbiti divides African theologies into three categories, namely, "the written, the oral and the symbolic."<sup>1</sup> Since all Christian theology stands or falls at the person of Jesus, this paper will also include African theological conceptions of the person of Jesus using *ancestrology*<sup>2</sup> by employing some African theological

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<sup>1</sup> John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995), 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ancestrology* according to Gwinyai H. Muzorewa (1985,13) is the theological concept and belief in the active mediation of the ancestors as the guardians of individuals, families, and the community.

anthropological paradigm. African theology, according to Elias Bongmba “is critical analysis of thought and praxis that draws its subject matter and themes from Christian tradition and African World including but not limited to texts, artifacts, traditions, culture, and social and political experience of Africans.”<sup>3</sup>

Discussions around the issue of theological methodology in African theology emerged in the light of the post-colonial state in Africa in the 1960’s and the renewal spirit of Vatican II. Proponents of the retrieval of African theology emphasized the role of indigenous religions in the way of being of Africans. Much of the thrust of this model stemmed from a rejection of negative constructs imposed on African religions and theology by the colonial state. Among the early pioneers of this movement was Mulagwa Cikala who argued “that theologians should also employ indigenous ideas to adapt Christian theology in Africa.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984), religious expression stems from the "experience of the mystery of love and awe, and that pertains to the realm of transcendence, its foundations, its basic terms and relationships, its method is derived from the realm of interiority."<sup>5</sup> For Lonergan religious experience is fundamentally an “experience of an unconditioned and unrestricted being in love. But what we are in love with, remains something that we have to find out. When we find it out in the context of philosophy, there results a philosophy of God.”<sup>6</sup> Bernard Lonergan defines method as “a

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<sup>3</sup> Elias Kifon Bongmba, *African Theology*<sup>1</sup> in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, Wiley-Blackwell companions to religion (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 241.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: Published by University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1990), 114.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Philosophy of God, and Theology: The Relationship between Philosophy of God and the Functional Specialty, Systematics*, St. Michael’s lectures 1972 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), 51.

normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.”<sup>7</sup> For his part, Rausch understands theology as “an effort to bring the faith-experience of God and God’s grace to expression, clarity, and deeper understanding. It means asking questions, probing more deeply into our beliefs, trying to bring our sense for God...to more adequate levels of expression.”<sup>8</sup>

This thesis is divided into nine parts. After the introduction in part one, part two will discuss the centrality of method in theology. In part three, I will discuss the current debate on some aspects of theological anthropology, and how theological anthropology influences theological orientation. In part four, I will elaborate some African perspectives on human consciousness and Bantu world view. In part five I will explain the sources and strategies of African theology. In part six, I will discuss the Bantu theological vision that are inculturated in the liturgy of the Church. In part seven, I will outline some praxis in African culture and African Christian theology. In part eight, I will discuss Bernard Lonergan’s framework and its application to Bantu theological worldview. In part nine, I will conclude the discussion by positing some final insights from the study.

## **2.0 The Centrality of Method in Theology**

Methodological issues have become central in the conduct of theology because they often determine the theological positions that are made and transmitted. Further, in the light of the emergence of plurality of theologies which have challenged the alleged rationality and objectivity of classical theology and its attendant premises, theological

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<sup>7</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas P. Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2016), 1.

method has become an indispensable and legitimate indicator of the credibility of a theological enterprise and epistemic system. Mary Veeneman argues that “Theological method matters because it drives how theological questions are asked and the ways in which texts are read. How those are carried out will have a direct impact on one’s theological conclusions.”<sup>9</sup> She claims that method in theology is often understood in three ways namely “it can be understood as an art rather than a science; this view sees theology as something that doesn’t have a procedure. Another approach, though, is to treat theology as science.”<sup>10</sup> This view looks up to the sciences and imitates some notions derived from scientific epistemology. This model rests on the conviction that “while every person is truly historically and culturally conditioned in terms of the content of thought, the human mind nevertheless operates in identical ways in all cultures and at all periods of history.”<sup>11</sup> Third, according to Veeman, other theologians “often have to be content if their subject is included in a list not of sciences but of academic disciplines.”<sup>12</sup> Appreciation of the plurality of theology has been advanced by a growing awareness about the role of culture in the construction of theology. Stephen Bevans posits that “While we can say that the doing of theology by taking culture and social change in culture into account is a departure from the traditional or classical way of doing theology, a study of the history of theology will reveal that every authentic theology has been very much rooted in a particular context in some implicit or real way.”<sup>13</sup> This awareness that theology is rooted in the human experience has justified the need to explore

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<sup>9</sup> Mary M. Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method: A Survey of Contemporary Theologians and Approaches* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev. and expanded ed., Faith and cultures series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 105.

<sup>12</sup> Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method*, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 7.

methodological issues of how theological ideas are conceived, articulated and communicated. Veeneman says, on this score that “A theology that starts with the idea of God and the Word of God is going to say quite different things from a theology that starts with human cultural experience.”<sup>14</sup> Such views and theological orientation have revolutionized theology by acknowledging that the discipline is by and large done not only formally by members of academia in their ivory towers but also discursively by ordinary people who essentially are the majority of the wielders of culture. Bevans acknowledges this fact and hence he asserts that “as our cultural and historical context plays a part in the construction of the reality in which we live, so our context influences the understanding of God and the expression of our faith.”<sup>15</sup> Hence exploring the implications of a theological method is a legitimate strategy to demonstrate the sources, epistemic systems and claims of theologies.

A number of methodological approaches to theology have emerged since the advent of contextual theology. Theologians such as Bevans have proposed six broad methodological models for the conduct of what might be considered theology. These models are, the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcendental model and the countercultural model. Thomas Cattoi, amongst others, explains two models, among those proposed by Bevans, as the “the translation model, which distinguishes a “core” Christian message from its linguistic articulation, and sets out to translate the meaning of doctrines into different cultural contexts, to the anthropological model, which views scripture and tradition as themselves

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<sup>14</sup> Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

culturally conditioned.”<sup>16</sup> These models affirm their precursors (ancestors, if you like) like the Lonerganian understanding that theology mediates meaning “between religious experience and culture.”<sup>17</sup> Rahner makes a similar observation about the purpose of theology, when he says “for we are dealing with an assertion which allows God, the reality about whom theology speaks, to be present where man feels at home and in the only place where he feels competent: in the world and not in heaven.”<sup>18</sup> Pope John Paul made a similar assertion when he said “ History therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity. God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday life, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves.”<sup>19</sup>

The future of the Church on the African continent is inextricably bound up with its engagement and conversation with the theology of the African peoples. My argument is that African religion can provide meaning and theological insights, in the broader theological framework and context within which the current Christian theological discourse on the continent can develop and grow. I agree with Gwinyai Muzorewa’s postulation on this score that “a theology that incorporates basic concepts of the tradition and is congenial to African beliefs will be more relevant to the needs of Africans than a theology expressed in borrowed concepts.”<sup>20</sup> Justin Ukpong , like Muzorewa, contends

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Cattoi, *Why Read The Church Fathers? Teaching Nicaea As Contextual Theology* in Eduardo Fernández and Deborah Ross, *Doing Theology as If People Mattered: Encounters in Contextual Theology*, None edition. (Herder & Herder, 2019), 54.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 179–180.

<sup>19</sup> “Fides et Ratio (14 September 1998) | John Paul II,” accessed March 26, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).

<sup>20</sup> Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1985), 18.

that “It thus becomes clear that transmitting the Christian message without taking all these (traditional concepts and ideas in African religion) into account is likely to produce only ephemeral and superficial results.”<sup>21</sup> Hence all theologies are culturally bound and conditioned. This is not to negate the fact that “all cultures have both universal as well as particular elements. That is why cultures are both open and closed systems, and it is what permits cultural interaction and cultural borrowing.”<sup>22</sup> In this regard, all cultures have their own theological method as they engage in the theological enterprise.

The Church, at Vatican II, realized all too well the essence of method in theology, when it noted that, “Recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which effect life and which demand new theological investigations.... theologians, within the requirements and methods proper to theology, are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to people of their times...”<sup>23</sup> Methods in theology, therefore must necessarily involve such processes as “gathering evidence; understanding, marshaling, and weighing evidence; making judgements and evaluating their truth; and deciding to act.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Lonergan, the ultimate goal of theology is conversion and not the development of proofs about theological doctrines (religious truths). On this point, Lonergan notes that, “systematic theology is aware that its understanding remains imperfect, analogous, and no more than probable.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, systematic theology

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<sup>21</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*, Spearhead no. 80 (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, AMECEA Pastoral Institute, 1984), 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Second vatican Council, “Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on The Church,” October 17, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>24</sup> Todd A Salzman and Michael G Lawler, “Method and Catholic Theological Ethics in the Twenty-First Century,” *Theological Studies* 74, no. 4 (December 2013): 903–933.

<sup>25</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 349.

ought to concern itself with an orderly arrangement of its proposition in a manner that is, as Lonergan describes, “responsible, intelligible and reasonable.”<sup>26</sup> African theology meets this triple litmus test in its articulation of its faith deposits in so far as they are rooted in the experience of the people. Of course, a significant disjuncture emerges on account of the fact that African theology places a high and unusually accentuated role on the communal dimension of responsibility, intelligibility and reasonability. In the latter part of my project, I will compare and contrast the method in African theology with Bernard Lonergan’s method in theology and show how they both lead to conversion, love and cosmic harmony as the ultimate ends and purposes of all theology.

In conducting this study, I am fully aware of the diverse reality of Africa and the existence of multiple African theologies. I endeavor, nonetheless, to anchor this study in Bantu theological anthropology. The Bantu linguistic grouping is a broad ethnic group that stretches from the Cameroonians highlands of Central Africa to the tip of Southern Africa. I want to stress my awareness of the fact that African theology and black theology are distinct intellectual enterprises. According to Emmanuel Martey, the two “are different not only in terms of their histories but also in terms of their emphases. Insofar as Africanization or indigenization is identified as the theme of the first, with an emphasis on culture, and liberation is identified as the theme of the second, with an emphasis on politics, the two remain dissimilar although not contradictory.”<sup>27</sup> In fact Bénézet Bujo, the Congolese Moral theologian argues that “the whole tradition of Black Africa treats religion as something

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>27</sup> Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1993), 27.



essentially liberating. This dimension of liberation persists through all social, political and economic changes.”<sup>28</sup>

Because of the pluralistic dimension of African theologies, I am conscious of the challenges involved in the articulation of a unitary broad African methodology that would be hermeneutically and procedurally congruent with Lonergan’s. Indeed, the African theologian Nyamiti, "recognizes that there are several approaches to theology within Africa, for cultural divergences make for a plurality of theologies.”<sup>29</sup> These differences arise from cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity. However, despite these differences, “there is an overriding common denominator that binds the whole continent together”<sup>30</sup>: *ancestrology* as a theological notion and category. I believe that *ancestrology* can serve as a solid premise for the construction and development of an African systematic theology. In this regard, it falls squarely into the ambit of transcendental theology as it “sheds light on the...idea of life-after-death and the communion of saints.”<sup>31</sup>

This study is circumscribed to African traditional theology and African Christian theology. That is, the encounters and cross-roads of Christianity with traditional African religion. This invariably, by way of proceeding, excludes hermeneutical approaches of other faith persuasions. Hence, the propositions considered will be from African theologians who have made attempts to chart an African theology. These theologians have argued that, “African religion has both concepts and institutions that may be used to throw light on certain aspects of theological issues. These points of contact provide the avenues

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<sup>28</sup> Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Faith and cultures series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1992), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Martey, *African Theology*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 19.

for developing a theology of African color.”<sup>32</sup> I wish to argue that some typically African aspects and notions about life such as “concepts of humankind, the world, destiny, about God and the sacred”<sup>33</sup> could be used in informing and constructing an African Christian theology.

In the course of this study, I use Bantu theological anthropology and cosmology, as well as Bantu reflections on Christology and *ancestrology*, to demonstrate the extent to which it is possible to develop African theology and hermeneutics. Engaging in a conversation with Bernard Lonergan’s theological method, I will show that Bantu African theology share some similarities and dissimilarities alike, in the Lonerganian fourfold structure of experience, understanding, judgement and deciding, and as such can also develop into a full-fledged theological method supporting an inculturated doctrinal expression of the Christian faith.

This study will focus mainly on Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology* and compare his transcendental approach to the claims of African Bantu theology. Other works that support or question the existence of method in African theology will be consulted. The study will employ a descriptive/comparative approach. After comparing and contrasting Lonergan’s and African Bantu theology’s approaches, I will evaluate the two various approaches and state their convergencies and divergences.

This study is significant on account of three primary reasons. First, it contributes to a renewed awareness of the centrality of theological method. Second, it seeks to lend legitimacy to notion of intercultural hermeneutics and intersubjectivity in the field of theology. Third, the study serves to underscore the value of contextual theology and cross-

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<sup>32</sup> Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

cultural hermeneutics by bringing into conversation Western and African theological approaches.

If all theology is as, with St. Anselm of Canterbury (1109) defines it, as "faith seeking understanding" then all theology must embrace some form of method in retrieving and expressing its doctrines and articles of faith. However, as human society evolves into more complex societies facing a varied complex social reality, the need to articulate this faith in a more coherent and systematic way emerges on account of the ever expanding, in spiral form, of human consciousness. The shift from mere spiritual speculation about faith affirmations to a somewhat methodological and systematic approach along the lines of the scientific method becomes mandatory. Pope John Paul II on this score is of the view,

Theology is structured as an understanding of faith in the light of a twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With the first, theology makes its own the content of Revelation as this has been gradually expounded in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church's living Magisterium. With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative enquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought.<sup>34</sup>

Add to this the emergence of the scientific method, theologians have been thrust with the responsibility to affirm theological premises along the lines of an analytic and empirical enterprise. Hence, critical reflection becomes necessary to reinterpret beliefs of faith in the light of new contexts, new perceptions, and the tension wrought on beliefs by emergent and more developed tools of questioning. It is on these premises that the early proponents of African theology, such as Tharcisse Tshibangu lamented the overarching role of Aristotelian categories on theology such that it obviated the existence of local

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<sup>34</sup> "Fides et Ratio (14 September 1998) | John Paul II," accessed March 26, 2020, 65c [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).

theologies. Tshibangu, then President of the University and Bishop of Kinshasa “criticized the dominant role imposed on theological discourse by Aristotelian categories because such an approach neglected the synthetic, existential, and holistic worldview of Africans.”<sup>35</sup>

Mudimbe, too has contributed immensely on the need to ground African theology into the realm of African experience and worldview. He says that there is a disguised comparison between “the scientific dignity of historical, exegetical, and philosophical methods which traditionally have been faithful auxiliary sciences of the western practice of theology and on the other hand, the vague and shifting methodological principles of anthropological knowledge invoked by African theologians.”<sup>36</sup>

Although the core of religious expression stems from the "experience of the mystery of love and awe, and that pertains to the realm of transcendence, its foundations, its basic terms and relationships, its method is derived from the realm of interiority."<sup>37</sup> Rausch understands theology as, “an effort to bring the faith-experience of God and God’s grace to expression, clarity, and deeper understanding. It means asking questions, probing more deeply into our beliefs, trying to bring our sense for God...to more adequate levels of expression.”<sup>38</sup> In this regard, theology should be understood as the continuous reinterpretation of statements of faith in the light of new realities. This process of reinterpretation requires a hermeneutical approach which is immersed in the faith

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<sup>35</sup> Bongmba, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 242.

<sup>36</sup> V. Y. Mudimbe, *Parables and Fables: Exegesis, Textuality, and Politics in Central Africa* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 66.

<sup>37</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 114.

<sup>38</sup> Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 1.

tradition. At this juncture, a renewed approach to systematic theology becomes ever more necessary to articulate the faith tradition in more meaningful ways.

According to John Parrat, “theology throughout Africa finds its common ground in three basic elements- in the bible and Christian tradition, in African culture and religion, and in the contemporary sociopolitical situation.”<sup>39</sup> On this score, subject to the theologian's context, a different theological perspective about a particular emphasis will need to be applied to each specific context. On account of the complex heritage of the theological reality in Africa, as stated above, African theology, it has been argued, has developed in two different stages. According to Mushete, “Theology in Africa has developed in two stages ‘the theology of adaptation’ and ‘critical theology.’”<sup>40</sup> With regard to approaches, it should be pointed out that the practioners of "the former have from the beginning paid more attention to formal theological methodology, and some, for example, Nyamiti, have gone to some lengths to explicate their theoretical approach to doing theology.”<sup>41</sup> I argue that despite this two-stage formation of African theology, in both approaches it has always been overtly important to understand the theological breadth, depth and length of African religions.

There is no a satisfactory definition of what constitutes systematic theology. Rausch posits that "Systematic theology, sometimes called constructive theology, dogmatic theology, or systematics (Lonergan), seeks to understand and render more intelligible the central doctrines of the faith and show how they are related to each other.”<sup>42</sup> A key attribute of systematic theology is that it is comprehensive in approach in that “it uses

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<sup>39</sup> Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>42</sup> Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 5.

inter-disciplinary intersubjectivity, by this, it tends to incorporate the data of biblical, historical, and doctrinal theology.”<sup>43</sup> Bernard Lonergan and Tracy’s approach to theology shares some common aspects with Nyamiti’s method, which “seeks to unite three distinct approaches to theology, which he calls the pastoral, the apologetic, and the pedagogical.”<sup>44</sup> Nyamiti’s three elements of theology are analogous to Tracy’s three publics of theology. Hence, I notice a large intersectionality between the transcendental approach to theology as beheld by Lonergan, Rahner and Tracy with the anthropological approach as espoused by Nyamiti. This is in respect with the audiences and the arena in the conduct of theology.

In contrast to Rausch, Bernard Lonergan argues that systematic theology (systematics) exists as a distinct functional specialty which also happens to be the seventh stage in the theological epistemic system. Lonergan claims systematics is, "concerned with promoting an understanding of the realities affirmed in the previous specialty, doctrines."<sup>45</sup> Lonergan, is of the view that systematic theology does not deal with theological data, but rather theological truths. Clarifying this grandiose claim by Lonergan is important. He comes from a long tradition of Catholic theologians, among them Augustine, Aquinas, et al. who claim that "God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, for Lonergan doctrines of faith are truths which are the object of systematic theology. He does make a distinction between church doctrines and theological doctrines, though, by saying that, “church doctrines are the content of the church’s witness to Christ; they express the set of meanings and values that

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>44</sup> Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 335.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 338.

inform individual and collective Christian living. Theological doctrines are part of an academic discipline, concerned to know and understand the Christian tradition and to further its development.”<sup>47</sup>

Loneran is alive to the fact that systematic theology is not a static methodological approach but rather a dynamic model of dealing with affirmations of faith. He is of the view that there exists a dialectic between theological claims in the here and now and their corresponding future claims. So, “there will be a brief indication of the manner in which a later systematic will continue, develop, revise earlier work.”<sup>48</sup> He contends that “theology has been conceived as reflection on religion and, indeed, in the present age as a highly differentiated and specialized reflection.”<sup>49</sup> Hence it utilizes complex processes in the gathering of religious truths and their attendant communication. In Bernard Lonergan's framework, systematic theology is depicted as a field and subject proceeding by way of “functional specializations.”<sup>50</sup> He lists eight functional specialties as follows: “(1) research, (2) interpretation, (3) history, (4) dialectic, (5) foundations, (6) doctrines, (7) systematics, and (8) communications.”<sup>51</sup> . For Lonergan, theology as a whole has eight specializations. Systematic theology is but one of the functional specialties or simply put a phase or stage in the theological epistemic system. Lonergan explains these stages as follows:

After *research*, which assembles the data thought relevant, and *interpretation*, which ascertains their meaning, and *history*, which finds meanings incarnate in deeds and movements, and *dialectic*, which investigates the conflicting conclusions of historians, interpreters, researchers, and *foundations*, which objectifies the horizon effected by intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, and *doctrines*, which uses

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 127.

foundations as a guide in selecting from the alternatives presented by dialectic, and *systematics*, which seeks an ultimate clarification of the meaning of doctrine, there finally comes our present concern with the eight functional specialty, *communications*.<sup>52</sup>

Lonergan argues that these stages are indispensable to the conduct of theology to the extent that, "without the first seven stages... there is no fruit to be borne, but without the last, the first seven are in vain, for they fail to mature."<sup>53</sup> Lonergan's system of conducting systematic theology is so interwoven that it establishes a complex whole of which every stage feeds into the next. It should be pointed out that these stages, though they are eight, in effect operate in two successive phases of four levels. It is understood that, the first half of the schema "research, interpretation, history, and dialectic, the four functions... could conceivably be carried out by an unbeliever, or at least without involving the theologian's personal commitment."<sup>54</sup> The last four stages of foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications, "is an articulation of his/her (theologian) personal stance..."<sup>55</sup>. On this score, "No repetition of formulas can take the place of understanding. For it is understanding alone that can say what it grasps in any of the manners demanded by the almost endless series of different audiences."<sup>56</sup> "Understanding," in Lonergan's framework, is important as it generates a degree of conscious satisfaction to the subject and audience.

According to Lonergan, the object of theology is conversion and not proofs about theological doctrines (religious truths). Lonergan points out that, "systematic theology is

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Frederick E. Crowe, *Method in Theology: An Organon for Our Time*, The 1980 Pere Marquette theology lecture (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 1980), 35.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 351.



aware that its understanding remains imperfect, analogous, and no more than probable.”<sup>57</sup>

To this end the approach in Lonergan’s theology, though with some semblance of the scientific method, is nevertheless limited to the world of probabilistic statements. I add on this score, as a slight departure from Lonergan, that the approach of systematic theology, as a generic discipline of the theological discourse, despite employing analytics in its methodology, does not necessarily follow the antecedents of logical demonstration of self-evident truths. Systematic Theology deals primarily with the transcendent.

Therefore, systematic theology ought to concern itself with an orderly arrangement of its proposition in a manner that is, as Lonergan describes “responsible, intelligible and reasonable.”<sup>58</sup> Lonergan, suggests that method in theology is “spontaneous yet free, invites and leads us, when we are face to face with the experiences of life, not only to attend to those real life experiences fully but also to seek to grasp their meaning.”<sup>59</sup>

African theology meets this triple litmus test in its articulation of its articles of faith in so far as they are rooted in life of experience of the Bantu people. Bénézet Bujo, lists the three cardinal aspirations of African theology as “promotion of life, life as unity and the special place of the ancestors.”<sup>60</sup> Although Orobator agrees with Bujo’s observation regarding the three fundamentals of African theology, he nonetheless lists them as life, service and solidarity. From the above, I conclude that there is a significant disjuncture in methodological approaches to theology between Bernard Lonergan and African Bantu

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>59</sup> Vernon Gregson, *The Desire To Know: Intellectual Conversion* in Vernon Gregson, ed., *The Desires of the Human Heart: An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 16.

<sup>60</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 18–23.

theology. It is notable that African theology places attention on the communal dimension of responsibility, intelligibility and reasonability, if we are to use Lonergan's categories.

African theology utilizes, with vast application in its theological enterprise, Christian and Islamic Scriptures, (the Bible and the Quran), the created world and the historical consciousness of the African people. The study of scripture as a theological enterprise stems from a realization that scripture is part and parcel of God's self-revelation.

However, this revelation is not necessarily literal but is inferred, due to human subjectivity, and because it is done through the medium of human experience, culture and language, which is among many signs and symbols of God's self-disclosure.

Notwithstanding this fact, according to Muzorewa "The most important document that missionaries brought to Africa was the Bible. No other document has done more to influence the character of African Christianity and its theology."<sup>61</sup>

According to Sandra Schneiders, "language is our highest form of symbol making as well as our most refined instrument of interpretation. It is the medium of both understanding and expression, and therefore it is not surprising that metaphorically attribute speech to anything we experience as symbolic."<sup>62</sup> That is, scripture is not synonymous with God, but rather it is but one of the means through which God chooses to reveal his divine self to humanity. There are several contentious positions regarding which would be the most appropriate hermeneutical approach to give the best inference to interpreting the scriptures. For example, Gina Hens-Piazza contends that, in the field of hermeneutics, "the foremothers of feminist studies taught us to be wary of texts and

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<sup>61</sup> Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 26–27.

<sup>62</sup> Sandra Marie Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999), 37.

interpretations that subjugate women or use them to promote a supposedly grand political or theological vision.”<sup>63</sup> My concern with such approaches is that they approach the discipline of theology with a framework of suspicion otherwise simply known as the “hermeneutics of suspicion.” That is theology is viewed with not necessary a critical approach but rather with suspicion as a tool for an undisclosed agenda. Such an approach to theology is objected by Pope John Paul who contends, in contrast “A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research, ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical enquiry.”<sup>64</sup> Of course, given the history of imperialism, and colonization riding the theological horse, one would not entirely blame such a theological approach. Theological imperialism has tended to dominate the global theological discourse ever since theology became a formal and an academic discipline, with a tendency to over rely on Neoplatonism and Aristotelian categories. Nonetheless, other theologians, particularly those of the Catholic tradition, among them Pope John Paul II, laud such an approach, that it establishes the dynamic balance of faith and reason in the discourse of theology. Pope John Paul II argues that “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Gina Hens-Piazza, “Forms of Violence and the Violence of Forms: Two Cannibal Mothers before a King (2 Kings 6:24-33),” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14, no. 2 (1998): 91–104.

<sup>64</sup> “Fides et Ratio (14 September 1998) | John Paul II,” accessed March 26, 2020, no. 33c [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

Hermeneutics of suspicion have a tendency to undertake a deconstruction of theological claims with the view of unmasking the power dynamics and the agenda of theological claims. It argues “that words may not always mean what they seem to mean. Some forms of expression, such as allegory and irony, depend of this fact.”<sup>66</sup> Feminist theology, Liberation theology and Political theology have a tendency to employ the hermeneutics of suspicion in their way of conducting theology. Such theologies pose three principle questions to any theological claim(s). That is “Who is doing this theology?”, “Why are they doing this theology?” and “For what and for whom?” It views theology as deeply rooted in the distribution of power and authority, which power and authority is meant to suppress marginalized communities and hence perpetuate the dominant world view. David Jasper aptly posits that, “On the other hand, we may come to read a text with caution, even skepticism, determined to test every claim and proposition against such humanly defined standards as the light of reason or the evidence of history.”<sup>67</sup> This we call a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion,’ and it has characterized most (though not all) thinking about hermeneutics in the past three or four hundred years.”<sup>68</sup> The hermeneutics of suspicion have the ultimate goal of negating all theologies that are not liberative and empowering, hence hold people or sections of humanity in subjugation. For example Feminist approaches which are categorized among the hermeneutics of Suspicion “make no pretense to objectivity; it challenges the notion of universals; it is

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<sup>66</sup> Christopher Bryan, *The Hermeneutic of Suspicion* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), accessed March 26, 2020, <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199336593.001.0001/acprof-9780199336593-chapter-4>.

<sup>67</sup> David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 9–10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

more interested in relevance than in so-called absolute truth.”<sup>69</sup> This approach therefore insists that each community, including women, be accorded an opportunity to name their respective theological experience as opposed to having this experience written and named by an outsider. Hence when it comes to reading of theological texts, a critical approach of reading between the lines of a theological claim is preferred rather than a literal approach. Here in lies the strength of such hermeneutics, despite the paradox that it employs mistrust at first contact, first value and first sight.

It is thus important to define what is meant by theological hermeneutics or at least what is all about. David Jaspers posits that “It is about “interpretation” or even “translation,” and especially the interpretation of sacred texts, which believers may understand as in some sense divinely inspired or “the word of God.””<sup>70</sup> Hermeneutics as a discipline encompasses strategies of literary interpretations that can be deployed to uncover the meanings of a sacred text. It is often a painstaking process that requires deconstructing the text and reassembling it in parts that are meaningful both to the theologian and his/ her audience. However, the process of interpretation is often complex. It does happen that what might be clear and apparent to the theologian might not be clear and apparent to his audience. That is, “Some texts that we find deeply meaningful can seemingly have no meaning at all for other readers.”<sup>71</sup> Sandra Schneiders, on this score, contends that, “ Around the expression “word of God” clusters a collection of interrelated theological terms such as revelation, inspiration, authority, infallibility, inerrancy, and

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<sup>69</sup> Danna Nolan Fewell, *Reading The Bible Ideologically: Feminist Criticism* in Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, Rev. and expanded. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 269.

<sup>70</sup> Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

normativity that are understood in radically different ways by believers in various traditions.”<sup>72</sup> The interpretation of sacred texts has also an anthropological dimension. It is in our nurture as human beings to ask relevant questions until we attain some reasonable meaning or appropriation of the text. According to Schneiders, “At the center and intersection of nature and history stands the human being in and through whose interpretive activity being achieves meaning. Nothing is truly symbolic unless it is interpreted, unless its meaning is grasped in understanding.”<sup>73</sup> Hermeneutics is critical to the enterprise of theology because “it is in our interpreting that all of reality becomes truly expressive.”<sup>74</sup> As such, hermeneutics is not limited to academic and discursive approaches but also to the interpretation of ordinary human experience. This necessitates that theology be conceived as culturally conditioned and contextual in practice. According to Stephen Bevans “Theology that is contextual realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms, and so forth are to be considered, along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression.”<sup>75</sup> This perspective has remodeled how we envision theology. Henceforth theology is viewed as having three sources, namely “scripture, tradition, and present human experience or context.”<sup>76</sup> This approach has drastically changed the nature of theological insights, that is “while classical theology understood theology as something objective, contextual theology understands theology as something unabashedly subjective.”<sup>77</sup> Hence, as noted by Oduyoye “Just as they had

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<sup>72</sup> Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

transmitted history orally, Africans retold these stories, elaborating them and drawing out what struck them as particularly relevant and enduring.”<sup>78</sup>

Theological method is at the heart of a “faith-seeking understanding.” Given the vast array of sources of theology, it becomes abundantly clear that ordinary women and men are able to undertake theological reflection as much as educated scholars. As Bevans notes “When human experience, world events, culture, and cultural change are taken as *loci theologici*, one can ask whether theology is always to be done formally or discursively.”<sup>79</sup>

David Tracy has also weighed in on the discourse of method in theology. His thesis regarding method in theology is contained in his major work, *Analogical Imagination*. He premises his project on the fundamental that “all theology is public discourse.”<sup>80</sup> This insight by Tracy has its foundations in Lonergan’s epistemology, who argues “Human knowledge, then, is not some individual possession but rather a common fund, from which each may draw by believing, to which each may contribute in the measure that he performs his cognitional operations properly and reports their results accurately.”<sup>81</sup> Tracy argues “if any human being, if any religious thinker or theologian, produces some classical expression of the human spirit on a particular journey in a particular tradition, that person discloses permanent possibilities for human existence both private and communal.”<sup>82</sup> By this thesis, Tracy argues that theology is done in a social context. That

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<sup>78</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1986), 45.

<sup>79</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 17.

<sup>80</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 7.

<sup>81</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2d ed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 43.

<sup>82</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 14.

is any theological classic “is always public, never private.”<sup>83</sup> This position is in many respects similar to Bénézet Bujo, the African theologian who argues that African theology is always done in a social context. In a sense, theology emerges out of social groups and their dynamics. He argues “If one is concerned to show the public status of all theology, it becomes imperative first to study the reference groups, the “publics” of the theologian.”<sup>84</sup> The second foundation of his argument is what he refers to as, “the rise of historical consciousness among theologians.”<sup>85</sup> This historical consciousness is premised on grounds that theology and religion, just like the sciences and the humanities, occur through space and time. They are a product of their own milieus. In light of these foundations Tracy and Lonergan, surmise that it is the task of theology and religion to, “ask and respond to such fundamental questions of the meaning of and truth of our existence as human beings in solitude, and in society, history and the cosmos.”<sup>86</sup> In responding to such theological questions “each theologian addresses three distinct and related social realities; the wider society, the academy and the church.”<sup>87</sup> To the extent possible Tracy’s theological framework is more a sociological perspective toward the theological enterprise. Consequently, he logically lays a case for the affirmation that, “behind the pluralism of theological conclusions lies a pluralism of public roles and publics as reference groups for theological discourse.”<sup>88</sup> What happens when theologians ignore such critical foundations of theology? Tracy contends that, “to refuse to face the complexity of the social reality of the theologian may prove as damaging as an earlier

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 5.



theological generation's refusal to face historical consciousness."<sup>89</sup> It is apparent that Tracy offers an important portrait and context in the conduct of theology. For Tracy, theology is a process and not an event. In the process of theologizing, we ought to pay particular attention to how various social groups, what he refers as "publics," both generate and articulate their respective theologies. However, he does raise a caveat with regard to the conduct of theology to the effect that, theologians should ensure that theological "arguments are in principle open to all intelligent, reasonable and responsible persons."<sup>90</sup> This requirement which Tracy raises goes to confirm that he premises his theological thoughts and framework on the transcendental theological tradition of Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner. Tracy's major difference from Lonergan, is that he argues that theological affirmations proceed solely by way of analogy and not by way of a transcendental dynamism. Simply put, Tracy understands theology as proceeding by way of mirror and image. The objective image is God, and humanity is the mirror, which then attempts to give the image the best inference and explanation by way of analogy that is, which seeks to reproduce the image by way of analogy. Hence theology, in attempting to grasp the image embarks on a theological enterprise by way of analogy, that is by contrasting and comparing while asking relevant questions until they are satisfactorily answered. After which the theologian proceeds to another analogy. Lonergan, however, would contend that the mirror and the image are diffused, with the mirror being the extension of the image.

Although there is clear merit in David Tracy's argument, in particular the epistemological foundations of his hermeneutical framework and the insistence that the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

conduct of theology should be accountable to the three publics, one might also contend with the adequacy of his framework. To what extent does the conduct of theology attain this triple differentiation in publics? Is it not a fact of reality that the three publics that he truncates are in reality, and in many cases, have common intersections? Take for instance the conduct of theology in a secular university. It may happen that the theologians conducting theology, might as well be confessional theologians as well as professional theologians. In short, where does Tracy draw the limits of each “public” in the conduct of theology? While I agree that all theological claims ought to be intelligent, reasonable and responsible by way of being accountable to their respective publics, there are clear cases where certain claims made by specific theologians are rejected by others? This can be seen if we consider the doctrine of the Trinity, which was highly divisive in the early church. In such a case, who do we consider as the legitimate adjudicator of theological claims and postulations. Another example, the current theological method, which embraces the role of ancestors and the natural world as profound sources of theological insights, of which members of the theological academia scorn as mere romanticizing of anthropomorphism.

The hermeneutical process in most African theologies embraces the role of culture and family, that is the social public, as an overriding framework for the theological enterprise as opposed to the academia and the Church. David Tracy’s three publics of theology argument is broad enough to cater to some sub-groups in each public. My project regarding theological method is congruently similar to Tracy’s, although I am introducing the novelty of theology as a culture, a way of being of a people. This is precisely the premise of African Theology.

Given the aforementioned, what would I recommend as the definitive hermeneutical principles and criteria of evaluation of scripture or theological data? My argument is that there is no one single overarching theological hermeneutical school that establishes the best strategy for interpreting and explaining a theological text. The best hermeneutical approach to explain a theological experience lies squarely on the objectives of the theological undertaking. What are the primary sources of theology in the light of our current human consciousness? Veenem notes “Some theologians will argue that the biblical text alone should inform theological work. Others will argue that creation itself or philosophy and the natural and social sciences are important sources for theological work.”<sup>91</sup> At best, it is recommended to use multi-disciplinary approaches in interpreting theological data. In summary, therefore, I would recommend that the best method in biblical interpretation is a hermeneutical approach that utilizes a diversity of methods in arriving at its theological goals. Be that as it may, this undertaking must be open to the working and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Spirit of truth, freedom and wonder. This is not withstanding the fact that “a good theological method is a necessary starting point for good theological work, theologians who have not thought about methodology do not have a solid ground on which to build their theological work.”<sup>92</sup> In sum, from the perspective of theological method, there are three broader epistemological approaches: the rational perspective, the creation-centered perspective and the social-historical perspective, with the third being a blend of the two former perspectives.

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<sup>91</sup> Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

### 3.0 Theological Anthropology of the Self and the Person

Theological anthropology refers to a specific people's consciousness of God which is culturally expressed in local terms and symbols. It is a specific people's notions of the origins of the world and life which are essential in their respective formulation of theological insights and meaning. The self-understanding or conceptualization of origins of the human person forms an essential dimension of theological anthropology. How we see and understand ourselves as human beings has an implication on how we understand God and vice versa. It also has a bearing on how we see and treat the other(s) person(s). Jean Gebser makes a notable observation regarding modern anthropology, that "the predominant question is no longer the theological man versus God, but the anthropological man versus man. This reduction and leveling, man's questioning of his relationship to himself and his surrounding, is the basis of all sociology."<sup>93</sup> It must be stated however that theological anthropology and natural science have a fundamentally different understanding of the human person. In this chapter, I will bring to the fore current debates on the understanding of the human person both by the discipline of science and the enterprise of theology and sociology. The purpose of this section is to answer the question: What is the human person?

According to Irenaeus of Lyon (A.D 200) "human beings were originally created in a bodily condition and will attain the perfection of that condition in the eschatological restoration and renewal of the whole creation in Christ."<sup>94</sup> Hence, throughout the centuries, Christianity has tended to split the human person in the categories of the body

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<sup>93</sup> Georg Feuerstein and Jean Gebser, *Structures of Consciousness: The Genius of Jean Gebser--an Introduction and Critique* (Lower Lake, Calif: Integral Publishing, 1987), 140.

<sup>94</sup> Patout J. Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, Sources of early Christian thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 2.

and the soul, at least after the first few centuries of the early Church. In Christian anthropology, Burns argues that “ the freedom of self-determination to good or evil, which is the inalienable divine image implanted in humanity at its creation, stands as the foundation of this anthropology.”<sup>95</sup> In contrast, Odoyuye opines that “the traditional themes of God, creation, sin and redemption are emphasized in African theology.”<sup>96</sup> There is an overarching belief in African theology that universal harmony can only be guaranteed if human beings participate to the degree they can in observing and respecting the universal order of creation. This creation has within it visible and invisible vital forces which should be acknowledged in one form or another through appropriate behavior and conduct. Hence, according to Nyamiti, “One form of existence, when considered isolated without relation to other forms or beings, is seen to be incomplete and unauthentic.”<sup>97</sup>

For Lonergan, however, being a human person involves primarily and first of all the notion of identity. According to Vernon Gregson “Identity itself means, in some sense, oneness, and Lonergan renders that sense technically precise, employing his analysis of the components of human knowing to do so.”<sup>98</sup> Lonergan claims that human desire is a primal ontological feature of human nature. Therefore, in Lonergan’s framework of theology, the human person’s intentionality and human desire are at par. Human desire is driven by the need to achieve something or reach a desired goal without which the individual shall remain restless. Because we have consciousness, we are

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>96</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

<sup>97</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 55.

<sup>98</sup> William P. Loewe, *Jesus, the Son of God* in Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 189.

endowed with awareness or we long for something. In this regard, he is of the view that the consciousness of the human spirit exists in four phases. He says that “the many levels of our consciousness are just successive stages in the unfolding of a single thrust, the *eros* of the human spirit.”<sup>99</sup> On this account our body and our human spirit are attuned towards desire. Vernon Gregson, similarly, says, “The desires and longings we have for what is beautiful, for what makes sense, for what is true, for what has value, and for what has ultimate value are at the heart of what it means to be human.”<sup>100</sup>

The issue of human freedom and the human spirit is central to Christian anthropology. In Christian anthropology “the exercise of this autonomy for good may be enhanced or encumbered by environmental factors whose actual influence, however, depends upon the individual’s own prior consent.”<sup>101</sup> With regard to theological cultural precepts, it can be stated that “cultural orientations actually gain power over a person only through his free consent, which appropriates and internalizes them.”<sup>102</sup> The human spirit is pitched into four dimensions: the socio-cultural existential reality, the existential physical environment, the historical consciousness of its being and, finally, its autonomy and tendency to be open to transcendence. This tends to impel the spirit towards transcendence. On this score, according to Burns, “Christian Platonism identifies the divine image in humanity not as the autonomy of self-determination but as rationality, the human capacity for knowledge of God.”<sup>103</sup> In Christian anthropology, the rational human spirit and human capacity for knowledge of God “finds a connaturality between the

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<sup>99</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2d ed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), xix.

<sup>100</sup> Gregson, *Theological Method and Theological Collaboration II* in Vernon Gregson, ed. *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

human spirit and the divine Spirit which manifests itself in a desire for union with God in knowledge and love, an innate and inalienable drive of the human toward the divine.”<sup>104</sup>

According to Oduyoye, the historical consciousness of the African people has had to deal with “our dependent economies, the exploitation of the rural and the voiceless, the power of the family and of rites, the political experiments geared to forging a system that answers to Africa’s vision of a just society and contributes to the world community.”<sup>105</sup>

Yet, human freedom and autonomy present a major challenge to the scientific understanding of the human person. According to Juvénal Ilunga Muya “by autonomy one ought to understand that human beings, being rational, can interpret the events confronting them and can order their own moral life.”<sup>106</sup> Scientific anthropology differs significantly from Christian anthropology. Whereas scientific anthropology has its roots in the materialistic interpretation of universe which began with the Big Bang, Christian anthropology, on the other hand, has its focus on the human spirit which is imparted to the created universe by the creator. In the development of life, many natural scientists subscribe to the argument that there have been episodes of emergence. Emergence is a term that has been used by natural scientists to describe “nature’s tendency over time to bring about complex ordered systems endowed with properties and functions that had not been operative at previous or less complex levels of evolution.”<sup>107</sup> In this process of rapid brain growth and development, there emerged the organizing capacity that went beyond

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

<sup>106</sup> Bénézet Bujo, *The Awakening of A Systematic and Authentically African Thought* in Bénézet Bujo and Juvénal Ilunga Muya, eds., *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003), 119.

<sup>107</sup> John Haught, *Emergence, Scientific Naturalism and Theology* in Nancey C. Murphy and William R. Stoeger, eds., *Evolution and Emergence: Systems, Organisms, Persons* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249-250.

ordinary group mentality. John Haught observes that “it is intuitively obvious that during the course of evolutionary history something more has emerged out of something less.”<sup>108</sup> This capacity is referred to as the phenomena of *mimesis*, i.e., repeated “executive and supervisory and cultural skills.”<sup>109</sup> Mimetic capacities in humans emerged through a “multi-staged adaptive process, in which each stage had to be self-justifying and self-sufficient.”<sup>110</sup> This implies that each stage of human brain development tended to generate an epistemic rupture that propelled forward the human brain to be a mind of profound consciousness and higher and advanced problem-solving skills. Therefore, “unlike any other known species, humans are able to think and remember in organized groups, aided by technology, and this arrangement constitutes a distributed cognitive system with special properties.”<sup>111</sup> It is argued that *mimesis* had its stages of development beginning with stone toolmaking, cave painting, event representation, and the emergence of a full-fledged mimetic culture, which is the “refinement and expansion of the skill-set of hominins as a species...representing reality and communicating ideas.”<sup>112</sup>

Niels H Gregesen expounds at length on the notion of emergence, that is, the “process of coming forth from latency, or to states of things arising unexpectedly.”<sup>113</sup> For Gregesen, the emergence of *Homo Sapiens* comes with an awareness of the reality of pain which is “the price paid for having a highly sensitive nervous system.”<sup>114</sup> By this,

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 250

<sup>109</sup> Gary Hatfield and Holly Pittman, eds., *Evolution of Mind, Brain, and Culture* (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2013).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 172

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 173

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 192

<sup>113</sup> Niels Henrik Gregesen, *Emergence, and Complexity* in Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, 1 edition. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 767.

<sup>114</sup> Niels Henrik Gergersen, “The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World,” *Dialog* 40, no. 3 (2001): 203.



he means that “the capacity for mental suffering can be seen as the price paid for an evolved consciousness, capable of calculating various options and outcomes.”<sup>115</sup> I contend, nonetheless, that emergence is more a condition of unpredictability on account of spontaneity in the evolutionary cycle. In statistics, the science of numbers and number patterns, this is what is referred to as a random. Emergence is a school of natural philosophy that posits the idea that "naturalistic science is in need of a richer explanatory scheme."<sup>116</sup> This branch of natural science observes that in the process of evolution there have been “cases where new emergent properties, based on new spatial or hierarchical configurations, acquire new causal capacities in the context of relatively enduring higher-order systems.”<sup>117</sup>

Gregesen, an ardent proponent of the emergence theory, claims “the emergence of the human mind as continuous with other sorts of self-reproducing systems. Still, the human person constitutes a special case of emergency.”<sup>118</sup> In this regard, human behavior cannot be fully accounted for from a purely neuroscientific point of view or from an exclusively socio-cultural perspective. Other, scholars who subscribe to the notion of emergence theory, such as Ursula Goodenough and Terrence W. Deacon have objected to a strictly reductionist understanding of emergence theory, but they reconstruct emergence theory "with our existential and religious yearnings.”<sup>119</sup> They argue that though the notion of emergence is transient, it operates and interacts “on initial and boundary conditions and proper energy/substance flow, and these conditions are usually

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<sup>115</sup> Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God’s Redemptive Suffering with Creatures*, Duffy lectures in global Christianity (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 2.

<sup>116</sup> Clayton and Simpson, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science.*, 769

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 776

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 776

<sup>119</sup> Ursula Goodenough and Terrence Deacon, *The Sacred Emergence of Nature*, Ibid.,854

ephemeral.”<sup>120</sup> In this regard, they contend that "Life's emergent properties are no longer left to the vagaries of substance diffusion and container disruption but are now themselves independently embodied in that emergent property called genetic information.”<sup>121</sup> Hence, Goodenough and Deacon conclude that “consciousness emerges as an incessant creation of something from nothing, a process continually transcending itself. To be human is to know what it feels like to be evolution happening.”<sup>122</sup>

This apologetic argument for evolution is however highly controversial. There are some compelling counterarguments against evolution, which include among them the idea that the theory of evolution violates the second law of thermodynamics. This law states that “the entropy of an isolated system not in equilibrium will tend to increase over time, approaching a maximum value at equilibrium.”<sup>123</sup> In other words, this law postulates that “an isolated system's entropy (a measure of the dispersal of energy in a physical system so that it is not available to do mechanical work) will tend to increase or stay the same, not decrease. Creationists argue that evolution violates this physical law by requiring a decrease in entropy, or disorder, over time.”<sup>124</sup> There are other theologians who embrace both evolutionary theory and creation theory in the origin of the universe. Denis Edwards and Neils Gregersen are among them. According to Denis Edwards “An evolutionary worldview can provide a basis for a modest theodicy, precisely because it sees our evolved world as a package deal, in which there can be no capacity for experiencing the joys of existence without also experiencing its pains.”<sup>125</sup> For Edwards,

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 857

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 859

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 887

<sup>123</sup> “Objections to Evolution,” *Wikipedia*, November 28, 2019, accessed December 16, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Objections\\_to\\_evolution&oldid=928397519](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Objections_to_evolution&oldid=928397519).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Edwards, *Deep Incarnation*, 2.

evolution and creation occur simultaneously as two faces of the same coin. He observes “In an evolutionary view, pain has a positive evolutionary function, increasing the attentiveness and adaptive fitness of organisms, and death is essential for the cycle of generations that make evolution possible.”<sup>126</sup>

African theologies, in as far as they are rooted in African traditional religion and African Christian religion, subscribe to the notion of a created universe. According to John Mbiti “for a number of African peoples, God not only created the material world, but also established laws of nature and human customs.”<sup>127</sup> Mulago, like Mbiti, notes that the entities of the universe are such that “the beings of which it is composed are not all visible; around animals and men there move the geniuses of the ground, the forces of vegetation, the spirits of the dead. The bond between them is that of participation (by ordering one’s life according to nature). The special function of religion is to recognize, classify and propitiate them (the spirits). This progress of ideas consists in differentiating them and placing them in a hierarchical order.”<sup>128</sup> For example, the Ila of Zambia believe that “God founded many of their customs, laws, and regulations, in addition to creating the world.”<sup>129</sup> On this score many of the African creation stories seem to state that human beings, male and female, were the last to be created. Mbiti is of the view that “according to many stories, the creation of man is placed at, or towards, the end of the creation of all things...these stories point out also that man was created as husband and wife, and a number of them give names of the first human beings.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 51.

<sup>128</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 62.

<sup>129</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 52.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 161.

One would contend on this score that evolution is adequate neither in explaining the physiological complexity of the human brain nor the emergence of species; that is it cannot account how we moved from matter to self-consciousness. This self-consciousness is the more reason why human beings are the only species that theologize. According to Feuerstein, the “emergence of the mental consciousness appears to have occurred relatively swiftly.”<sup>131</sup> In the emergence of self-consciousness, Feuerstein notes how “humanity witnessed the birth of the individual who could brave life, more or less, on his or her own, who did not feel particularly bound by, or even beholden to, the past, but who looked ahead to the possibilities of the future.”<sup>132</sup> The capacity to theologize by most communities in their traditional setting is part and parcel of self-consciousness. This precisely explains why Feuerstein argues “self-knowledge is in essence contextual: it is experiencing oneself as a unique but integral part of the total “environment” of existence. As such it is a moral force inasmuch as it engenders social responsiveness and responsibility.”<sup>133</sup> Surely, such a force cannot be an act purely of bodily matter that humanity tends to search for the Divine. The sequence of events in evolution are not sufficient in explaining the emergence of consciousness.

The brain, an organ that functions as the epicenter of the nervous system in all vertebrate and most invertebrate animals is located in the head, in close proximity to the sensory organs for smell, vision, and sight. The human brain is surmised to be the most complex organ in the body. There is unanimity in the scientific community that the human brain is the central organ of the human nervous system. Together with the

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<sup>131</sup> Feuerstein and Gebser, *Structures of Consciousness*, 95.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

spinal cord, it makes up the central nervous system. It consists of the cerebrum, the brainstem, and the cerebellum. It is this part of the human body that plays a significant role in human consciousness. If we consider some other African theological anthropologies, we will come across the *Fon* People, who believe in an evolutionary creation narrative, which entails a staggered and phased creation over a period of time. According to Mbiti, the *Fon* People believe that “on the first day, God set the world in order, and then formed man out of clay and water. The third day, God gave man sight, speech, and knowledge of the external world. On the fourth day man was given technical skills, which evidently equipped him to live on this earth.”<sup>134</sup>

Human cognition and sensory perception have evolved over the course of human history to the degree that it is now referred to as consciousness. It is precisely the degrees of consciousness that define where a specific species is located in the taxonomy of species differentiation. It is a historical consciousness that sets us apart as the human species. As the human species we have moved from merely being sentient beings to be the prototype of consciousness. This consciousness, sometime referred to as the human spirit has been defined and understood differently by different human cultures. In Africa, it is called the human spirit. In some Bantu dialects it is called *Mzimu*. *Mzimu* is the human side that transcends bodiless. It eludes the human grasp and cannot be created or destroyed by humans. In most Bantu communities, the human spirit is understood to be the indelible imprint of God onto the human body. According to Juvénal Ilunga Muya “In relation to the human spirit, every being must necessarily have a mysterious

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<sup>134</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 166.

component.”<sup>135</sup> It is the human spirit which also constitutes the mystical character of human beings. I argue that the human spirit has proven problematic to grasp by materialistic attempts to understand a human being. Bantu theology in contrast, simply affirms that it is mysterious and therefore, “by nature it inspires the religious sense.”<sup>136</sup>

In African theological anthropology the existence of spirits is central to African religious consciousness. Mbiti notes that “African peoples are extremely sensitive to the existence of the spirit world which presses hard upon that of human beings.”<sup>137</sup> He further argues that “there is practically no gap between these two worlds. The spirit world is as real as the physical world and cannot be excluded from African ontology.”<sup>138</sup>

No other animate species are endowed with a historical consciousness comparable to that of the human species. It is argued that “the human being is an observable entity, like all organisms, but at the same time it reflects on itself, it is a 'self-interpreting being.'”<sup>139</sup> Alison Benders, writing from Lonergan’s perspective, holds a similar view of human anthropology. She posits that,

anthropologically, human beings are self-reflective subjects, who constitute themselves as knowers, choosers and lovers. Morally, to the extent that human beings adhere to the transcendental precepts, they are authentically human knowers, choosers and lovers. To the extent that human beings continually strive toward self-transcendence, they concretely direct toward finality in the divine, which is unrestricted act of being knowledge and love.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Juvenal Ilunga Muya, *Theologian of A Trinitarian Mystery* in Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers. 2* (Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), 61.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>137</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 268.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> “Neurosciences and the Human Person,” accessed December 16, 2019, <http://www.academiadelasciencias.va/content/accademia/en/events/2012/neurosciences.html>.

<sup>140</sup> Alison M Benders, *A Comparative Study of Self-Awareness and Self-Transcendence: What Do Lonergan and Sankara Have to Say to Each Other?* (Ph.D., Boston College, 2006), 103.

According to John Haught, “What is not incontestable, in any case, is that out of a monotonous primal sea of elementary particles prevalent shortly after the Big Bang there has indeed emerged in our universe a succession of complex systems and organisms, including life, mind, and culture.”<sup>141</sup> It is these emergent phenomena that have about the progressive self-organization of life on earth. According to Haught, “The spontaneous self-organization of physical entities and processes into more and more complex systems has been going on in less dramatic ways from the time of cosmic origins.”<sup>142</sup> Burns, in contrast, states that “a creature can attain stability and fulfillment only by participating in the unchangeable goodness of uncreated being.”<sup>143</sup> Further, he notes that “in this understanding of the diversity between the nature and destiny of matter and spirit, the divine purpose in joining them to humanity becomes puzzling and mysterious.”<sup>144</sup>

I object to an exclusively evolutionary anthropological conception of life, because evolution, as I argued earlier, brings limits to the interpretation of human freedom and autonomy. I postulate rather that it is because of the human mind’s openness to transcendence, which questions a purely materialistic understanding of human life. It is in human freedom and autonomy that human beings are naturally endowed with a consciousness that draws them to the existence of God, the One in whom all that is exists and has its consummation. Indeed, evolutionary science hits the limits of its claims in human behavior. Daniel Hutto contends that human behavior is anchored in a belief/desire system with much of human behavior built on childhood development. I,

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<sup>141</sup> John Haught, *Emergence, Scientific Naturalism, and Theology* in Murphy and Stoeger, *Evolution and Emergence*, 250.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 250

<sup>143</sup> Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 7.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

however, add to this, that it is precisely in this behavior in that conceptions of the self are made.

Terrence Deacon elaborates on the notion of evolution using the notion of natural selection. He observes that "natural selection in its simplest form requires the production of variations of form and multiplication of offspring from which the most successful are preserved."<sup>145</sup> He nevertheless notes a severe omission of the phenomenon of natural selection. He notes that "although natural selection offers a powerful logic that can account for the way organisms have evolved to fit their surroundings, it leaves out nearly all of the mechanistic detail of the processes involved in generating organisms."<sup>146</sup> On this score, he argues that the vast majority of evolution occurs "through a process that regularly transforms incidental physical properties into functional attribute."<sup>147</sup> This point raised by Deacon, regarding evolution occurring at the molecular level, has obvious implications regarding species adaptation and self-consciousness. Deacon claims that species functionality is a direct output of its related physical properties. Clayton agrees with Deacon when the latter posits that "there is no scientific basis to conclude that any of the human capacities could be produced or continue to function without the underlying biological and neurological systems that produce them."<sup>148</sup> I find this claim inadequate in explaining human consciousness and behavior. The autonomy of human behavior, consciousness, and identity eludes his argument. Biological and neurological explanation of human behavior might be necessary in explaining human behavior, but it is not all

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<sup>145</sup> Terrence W. Deacon, *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter*, 1 edition. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 422.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>148</sup> Philip Clayton, *Emergence, the Quest for Unity, and God: Toward a Constructive Christian Theology of the Person* in Michael Welker, ed., *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Eerdmans, 2014), 156.



that it is. My argument is that personhood eludes the grasp of the natural sciences and, hence, nothing as of yet correlates human consciousness to the physiological and biological substrates of the person or community. It is, therefore, not surprising that Lonergan grounds humanness in “levels of consciousness” which are premised on knowing and deciding, that is “we are and choose to be the inquiring consciousness, which is not satisfied with mere impressions, but which tries to grasp their meaning.”<sup>149</sup> Consciousness according to Lonergan “is not a mere fact, it is a many-leveled achievement.”<sup>150</sup>

Dan Zahavi has weighed in on this conversation using the perspective of human behavior. Zahavi objects to the dialectics of personal identity circumscribed by the notion of diachronic and episodic experiences of life, as postulated by Strawson. He asserts that the diachronic self-experience and the episodic self-experience “are intimately interconnected.”<sup>151</sup> He argues that, in contrast to Strawson’s thesis, “a person often appropriates as being connected to the past and the future.”<sup>152</sup> This is precisely the African worldview that is found in Bantu African theological anthropology. In the Bantu consciousness of the human person, the life of the human being, according to Laurent Magesa, “is an active rhythm of an upward expanding cycle which makes existential relationships possible.”<sup>153</sup> This eternal and divine cycle encompasses the past, the living, and the future. Magesa elaborates on this life cycle as comprising “the sequences of birth,

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<sup>149</sup> Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 20.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: A Bradford Book, 2008), 119.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 178

<sup>153</sup> Laurent Magesa, Jesus, *The Life Naming Jesus as “Healer” in Africa* in Mkenda Festo and Diane B. Stinton, *The Way, The Truth and The Life* (Nairobi, Kenya: Jesuit Historical Institute in Africa, 2017), 119.

puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death in old age, entry into the community of the departed, and finally access into the company of the spirits.”<sup>154</sup>

In his discussion of human consciousness, Zahavi claims that in our contemporary milieu, "We need to distinguish between merely being conscious or sentient and being a self" because being a self "is an achievement rather than a given."<sup>155</sup> Hence, regarding the identity of the self and its dimensions, it is such that "who I am is not something given, but something evolving, something that is realized through my projects."<sup>156</sup> Human consciousness and the identity of the self are dynamic, often "emphasizing both the temporal and social dimension of selfhood."<sup>157</sup> However, others like Feuerstein are of the view that "self-conscious humanity must face its inevitable mortality — a realization that provokes deep sorrow. It is this sorrow, in the face of life's utter impermanence and instability, that is given increasing expression as the mental structure of consciousness approaches and unfolds."<sup>158</sup>

In African Bantu notions of the self, the self is only as healthy as its participation in community life. In other words, the human person is a mixture of temporal consciousness and communal responsibility. In African Bantu consciousness, this is known as *Ubuntu*. According to Orobator, *ubuntu* "is the unencumbered sense, ubuntu is a simple idea that prioritizes inclusivity over exclusivity, community over competition, hospitality over hostility, dialogue over confrontation and respect over domination."<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Magesa in Festo and Stinton, *The Way, The Truth and The Life.*, 119

<sup>155</sup> Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 179.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 180

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Feuerstein and Gebser, *Structures of Consciousness*, 97.

<sup>159</sup> A. E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 72.

In this regard, Bantu consciousness appeals to the individual, that is “For the sake of life’s flourishing, the individual must always guide one’s behavior toward controlling negative emotions within the self that would destroy community.”<sup>160</sup> Donald Merlin agrees with the inherent advantage of communal thought. He says, "Connected minds prosper in proper in proportion to the richness of their links with culture. Minds grow with the collectivity, and isolated minds wither."<sup>161</sup>

Zahavi poses some valuable insights into the mind. He is of the view that “the mind is not something exclusively inner, something cut off from the body and the surrounding world, as if psychological phenomena would remain precisely the same even without bodily and linguistic expressions.”<sup>162</sup> Hence, he is of the view that “any account of the mind must take subjectivity and the first-person perspective seriously, and that a focus on behavior and action will consequently lose sight of what is essential to the mind.”<sup>163</sup> At this point, I disagree with Zahavi’s argument because human subjectivity can only be understood in comparison to other minds. Indeed, the human subject is central in Lonergan’s theology. Alison Benders argues that, for Lonergan, “a self is the ‘unity identity-whole’ that performs the dynamic operations of human consciousness.”<sup>164</sup> Indeed, the problem with understanding the human mind in an entirely self-enclosed individuated manner is that it tends to obfuscate its social origins and limits its dynamic nature. The human being is drawn to what Lonergan terms a “doubly dynamic

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<sup>160</sup> Laurent Magesa, *Jesus The Life Naming Jesus as “Healer” in Africa* in Mkenda Festo and Diane B. Stinton, *The Way, The Truth and The Life*, 121.

<sup>161</sup> Merlin Donald, *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness* by Merlin Donald (W. W. Norton & Company, 1775), 151.

<sup>162</sup> Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 152.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 160

<sup>164</sup> Benders, *A Comparative Study of Self-Awareness and Self-Transcendence*, 39.

pattern;”<sup>165</sup> in other words, it is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible; it is a conscious intending, ever going beyond what happens to be given or known, ever striving for a fuller and richer apprehension of the yet unknown or incompletely known totality, whole, universe.”<sup>166</sup> The bottom line is that the human spirit is drawn to communion with the transcendent. Hence, as observed by Oduyoye “human beings do feel a part of, as well as a dependence upon, a greater structure of reality that transcends what we can comprehend.”<sup>167</sup>

Marya Schechman has a different perspective, which is premised on integrated neuroscience. She argues that how people put across their narratives of self-constitution explains a lot about how they view their identity. This can be applied and extended to the conception of their respective theology as well, that is, their idea of God. For example, according to Mbiti, “It is generally in societies which traditionally have or have had kings and rulers where we find the concept of God as King and Ruler. Although this concept thus reflects the political structure of the peoples concerned, it is also found among others who do not have traditional rulers.”<sup>168</sup> In this case, it is possible to reasonably infer whether one views oneself as a victim of the greater schema of life or is an active participant in the narratives of life. Accordingly, Schechman notes “there are of course, a great many ways in which the larger narrative context can impact and condition experience in the narrative of “self-constitution.”<sup>169</sup> In this regard the group narrative can condition how the individual self-views itself. Schechman concedes that “there is much

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<sup>165</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 13.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 67.

<sup>168</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 71.

<sup>169</sup> Marya Schechtman, “Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View,” *Philosophy* 82, no. 320 (April 1, 2007): 155.

work to be done in producing a satisfying narrative account of identities.”<sup>170</sup> In this regard, there is still an existential tension between the phenomenological and hermeneutical understandings of the identity of the human person as an individuated being. Bevans, on this score, observes that “our cultural and historical context plays a part in the construction of reality in which we live, so our context influences the understanding of God and the expression of our faith.”<sup>171</sup>

Lonergan has weighed in on the notion of consciousness. He is of the view that consciousness is dynamic. He states that “we note that the basic pattern of conscious and intentional operations is dynamic.”<sup>172</sup> Further, he adds that consciousness is “dynamic materially inasmuch as it is a pattern of operations...dynamic formally, inasmuch as it calls forth and assembles the appropriate operations at each stage of the process, just as a growing organism puts forth its own organs and lives by their functioning.”<sup>173</sup> In this regard human consciousness is an integrated and unified whole which is premised on an intelligible unity. Benders surmises that “empirical consciousness or immediate awareness of the self in and through its conscious activities is merely the content presupposed for the subsuming operations of understanding and judgement.”<sup>174</sup> For David Tracy, however, he posits that “The pluralism of cultural worlds has enriched us all with new visions of our common lives and new possibilities for an authentic life...For each of us seems to become not a single self but several publics external to the self but to several internalized publics in one’s own reflections on authentic existence.”<sup>175</sup> I argue that the

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 178

<sup>171</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

<sup>172</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 13.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Benders, *A Comparative Study of Self-Awareness and Self-Transcendence*, 39.

<sup>175</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 4.

historical consciousness of a people can be dramatically altered by external intrusion or natural events that impact their local culture and theology so much as to entirely alter both its outlook and its internal dynamism. This has been the case of colonialism which has brought about the emergence of a colonized psyche and a resulting lack of originality in theology. Some African theologians and philosophers are advocating for retrieval of theological deposits and notions of the African traditional society before colonialism. Juvénal Muya, cites Lufuluabo Mizeka, a trinitarian theologian who bitterly criticized “dogmatic assertions that condemns African traditions without a deep knowledge of them.”<sup>176</sup>

Tsenay Serequeberhan embraces the retrieving of theological and philosophical approaches to African Philosophy from the historicity of the continent. I agree with Serequeberhan’s argument that all life giving and supporting traditional cultures are replete with theological deposits. The primary premise of Serequeberhan is set on unmasking the damage done to the knowledge base of African communities by colonialism. He contends that “European modernity establishes itself globally by violently negating indigenous cultures. This violence in replication, furthermore, accentuates the regressive and despotic/aristocratic aspects internal to the histories of the colonizing European societies”<sup>177</sup> It is rather a paradox that the driving force for colonialism was “spreading civilization and beneficially Christianizing the globe.” He argues, using Chinua Achebe’s book *Things Fall Apart* (1959) that, due to colonialism, “the African’s mode of life, his indigenous habitat of human existence, was displaced by

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<sup>176</sup> Juvénal Ilunga Muya, *A Theologian of a Trinitarian Mystery* in Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers. 2* (Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), 52.

<sup>177</sup> Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 58.

the violence of the “civilizing mission.” Things African were devalued and the African was reduced to slavery.”<sup>178</sup>

Serequeberhan utilizes three approaches. First, he uses the hermeneutics of suspicion in his treatment of colonialism. He objects to the argument of the colonizing powers that colonialism was equal to civilizing and Christianizing the “savages.” Instead, he contends that colonialism was an act of violence that should be equated to cultural genocide and decimation of the “enduring traditions of Africa.”<sup>179</sup> He is, therefore, circumspect regarding the whole undertaking of colonialism because, by its very nature, colonialism is “the blatant denial of the humanity of the colonized which serves as its own proof. It is the affirmation that the colonized have no history and are introduced into the human community by European conquest.”<sup>180</sup>

The second approach utilized by Serequeberhan is hermeneutics of deconstruction. He deconstructs colonialism and neocolonialism by uncovering their constitutive elements, as well as the forces that were central to their implementation on the African continent. He concludes that at the core of colonialism and neocolonialism was violence inflicted on African primordial values, culture and world view. The net effects of such violence is that “colonialism literally freezes the internal dynamic of the subjugated society.”<sup>181</sup> In deconstructing colonialism and its various manifestations, Serequeberhan advocates for “confronting colonialism,”<sup>182</sup> which will involve the

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 81

colonized to claim “the effective heritage of the past.”<sup>183</sup> This process will require what he refers to as “the emancipatory project.”<sup>184</sup>

The third hermeneutic approach employed by Serequeberhan is philosophical anthropology. He posits that “in decolonizing, the decolonized has to open up and claim its historical existence, its Being as history, closed off by colonial conquest.”<sup>185</sup> In returning to this originality, the African must not have the consciousness of a westernized individual. Rather his or her world view must be informed by a consciousness that is deeply rooted in African anthropology and world view. Serequeberhan’s postulations have merit in so far as they advocate for retrieval of the primordial philosophical framework of the African continent. It is at this juncture that his hermeneutical approach has implications for the theological enterprise. I subscribe to the idea that all cultures have a theological vision weaved into their existential reality. This is the meaning of incarnation: God breaking into human affairs by way of existing in the historicity of communities and societies. As Rahner rightly points out, “For we are dealing with an assertion which allows God, the reality about whom theology speaks, to be present where man feels at home and in the only place where he feels competent: in the world and not in heaven.”<sup>186</sup> For Rahner, all theology begins with the human religious experience, which pervades all human experience whether individuals are aware of it or not. Hence, theology must be articulated in such a way that it is comprehensible to contemporary and ordinary people.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>186</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 179-180.



Other theologians like Karl Barth object to a theology that begins with human experience. He says such a starting point of theology is overtly narcissistic, hence he critiques it for being anthropocentric (excessively human centered). Barth, argues that theology must first “start with God and the Word of God, and not the human being.”<sup>187</sup> According to Barth “Theology stands and falls with the Word of God, for the Word of God precedes all theological words by creating, arousing, and challenging them. Should theology wish to be more or less or anything other than action in response to that Word its thinking and speaking would be empty, meaningless and futile.”<sup>188</sup> Barth has a valid observation in insisting that all theology should be premised on faith. But, I argue that this faith is not without context. It is rooted in the human experience. The human senses first ought to experience awe and proceed into questioning. It is the missing links in the human cognitive process that give way to faith because the human mind come to terms that there is an aspect of reality which eludes human traction. As observed by Pope John Paul II,

Philosophical enquiry can help greatly to clarify the relationship between truth and life, between event and doctrinal truth, and above all between transcendent truth and humanly comprehensible language. This involves a reciprocity between the theological disciplines and the insights drawn from the various strands of philosophy; and such a reciprocity can prove genuinely fruitful for the communication and deeper understanding of the faith.<sup>189</sup>

Therefore, I argue, that some typically African aspects and notions about life such as “concepts of humankind, the world, destiny, about God and the sacred”<sup>190</sup> could be

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<sup>187</sup> Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method*, 14.

<sup>188</sup> Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, Anchor books A408 (Garden City, N. Y: Doubleday, 1964), 17.

<sup>189</sup> “Fides et Ratio (14 September 1998) | John Paul II.”

<sup>190</sup> John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 38.

used in informing and constructing an African Christian theology. As theologians who are open to the multifaceted character of the God experience, we need to be “aware of the importance of context in constructing human thought and – at least in the minds of some – of the context in terms of God’s revelation.”<sup>191</sup> The point of the above chapter is primarily to contend, as observed by Oduyoye, that “theology, to be authentic and relevant, must reflect a particular context.”<sup>192</sup> African theology, is by and large, creation-centered. This is because many of the categories it utilizes are pragmatic and derived from the created universe. According to David Tracy, such a “creation-centered orientation to theology is characterized by the conviction that human experience, and so context, is generally good. Its perspective is that grace builds on nature, but only because nature is capable of being built on, of being perfected in a supernatural relationship with God.”<sup>193</sup>

In summary, just like the observation in the preceding chapter, there are three overarching epistemological understandings of the self and the human person: the rational perspective, the creation-centered perspective and the social-historical perspective, with the third being a blend of the two in, albeit, different degrees depending on the orientation of the theological enterprise. This has implications on the overall outlook of the theological enterprise depending on which anthropology of human subjectivity the theologian espouses. In a word, therefore, Bujo, argues that “Christian theology has always tended to split humans into body and soul, and to preach the salvation of the soul. Africa could never accept this mutilation of the human being.

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<sup>191</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 5.

<sup>192</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

<sup>193</sup> David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 19.

People in Africa experience themselves as a unity, living in a network of living relationships with God and with nature.”<sup>194</sup>

#### **4.0 African Perspectives on Human Consciousness – The Bantu Worldview**

In this chapter, I explore the Bantu understanding of the human person and the theological anthropological themes used by the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa. The driving research question is, who is the human person in sub-Saharan Africa in the light of empirical discoveries in natural science, which have affirmed a unified person against the long-held view of a dualistic person? Because of such a view regarding the human person, Daniel Dennett notes, “Finding suitable replacements for the traditional dualistic images will require some rather startling adjustments to our habitual ways of thinking, adjustments that will be just as counterintuitive at first to scientists as to laypeople.”<sup>195</sup> It might be argued that the African anthropological conception of the person, the self, and identity stands on a culturally oriented premise when cast in the light of the discoveries of neuroscience and latest trends in human cognition. It is my view that the culturally embedded understanding of the human person has consequences on the formulation, understanding and conduct of the theological enterprise. It should be stated however that there has been a disjuncture in the understanding of the human person from the viewpoints of science and cultural anthropology. The recent movement has been to bridge the hitherto widening gap between the two. Hence African theology deals with “Africa’s own history — its social institutions as well as its religious and cultural values

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<sup>194</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 31–32.

<sup>195</sup> D. C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 1st paperback ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1991), 37.

in all their variety.”<sup>196</sup> Ngindu Mushete contends on this subject that “a perception of the world and its values always depends on the locus from which that perception comes into being. Since persons live in different contexts, they experience and theorize their human relationships, their culture, and their religion differently.”<sup>197</sup> Magesa, another African theologian, posits, with regard to African consciousness that “at all times in a person’s life, a religious consciousness is always explicitly or implicitly present. In no way is anything understood apart from the context of God, the ancestors and the spirits; in no way is any thought, word or act understood except in terms of good and bad, in the sense that such an attitude or behavior either enhances or diminishes life.”<sup>198</sup>

Merlin Donald, in his work *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness*, argues against a purely neuroscientific conception of a human being and human consciousness. His ideas about self-consciousness, awareness and identity are useful to Bantu anthropology. Donald underscores the defining role that culture plays in the development of human consciousness. He considers the relationship between human consciousness and societal culture in greater detail by pointing out the socio-cultural basis of consciousness. I agree with Donald Merlin in as far as he argues that human consciousness is an interplay of the human person and culture. Normative cognitive ‘science’ based on purely neurological conceptions of the human person are inadequate. This is because in explaining human consciousness the materialist approaches appear to negate the social origins of human consciousness and instead seem to hold the view that human consciousness is a matter of a private individual’s brain activity. Rather it has

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<sup>196</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

<sup>197</sup> Ngindu Mushete, *An Overview of African Theology* in Rosino Gibellini, ed., *Paths of African Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994), 24.

<sup>198</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 60.

wider history and context. There is a way in which human consciousness transcends the individual. It is diffused in the context and milieu of the person. Donald, hence, claims, that “consciousness is not sensation.”<sup>199</sup> Consciousness, is much more than awareness. It is, according to Donald, “the very governor of mental life.”<sup>200</sup> Donald argues for the central role that culture and consciousness play in the development of the person. He asserts that so much of what we are reflects the information we appropriate from our context that comes through our senses. He advances the idea that human beings have evolved collectively, hence being able to survive various milieus and environments as a community. He makes a claim to the effect that, by the very fact that we are conscious, then we are more than our brains, and -I would add- more than our bodies. It is human consciousness which is at the heart of the hermeneutical and epistemological foundations of theology. Dennett agrees with Donald’s proposition when he asserts that “whatever else our materialist theories may explain they won’t explain consciousness if we neglect the facts about experience that we know so intimately “from the inside.””<sup>201</sup> I therefore contend that the mind is not the brain. Yet the brain is but part of the human mind. I therefore object to the dualistic conception of the human person, that is “the idea of mind as distinct in this way from the brain, composed not of ordinary matter but of some other, special kind of stuff.”<sup>202</sup> A conscious mind is not just the brain but rather is also an experience of the human person. According to Georg Feuerstein, consciousness “requires, rather, a particular kind of exertion or work, namely the persistent and

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<sup>199</sup> Donald, *A Mind So Rare*, 46.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 47

<sup>201</sup> Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 42.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

consistent application of oneself to the rendering transparent of human personality so that consciousness can coalesce, grow together, with the spiritual."<sup>203</sup>

Evolution has invested the human brain with a versatility lacking in other primates, even though human beings are relatively late in the evolutionary chain. Interestingly enough, Donald is of the view that culture is a product of consciousness too. Consequently, he surmises that human consciousness is a hybrid of external culture and brain activity. Indeed, the evolution of consciousness for Donald is a constitutive process of the interaction of culture and brain activity. This culture becomes manifest in symbols and signs. Symbols and signs are products of a "kinematic imagination,"<sup>204</sup> which -he contends- was the starting point of self-awareness that eventually resulted in the emergence and design of "symbolic technologies."<sup>205</sup> Donald argues that "the symbolizing side of our mind is more aggressive in approach. It creates a sharply defined, abstract universe that is largely of its own invention."<sup>206</sup> Part of this symbolic representation of human consciousness is language. He contends that we need to shift from the notion that human language was (is) not a function of the human brain only. Instead, he posits that human language is biocultural. By this he implies that there is an active interaction between the biological aspects of the person and the culture in which that person lives. Hence the influence of one's mother tongue on an individual's vocalization and pronunciation. Donald, further, places language in the context of cognitive communities. I agree with Donald when he states that language is biocultural. That is language capability hinge on the person's biological adaptability in the larger

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<sup>203</sup> Feuerstein and Gebser, *Structures of Consciousness*, 163.

<sup>204</sup> Donald, *A Mind So Rare*, 271.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

context of the socio-cultural existential reality. Nyamiti, makes a similar argument when he extrapolates the representation aspect of language using symbols. He says that “things are conceived as symbols of each other. Symbols, on their part, not only unify the objects they symbolize, but are also believed to participate somehow in the reality which they express.”<sup>207</sup> For example, the naming of the Christian God as Father has placed a huge burden on Bantu theological anthropology. In several Bantu communities, God has no gender, that is, God exists as S/he. Hence, he is able to create a woman and a man. As such, the paternal category placed on God in Western theological framework is at variance with Bantu consciousness. To call God “Father” would appear to be unlikeliness of God. For God, understood as the creator of the universe transcends all gender, and albeit linguistic classification and categorization. Nonetheless, it is acceptable to use the human culturally oriented patriarchal classification of God in bantu communities purely on grounds that Jesus used it in the gospel narratives, and it has been transmitted as such in the missionary activity and language of the church. Donald, further asserts that “languages are always the product of circular interactions between two or more brains, rather than of the operations of a single brain.”<sup>208</sup>

Merlin Donald’s position is in many respects similar to Bantu understanding, by and large, when he contends that the human mind is a hybrid outcome of the interaction between the human brain and culture, which subsequently forms what we call consciousness. Donald’s focus on human culture and the human brain to the exclusion of the other parts of the human body and the role of the environment appear questionable. What about the rest of the human body as part and parcel of sensory human cognition and

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<sup>207</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *The Scope of African Theology* (Kampala, Uganda: Gaba Publications, 1973), 22.

<sup>208</sup> Donald, *A Mind So Rare.*, 150

consciousness? This accounts for the African theological anthropology which affirms that in human knowing and worship it is not “ a matter of offering prayers and singing hymns.”<sup>209</sup> Hence in African processes of knowing and liturgical worship “it involves also dancing, drumming, clapping of hands and making various bodily gestures. In worship, not only minds and hearts are involved but also bodies.”<sup>210</sup> Human knowing is not merely stored in the brain; it is also stored in other parts of the body, such as muscles, bones and tissues. Indeed, at some point, Donald does make a claim to the effect that "human consciousness is the product of many functional systems working in cooperation."<sup>211</sup> It is therefore not surprising that human consciousness is at the heart of the current technological dynamism especially in the area of artificial intelligence (AI). The sad reality is that the emergency of the algorithm which maps human conscious by way of online behavioral choices has been used for subversion of human conscious by groups and corporations and not the common good. The rise in trends in the manipulation of human conscious by way of artificial intelligence (AI) is indeed a cause for concern as it attempts to subvert human autonomy. Hence in our contemporary world human consciousness risks being a case of controlled drama by the emergency of the algorithm, particularly in the light that personal data gathered through the algorithm is used for profit by corporations.

Language belongs to human cognitive communities. It is language that makes it tenable to conduct oral and discursive theology. The oral expressions of African theology gives rise to proverbs, storytelling, poetry, sermons and songs. However, Oduyoye

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<sup>209</sup> Ukpogon, *African Theologies Now*, 11.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Donald, *A Mind So Rare.*, 122



argues, regarding African oral theology, that “this oral theology has not to my knowledge been systematically collected in Africa. Collecting them is an important task for us to undertake if we are really to appreciate the religion of those who sing these songs.”<sup>212</sup> I disagree with Donald’s view that “the evolutionary origins of language are tied to the early emergence of knowledge networks, feeling networks, and memory networks, all of which form the cognitive heart of culture.”<sup>213</sup> Instead, I am of the view that the emergence of language was purely on account of human survival instincts. It is the natural propensity in human beings to survive the odds of the Heideggerian notion of ‘thrownness’ or Thomas Hobbes’ State of Nature, by developing not only the requisite tools to survive but also language and invariably culture. This was, of course, aided by human evolutionary potential and the spatial environmental enablers of the context. Language emerged as a cultural phenomenon with the onset of sedentary communities, which necessitated the subsequent evolution of “sophisticated communicative capacities.”<sup>214</sup> It developed into culture as more human communities, living nearby each other, came to an awareness of the need to learn other languages which constitutes a constitutive element of a people’s culture.

The emergence of language, without doubt, impacted the levels of human consciousness greatly to the extent of empowering the human mind to grasp fictional and conceptual narratives. This plasticity of the human mind has been shaped in a way that “it carries out its cognitive business, individually and in groups, that the core configuration of skills that defines a mind varies significantly as a function of different kinds of

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<sup>212</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 50.

<sup>213</sup> Donald, *A Mind So Rare*, 253.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

culture.”<sup>215</sup> Admittedly, and from the perspective of evolution, the use of symbolic languages and technologies “was a revolutionary development”<sup>216</sup> , especially in the light of their public space utility, say as traffic or pedestrian signs which could be universally understood, deciphered and interpreted.

In traditional African Societies, according to Magesa, “the spiritual journey and mystical experience of a people fundamentally involves language that transcends ordinary, conceptual systems of thought and speech.”<sup>217</sup> Consequently, if we are to render a full accounting of the experience and understanding of the self-using language, “the symbolic, metaphorical, affective, and emotional modes of speech must be taken into account.”<sup>218</sup> In this regard, Oduyoye observes that “to distill the theology that inspires and informs those oral expressions will be to put one’s finger on part of the theology of the people.”<sup>219</sup>

The fact that one can only define oneself in the context of the community is a distinctive feature of Bantu anthropology. The fundamental dimension of the shared human lived existence is prime in the Bantu world view. Magesa argues that “the principle of individualism and self-interest as the sole criteria of autonomy fails to satisfy the African communitarian psyche.”<sup>220</sup> If Christian doctrine is to genuinely make headway in this part of the world, it would be vital that the current progress of science, Christian Church teaching, and African cultures be engaged simultaneously. In Bantu anthropology, according to Magesa, “a person is a person only with other persons, alone

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>217</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 115.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 50.

<sup>220</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 45.

one is an animal."<sup>221</sup> The self in this regard is only as healthy as it can be in a relational context, that is with others and the community. What is the basis of this relationship of the self with others and the community? It is based on the view that "relationships among all beings are basically and equitably founded on divine power. This is the inner power of existence that informs the outward forms of each creature, enabling them to relate."<sup>222</sup> In this world view animals and plants are manifestations of the life force that runs through the universe. Nothing exists merely for the sake of existing. All matter and every object has a particular spirit, inner core to its being, which participates and is inter-connected to the universal *telos*. The Bantu view the created world as a revelation of the creator. This explains why, according to Muya "African religious intuition is the grasping of the truth that the world is creation. It is a place where vital forces interact."<sup>223</sup> The ultimate goal of this *telos* (vital force of matter is the participation in the eternity of the supreme being. The dynamic thrust governs all of Bantu understanding of life. Muya points out "This dynamism has a double characteristic: tangible on the one hand and mystical on the other."<sup>224</sup> This Ubuntu cosmology has implications regarding perceptions of the self, that is "In the structure of existence, all elements of existence are therefore complementary. They are all connected in the great circle of life."<sup>225</sup> It is the existence of the Supreme Being which gives subsistence to the created world. The experience of this supreme Being in Bantu cosmology, according to Muya "takes place equally at the level of human consciousness."<sup>226</sup> It is human consciousness which warrants the emergence of African

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>223</sup> Juvenal Ilunga Muya, in Bujo, *African Theology in the 21st Century*, 52.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>225</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 33

<sup>226</sup> Juvenal Ilunga Muya, in Bujo, *African Theology in the 21st Century*, 53.

Traditional Religion (ATR). This consciousness, according to Bantu theological anthropology “is the foundation of the possibility of the moral law.”<sup>227</sup> Such a world view, as of the Bantu people, is at stark variance with the notion of Emergence and Evolution. The most astounding phenomena to natural scientists have been the “appearance of life on earth out of lifeless physical precursors, and the emergence of self-awareness out of a previously unconscious cosmos.”<sup>228</sup>

According to Young, the African anthropological view is somewhat different with regard to the origins of the world. He claims that in African religion “the earth is our home, and the prolongation of humankind is ultimately bound to the earth’s fecundity. The sky, the earth, and all the living and breathing things that give life and balance to the cosmos are essential to the quest for...humanity, [for the life in its fullness].”<sup>229</sup> In African anthropology, the notion of ancestors is the consequence of lived experience. According to Bujo “The community of the ancestors is composed not only of the dead members of the family, but also of the living descendants, who form with the dead a single “mystical” community. The dead live in the remembrance of the living who conduct with them a communal dialogue. The dead live too in their descendants, so that numerous progeny can only be welcomed.”<sup>230</sup> For Magesa, however “to become an ancestor is in African theological thought the highest state a human being aspires to and can attain after death. Though not universal to all African ethnic groups, the cult of the

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> John Haught in Nancey C. Murphy and William R. Stoeger, eds., *Evolution and Emergence: Systems, Organisms, Persons*, 250.

<sup>229</sup> J.S Young, *Out of Africa: African Traditional Religion and African Theology* in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *World Religions and Human Liberation*, Faith meets faith (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1992), 107.

<sup>230</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 35.

ancestors is the most pervasive and arguably the most invasive in African societies.”<sup>231</sup>

No individual is deemed as existing as a single entity. The human person is viewed from the perspective of the human community - those past, present, and future. In Ubuntu cosmology, life is viewed as a divine circle, a cosmic dance that is rhythmic with nature.

In this regard, evolution and creation are two intertwined perspectives through which we see the reality of not only human life but also of the natural world. Science and religion are interlocked in the deep consciousness of the human person. Both are wrestling with trying to understand the mystery of life. The arguments in support of evolution are anchored on species adaptation. Still, evolution might provide a plausible explanation for the emergence of life in the universe. Evolution, nevertheless, lamentably fails to explain with specific detail the genesis of human life. Hence, my argument, is that evolution has occurred within the context of creation. Indeed, there is no significant conflict between faith and science. The two complement each other. That is, science serves to explain what creation has provided. On this score, evolution occurs in the context of creation. It is a creation that provided the materials for teleology and emergence. For example among the Lozi of western Zambia hold that “the first man, Kamunu, was created after all other things had been created, and that God was then still on the earth when he formed different peoples with their different customs, languages, and manners.”<sup>232</sup> Charles Nyamiti too, affirms this relatedness between man and creation. He says, “Man is regarded as intimately related to other fellow-men and beings; and the

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<sup>231</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate: From Intolerance to Coexistence*, Interreligious studies v. 3 (Berlin : Piscataway, NJ: Lit ; [Distribution] in NorthAmerica by Transaction Publishers, 2010), 84.

<sup>232</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 162.

universe is conceived as a sort of organic whole composed of supra-sensible or mystical correlations and participations.”<sup>233</sup>

In the wake of discoveries of science regarding the notion of being and consciousness of the human person being a unified whole, I note that there is a correspondingly large intersection with African perspectives. For example, what scientists refer to as background radiation, the blueprint of the created universe<sup>234</sup>, in African cosmology it is understood as a vital force, which is the background energy from which all that exists emanates. That is the central force of life, which is not visible to the naked eye, but whose effects are manifest in matter. Indeed, without this energy, that is vital force “nothing holds together.”<sup>235</sup> Just as nature has background radiation, so do human beings have the human spirit, which impels us towards truth and God. This human spirit exists in the realm of desire, that is the human *eros*. In short, both perspectives share areas of convergence and corresponding areas of divergence. On the whole, the upward posture of the human person was a giant leap in the evolution of homo sapiens. The phase of *homo erectus* enabled a considerable amount of the nervous system to move towards the brain near the sensory organs of sight, smell, hearing, and mind and fundamentally determined to what we have become today: human beings with more exceptional thinking and executive functional capabilities, with revolutionary computational and conceptual skills, and with a depth of consciousness as no other primate which exceeds that of any other primate. It is this consciousness that enables mankind to theologize, form cultures and execute executive functions. This account of

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<sup>233</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 55.

<sup>234</sup> “COBE | Science Mission Directorate,” accessed March 27, 2020, <https://science.nasa.gov/missions/cobe>.

<sup>235</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 90.

human evolution and development is not at all opposed to the Genesis creation narratives in the first and second chapters of the Bible. The creation narrative in the Book of Genesis is primarily originating from a tradition that “does not pretend to be a history of origins or a scientific explanation of what is. It is an attempt to say who God is, to affirm that chaos is contrary to the nature of God, and that the universe came into being out of the “pain of God.”<sup>236</sup>

It is not in dispute that there are strengths and limitations in the traditional theological understandings of the human being. Feuerstein posits that “the mystery religions of the ancient world, even though they may have contained regressive aspects, must essentially be seen as a positive effort of the mental consciousness to come to terms with the psychic legacy of the past. That is to say, they are endeavors to integrate consciousness with the other structures of consciousness.”<sup>237</sup> One of the weaknesses is how to reconcile the present human historical consciousness in the light of the greater universe and the creation myths that are replete in the cultures of the world. Could it be that many of these creation narratives are an attempt to answer the existential question of who we are as human beings from the contextual perspective of a given cultural group. That is, we have become a part of something greater than could be conceived by the human mind. Indeed, we are made of materials of the universe, and if our consciousness leads us to insights of the self, then we shall be one with our space and time. There is a convergence between the greater and ultimate universe and an appropriate insight into the notions of the self. This accounts for the argument that if the universe is rational, then human beings too is are rational beings. Therefore, by correct use of rationality, human beings are capable of

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Feuerstein and Gebser, *Structures of Consciousness*, 105.

grasping objectively the reality of being and of existence and theology. Such logic and thought are characteristic hallmarks marks of Aristotelian, Thomistic and Lonerganian epistemology and theology.

The contentious side to evolution and naturalistic science is their seemingly logical objection to the existence of a creator, in the light of their assertion that everything we see, and experience is as a result of the universe's natural process of becoming. I contend, on this matter, that good science, in contrast, ought to consider the possibility of eternity to the world. Science, like religion, is seeking truth using methods proper to its enterprise. Whereas natural science has limitations in accounting for human autonomy and self-determination, theological anthropology, on the other hand, has limitations in explaining how we moved from matter to consciousness and from single matter to diversity. However, it should be noted that “the creation narrative underlies the fact that the universe belongs to God who created it and that there is an interdependence of God’s world and God’s people.”<sup>238</sup> Therefore, I contend that it was at creation that time, space, and matter all come into existence, creating the bedrock for evolution.

In this regard, how do we articulate contemporary anthropological models from the natural sciences? Since the discovery and development of quantum physics, many theologians who are also scientists have struggled with acceptance of the image of William Paley’s “watchmaker argument.”<sup>239</sup> God did not create the universe and then abandoned it to teleological vicissitudes. The point is that in creation and human history “God speaks to humanity and humanity has the ability to respond to God. Made in God’s

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<sup>238</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 93.

<sup>239</sup> “Design Arguments for the Existence of God | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/design/>.



image, we are expected to be God-alike.”<sup>240</sup> Anthropologically, humanity has to come to terms with String Theory, in so far as it affirms the interrelatedness of the created universe. That is string theory affirms the interrelationships of existential reality. Such an explanation of reality is notable is some Bantu understanding of reality. According to Muya “Since all Bantu preoccupations are of the dynamic-vital order, it is natural that they should consider everything under this perspective. Things appear to the *Muntu* as endowed with dynamism, with an acting force that moves them. Every being is dynamic or better dynamism is a transcendental property of being.”<sup>241</sup> Magesa, reflects on African consciousness and anthropology, postulates that “the identity of the individual and his or her community and the identity of the entire universal existence, though distinct, are inextricably intertwined.”<sup>242</sup> Magesa attributes a similar argument to Bénézet Bujo, the Congolese moral theologian who argues that “it is incumbent on human beings to respect and preserve nature, since humanity is intrinsically and inextricably bound up with, and consequently implicated in, the rest of creation and vice versa.”<sup>243</sup> In Bantu world view, all that exists has a purpose, that is a telos, because “Existing without operational exercise would be like living without vital exercise.”<sup>244</sup>

Therefore, in the various models and narratives in the construction of the self, I contend that evolution does broadly account for species adaptation and development of a species’ functional properties. Still, this does not adequately explain human autonomy and freedom, culture, and consciousness. This negates the naturalist and materialistic

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<sup>240</sup> “Design Arguments for the Existence of God | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/design/>.

<sup>241</sup> Muya in Bujo, *African Theology in the 21st Century*, 60.

<sup>242</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 30

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>244</sup> Muya in Bujo, *African Theology in the 21st Century*, 60.

claim that the universe and all that exists within it is self-originating. Further, evolutionary science is deeply grounded in specific cultural perspectives and context. It is primarily an empiricist attempt to explain the origins of the self, life and the species. It is what the natural scientific community offers to the many narratives about the origins of human beings and the self. A good theory of consciousness must have a unified notion of the human person. This integrated notion of the human person must necessarily dismiss the notion of dualism that creates a dichotomy “between matter (body) and consciousness (soul/spirit).”<sup>245</sup> At the same time, we should recall that – in the words of Daniel Dennet, “almost all researchers in cognitive science, whether they consider themselves neuroscientists or psychologists or artificial intelligence researchers, tend to postpone questions about consciousness by restricting their attention to the “peripheral” and “subordinate” systems of the mind/brain, which are deemed to feed and service some dimly imagined “centre” where “conscious thought” and “experience” take place.”<sup>246</sup>

On the whole, how do we reconcile biblical theological tenets with faith, but also with the logic and reasoning of science? My basic stance is that before there was evolution, there must have been creation. Evolution and species adaptations occur in the broader scheme of creation. In a word, therefore, all existence consists of some thermodynamics that is, as Magesa states, "energy or power, in other words, it consists of active, existential forces that continually and consistently interact with and influence one another (for good or for evil)."<sup>247</sup> It is on this account that we have a number of creation myths in Bantu culture which affirm the creation narrative. Augustine Musopole asserts

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<sup>245</sup> Feuerstein and Gebser, *Structures of Consciousness*, 105.

<sup>246</sup> Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 39.

<sup>247</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 33

that “the theological significance of the myths is that human beings are created and sustained by the very presence of God, and that as creatures they are related in a fundamental way to the world.”<sup>248</sup> Therefore, in Bantu theological anthropology, according to Magesa, “ancestors play this indispensable role toward a culture that is more attuned to the concrete in order to appreciate the good life that is shaped by divine power.”<sup>249</sup> In African theological anthropology “becoming human is a process of physical and moral development; though no one completes it, each one is meant to strive toward its goal.”<sup>250</sup> Nyamiti holds a similar position, but uses different categories. He says “all life forces, that is all creation, are intended to serve and enhance the life force of the human person and society.”<sup>251</sup> It is this local anthropology of the self that gives legitimacy to what I would call an indigenous hermeneutics= the latter in turn generates local theologies, which eventually are expressed in local and culturally appropriate categories. These theological epistemic systems are expressed in local symbols and languages. In this regard, the African anthropological view of the universe contains the theological themes of “the sacrality of life, respect for the spiritual and mystical nature of creation and, especially, of the human person; the sense of the family, community, solidarity and participation; and an emphasis on fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality.”<sup>252</sup> It is these themes which compose the core of Bantu theological epistemic system. As might be noted, they originate from the human experience of the various peoples that constitute the Bantu linguistic grouping.

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<sup>248</sup> Augustine C. Musopole, *Being Human in Africa: Toward an African Christian Anthropology*, American university studies. Series XI, Anthropology and sociology vol. 65 (New York: P. Lang, 1994), 70.

<sup>249</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 120.

<sup>250</sup> Musopole, *Being Human in Africa*, 75.

<sup>251</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 54.

<sup>252</sup> Nyamiti, *The Scope of African Theology*, 9–11.

## 5.0 Sources and Strategies of African Theology

The object of this section is to discuss the sources of African theology and how they have been incorporated into African theological discourse. It should be emphasized that “a monolithic construction of African theology would be unrealistic, given the variety in the continent of historical experience, political systems (traditional and colonial), primal religion, and economies.”<sup>253</sup> However, this diversity of African theologies and their respective methodologies does not, as observed by Congolese theologian Boka di Mpassi Londi “foreclose the existence of a much richer commonality. Therefore, without succumbing to the temptation to generalize, we can safely assert that beneath the divergences of African cultural religious systems lies a radical commonality.”<sup>254</sup> However, it is argued by Mercy Oduyoye that “in Africa there exist at least three broad theological trends: the traditional, the indigenized, and the contextual.”<sup>255</sup> The traditional world view – by which I mean the anthropological world view of the African people in general, and the Bantu people in particular- offers an extraordinary wealth of theological resources. This implies that traditional Bantu communities are endowed with theological fecundity, which is inherent in their world view, including the sacramental nature of life, the existence of spirits and the vital force of the ancestors. Secondly, the indigenized theological perspective holds that the indigenous hermeneutical framework is valid for conducting African theological discourse. According to Oduyoye “the indigenizers begin from the position of the traditionalists, but they go on to ask how far the Hebrew worldview and the Greco-Roman symbols that permeate the Bible and Christianity are

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<sup>253</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

<sup>254</sup> A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context*, Hekima College collection 5 (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), 29.

<sup>255</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

understood by African Christians.”<sup>256</sup> The third strand of African theology is what is referred to as contextual theology. This theology is much more expansive than the previous two. Oduyoye states that “contextualization here expands to include the politico-economic aspects of life and seeks to produce symbols and language that are universal and inclusive of Africa’s reality.”<sup>257</sup>

We have a lot to be grateful for regarding the emergence of contextual theology as it has garnered dynamism for the construction of a number of local theologies. Contextual theology is understood by Oduyoye as “a theology that aims to confront society with the Bible and intends to read the Bible from the perspective of the people.”<sup>258</sup> In the case of Africa, we have seen the construction of three distinct theologies, namely: African theology, *Theologia Africana* and African Christian theology. African Theology, which has gained the most popularity among the three refers to “the theology of African traditional religion.”<sup>259</sup> In contrast *Theologia Africana*, a term first used by John Mbiti in 1963 is “an expression of a romantic attachment to the Latin Fathers of North America who made an immense contribution to what is now known as Western theology, the phrase could well serve as a common for both French and English speaking Africa.”<sup>260</sup> According to Ukpong “the expression African Christian theology was first proposed by John Agbeti in 1972 as an alternative to African Theology.”<sup>261</sup> It refers to the enterprise of Christian theology that is conducted using African socio-cultural categories. It should

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ukpong, *African Theologies Now*, 7.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

be noted however, that the three approaches to the enterprise of theology in Africa are all legitimate designation and are often used interchangeably among academia. Such theologies have important implications on the structure and mission of the Church. Theologian Aylward Shorter notes on this score that “African Christians want a simpler and more congenial Church, not one in which they feel estranged by western forms that are irrelevant to their own cultural environment. They want a greater measure of participation, of community experience and of communion with the Church’s leaders. Such things are the demands of an oral culture and of the African religious imagination.”<sup>262</sup>

In the African consciousness, the world is profoundly interconnected. According to Magesa, “African perceptions of the universe consist of the interaction of various (ultimately divine) vital forces.”<sup>263</sup> Hence, he surmises that the African consciousness perceives that “the world as a sacred abode of the life forces of God, the ancestors and diverse spirits is what gives human action necessarily sacred character.”<sup>264</sup> Therefore, as observed by Bujo, “people are conscious of the benign presence of the ancestors whenever they enjoy fullness of life. Good health, numerous progeny, healthy cattle, abundant crops: all these things are felt as signs of the ancestral blessing.”<sup>265</sup>

Ukpong argues that “the emergence and development of African theologies is a function of many circumstances or factors.”<sup>266</sup> He postulates that “the major

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<sup>262</sup> Aylward SHORTER, *Christianity and the African Imagination: After the African Synod, Resources for Inculturation* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1996), 26.

<sup>263</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 59.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 25.

<sup>266</sup> Ukpong, *African Theologies Now*, 6.

circumstances that seem to have created the climate for and to have actually provoked the rise of these theologies may be designated as: the cultural factor, the historical factor, the socio-political factor, the contribution of social sciences and the theological factor.”<sup>267</sup> Among the historical factors that contributed immensely to the self-identifying theology which is rooted in theological anthropology and which embraces the three facets elaborated above has been spurred by the dynamism and progress brought about by the ideas of the ecumenical assembly of Vatican II, which emphatically affirmed the religious experience of all peoples. I will tackle this matter in the next chapter, that is how African theological elements have found expression in the liturgy of the Church on account of the consciousness brought about by Vatican II. Nevertheless, it remains to be stated that African theology has three fundamental sources: the created universe, African social, political and historical reality, and Scripture. Part of the historical reality that shapes an indigenous theological framework includes, according to Oduyoye “Africa’s own history – its social institutions as well as its religious and cultural values in all their variety.”<sup>268</sup> The Bible is a central source of African theology in that major themes of the Bible have a self-implication on the African consciousness. It is not in dispute that most African theologians, among them Mbiti “accept the claim of the PanAfrican Conference of Third World Theologians that the bible is the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture.”<sup>269</sup> Themes such as liberation from slavery, natural catastrophes and calamities, and God’s intervention are elements which

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

<sup>269</sup> Appiah-Kubi and Torres (1979,81) in Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 27.

permeate the African experiential reality. Bujo surmises, “the religious perspective of Africa can be compared to what is nowadays called “narrative theology” which is in fact rooted in the Bible.”<sup>270</sup> The significant aspect from the Bible which is the source of African theology is the Christ event. Jesus represents the yearnings of African theology in the dimension of the Messiah who gathers all of God’s children into one gigantic and flourishing human family. The African theological enterprise has been sustained by “the constant telling and retelling of the story of the Christ-event; Christian theology comes out of these events and narratives with which the people identify.”<sup>271</sup>

## **6.0 Liturgy and Bantu Culture**

Vatican II advocated for the following changes in the life of the Church: liturgical reform, episcopal collegiality, religious freedom, ecumenism, proper training of priests and the restoration of the hierarchy of revelation (and truths) with scripture taking pre-eminence over Church tradition. Further, Vatican II encouraged theological research by acknowledging the contributions of the historical critical method as a relevant approach to the conduct of theology. In this regard, the church came to the realization regarding the liturgy that, “in order that the Christian people may more certainly derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself.”<sup>272</sup> Having acknowledged the need for liturgical reform, the Church further affirmed the two dimensions of liturgy that, “for the

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<sup>270</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 29.

<sup>271</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 51.

<sup>272</sup> “Sacrosanctum Concilium,” accessed October 14, 2019, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html), 21.



liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These not only may but ought to be changed with the passage of time if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it.”<sup>273</sup>

Admittedly, as often occurs in major institutional reforms, there was tension brought about by renewal efforts spurred by Vatican II. In undertaking liturgical reforms, the Church envisioned, “that sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress careful investigation is always to be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised. This investigation should be theological, historical, and pastoral.”<sup>274</sup> The Church further guided that:

All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail. If they are true to this course of action, they will be giving ever better expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the Church.<sup>275</sup>

In this regard, the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) stated that, “finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.”<sup>276</sup> In the case of Sub-Sahara Africa and in particular Bantu Africa, the argument was that we must embark on liturgical innovation and adaptation to the extent that notions of *Ubuntu* are

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, no. 21.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, no 23.

<sup>275</sup> “Unitatis Redintegratio,” accessed November 28, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, no.23.

manifest in the liturgy. Ubuntu as an anthropological phenomenon celebrates all life enhancing events. The pulse and celebration of life is a marked feature of Bantu worldview. According to Magesa, these life enhancing events are staggered over “ the sequences of birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death in old age, entry into the community of the departed, and finally access into the company of the spirits.”<sup>277</sup> These stages of human development according to the Bantu world view have been recognized by the Church over the course of history, such that Pope Paul the VI remarked “the church views with great respect the moral and religious values of the African tradition...because she sees them as providential, as the basis for spreading the gospel message and beginning the establishment of the new society in Christ.”<sup>278</sup> African theologians such as Mercy Oduyoye subscribe to this notion when she states that Christian theology “would be unrealistic to ignore the point at which religion is the deepest element in Africa’s living culture.”<sup>279</sup>

Liturgical inculturation marks a profound awareness that God speaks to all peoples and all cultures in the deep recesses of their spirituality. Inculturation is part of a 20<sup>th</sup> century struggle to make sure that the global church could also be truly local. As Orobator observes, “cultural adaptation of the liturgy is a cultural process that has occurred spontaneously in local churches and is now understood as a way of ongoing renewal.”<sup>280</sup> Orobator understands inculturation as “the process of expressing the

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<sup>277</sup> Laurent Magesa, *Jesus The Life* in Mkenda Festo and Diane B. Stinton, *The Way, The Truth and The Life* (Nairobi, Kenya: Jesuit Historical Institute in Africa, 2017), 119.

<sup>278</sup> Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988), 207.

<sup>279</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 54.

<sup>280</sup> Mark R. Francis, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000),67.

fundamental truths of Christianity in the local faith-dialect of the people.”<sup>281</sup> It is therefore through inculturation that the church in Africa will be authentically African by depicting the unique cultural religious heritage that typifies the continent. Hence the process of inculturation has been undertaken through various symbolisms. Magesa proposes that “inculturation can be facilitated by introducing African rhythms and music in the church. This can happen through ...liturgical vestments, postures and signs.”<sup>282</sup> Aylward Shorter has a different perspective on inculturation, arguing that inculturation “is the on-going dialogue between faith and culture, or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.”<sup>283</sup>

The renewal in worship by the church stems from the realization that liturgy is made up of cultural appropriations absorbed through the centuries. The Church rightly noted “For the liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from intrusion of anything out of harmony...(SC,21). Peter Phan weighs in on the conversation on liturgical inculturation by positing that “inculturation is the double process of inserting the gospel into a particular culture and inserting this culture into the gospel so that both the gospel and the culture are challenged and enriched by each other.”<sup>284</sup> Phan understands culture to be “constituted by the conventions created by the consensus of a group into which its

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<sup>281</sup> A. E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 84.

<sup>282</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 16.

<sup>283</sup> Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*.

<sup>284</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004),213.

members are socialized...culture is seen as an integrated and integrating whole whose constituent elements are functionally interrelated to one another.”<sup>285</sup> Phan notes the tension regarding the process of inculturation to the degree that “ the liturgy is the expression of faith and Christian life, and so it is necessary to ensure that liturgical inculturation is not marked, even in appearance, by religious syncretism.”<sup>286</sup>

Notwithstanding the complexity of inculturation and the challenges it poses for the Church, I am in firm agreement with the claim by the Lutheran World Federation that “more efforts related to the transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural nature of Christian worship”<sup>287</sup> should be undertaken. Of all the proposals for inculturation, this organization recommends a process of dynamic equivalence which “involves understanding the fundamental meanings both of elements of worship and local culture and enabling the meanings and actions of worship to be ‘encoded’ and re-expressed in the language of local culture.”<sup>288</sup> Cardinal Blasé J. Cupich of the Archdiocese of Chicago comments: “What is the church’s approach as it engages such cultures? From the early days of the church, Christians believed that the seeds of faith have been planted in the hearts of all human beings, even before the Word of God is proclaimed. As such, the early church welcomed people of every culture, realizing that both the cultures and the Church are enhanced in coming to know God.”<sup>289</sup> Using Cardinal Cupich’s argumentation, I postulate that in Africa, local culture and local

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid,219.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid,230.

<sup>287</sup> Lutheran World Federation, “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities,” *The Ecumenical Review* 48, no. 3 (July 1996): 415–417, 92.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>289</sup> Blasé J. Cupich, “*Inculturation: A Two-Way Street*,” *Chicago Catholic*, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.chicagocatholic.com/cardinal-blase-j.-cupich/-/article/2019/11/06/inculturation-a-two-way-street>.

African Traditional Religions (ATRs) form the substratum upon which Christianity is planted. This is true “especially at moments of transition, liminality, and crisis occasioned by integration into the macrocosmic context that many Africans seek solace and support in the deep recesses of their ancestral religion.”<sup>290</sup>

Inculturation is a process and not a single event. It has a specific heuristic structure that seeks to promote the local realization of the universal Church. According to Joseph Komonchak “the process includes an initial moment in which the Gospel is translated from the language of the received tradition into the language of the new culture, a second moment which Pope John Paul II calls “a dialogue of cultures” takes place, and a third moment in which the Gospel has so entered into the local culture that it can help form and direct it.”<sup>291</sup> In short, the call for an inculturated liturgy emanates from the realization that “traditional Catholicism bears the marks of the long history through which it has transformed Western culture and been itself transformed in the process. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a Catholicism that represents some pure, transcultural quintessence of Christianity.”<sup>292</sup> In this regard, there is need to free liturgy from cultural domination of one culture over the other. In contrast, liturgy should be laden with the free expression of “elements proper to the culture in question.”<sup>293</sup>

The Second Vatican Council took place between 1962 and 1965, and was attended by some approximately 2,860 bishops from 116 countries. Of these bishops, ten percent represented the African continent; of these, thirty were indigenous African bishops.

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<sup>290</sup> A. E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 69.

<sup>291</sup> Joseph Komonchak, *The Local Realization of the Church* in Giuseppe Alberigo et al., eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 82.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>293</sup> Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 11.

Although the African voice was subdued at Vatican II, on account of the numbers, there were nevertheless vocal elements at the Council who advocated for the consideration of the unique existential context of the Church in Africa. Among such, according to Laurent Magesa, was Bishop Soares de Resende of Beira in Mozambique who “wanted a Church of and for the poor, questioning the value of ornate Church decoration and insignia as not being in accordance with the Spirit of Christ.”<sup>294</sup> Another notable critic of the Church’s agenda at Vatican II was Bishop Raymond Tchidimbo of Conakry in Guinea who noted that the Church was “Western in outlook.”<sup>295</sup>

Vatican II produced sixteen crucial documents that were set to define the course of the Church over the next century. At the core of Vatican II were two principal dynamic principles, namely; the renewal of the Church in the light of rapid socioeconomic changes and undisputed and reasonable scientific discoveries that were occurring in its context and the profound awareness on the part of the Church of the active presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world, and the subsequent call to be responsive to the needs of the times. The Church affirmed the significance of inculturation in in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS):

The church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any set of customs, ancient or modern. The church is faithful to its traditions and is at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves. (GS,58)

The renewal in worship by the church stems from the realization that liturgy is made up of cultural appropriations absorbed through the centuries. Hence, we read, “for the liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements

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<sup>294</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *The Post-Conciliar Church in Africa - No Turning Back The Clock*, First. (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from intrusion of anything out of harmony...(SC,21).

Peter Phan, weighs in on the conversation on liturgical inculturation by positing that, “Inculturation is the double process of inserting the gospel into a particular culture and inserting this culture into the gospel so that both the gospel and the culture are challenged and enriched by each other.”<sup>296</sup> Phan understands culture as, “constituted by the conventions created by the consensus of a group into which its members are socialized...culture is seen as an integrated and integrating whole whose constituent elements are functionally interrelated to one another.”<sup>297</sup> Phan notes the tension regarding the process of inculturation observing that “ the liturgy is the expression of faith and Christian life, and so it is necessary to ensure that liturgical inculturation is not marked, even in appearance, by religious syncretism.”<sup>298</sup>

Mark Francis, argued that in the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, “the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy set Vatican II firmly on the path of allowing local churches a measure of freedom in discovering and developing their own particular expression of the faith in worship.”<sup>299</sup> Consequently, therefore, due authority was granted to the “use of the vernacular in the liturgy (see SC, 36) and the possibility of legitimate variations within the Roman rite(see SC, 37-40) are examples that might be used to facilitate a better understanding of the liturgy.”<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 213.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>299</sup> Francis, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider*, 51.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid,51-52.

The document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) which states that, “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy”<sup>301</sup> Further, the constitution on divine liturgy states that, “there must be *no innovations* unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.”<sup>302</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* (GS) is considered among the most progressive documents of Vatican II. In its wholeness as a document, it is considered a summary of the thrust and motif of the Second Vatican Council. In comparison to other documents of the Council, it was the last and in no way the least document to be considered and approved by that body. A key characteristic of this document is that it is addressed to all people and calls upon the Church to read the signs of the times. It is also the longest document of the Council. The document has three parts. After the introduction, part one depicts the situation of people in the world; part Two formulates the Church’s calling in responding to the human condition by focusing on the dignity of the human person, the community of mankind, man’s activity in the universe, the role of the Church in the modern world. Finally, part Three elucidates some urgent social-economic problems, such as the defense of marriage and family life, the proper development of culture, economic and social life, the life of the political community, the fostering of peace and promotion of a community of nations. Thanks to the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et*

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid, no.14

<sup>302</sup> Ibid,no. 23.



*Spes*) the Church of Southern and Eastern Africa can appropriate in its liturgical expression a variety of local cultural symbols and signs.

According to Ratzinger, the Pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World was the most important document of the council because it “was a single comprehensive new document which would treat all the topical questions involved in the Christian relationship to the world.”<sup>303</sup> The chief architect of this document was the German moral theologian Bernhard Häring. The argument for a constructive engagement with the world in the document was advanced primarily from the view that “authoritarian *fiat* had to be replaced by dialogue, insistence on rights by an awareness of the Church’s duty to serve...”<sup>304</sup> In this regard the text of the document “was intended to come sympathetically to terms with the contemporary situations and modern thinking.”<sup>305</sup> So the central thrust of the text of the document “was to speak to contemporary man; thus it had tried to express fundamental theological ideas in a modern way...”<sup>306</sup> This was for purposes of addressing “the dichotomy...between Biblicism and modernity...i.e. establish an alliance between biblical and contemporary thinking.”<sup>307</sup>

Let us take for example the declaration on the possibility of salvation outside the Catholic Church. *Gaudium et Spes* states,

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.”<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009). 214

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 215

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 215

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 219

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-219

<sup>308</sup> Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on The Church*,” December 7, 1965, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). 22

It was quite revolutionary at the time for the Church at that juncture of history to be open to the possibility of deep incarnation- the belief that Jesus Christ transcends the institutional Church and is present concretely in the people and cultures of the world. Such an approach is shared by Neils Gregersen who “adds the idea of the whole of creation as the cosmic body of Christ.”<sup>309</sup> It is not without question that this such an inspiration on the part of the Church was the work and act of the Holy Spirit. Such a profound consciousness by the Church at Vatican II showed great capacity in the Church to transcend its times and horizons. It was a complete shift from the claim of Vatican I and previous Councils which affirmed the nomenclature of uniformity in the Church. In contrast Vatican II called for unity in diversity.

The question of culture and theology has gained momentum ever since the discovery of the science of anthropology. Culture is defined by Sir Edward Tylor as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”<sup>310</sup> Tylor argues further that culture is “essentially a transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a pattern capable of development and change, and it belongs to the concept of humanness itself. It follows that if religion is a human phenomenon or human activity, it must affect, and be affected by culture.”<sup>311</sup> Magesa, advocating for consideration of an African narrative, has weighed in on the discourse of liturgical inculturation by stating: “There is need to promote respect for African cultural heritage and identity, to drop the Western

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<sup>309</sup> Edwards, *Deep Incarnation*, 22.

<sup>310</sup> Sir Edward Tylor in Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988), 4.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*,5.

mentality that leads to negative perceptions and mistreatment of African traditional religiosity and people.”<sup>312</sup> Joseph Healey, like Magesa contends that “ African religion and culture contain seeds of God’s word.”<sup>313</sup>

Given the foregoing, the church has made tremendous achievements in the understanding of human salvation seen from the prism of culture especially after Vatican II. In order to appreciate the strides made by the Church, let us consider the view of the church prior to Vatican II, which held to the notion that, “ there is no doubt that not only all heathens, but also all Jews and all heretics and schismatics who die outside the church will go into that everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.”<sup>314</sup> However, since Vatican II there has been a marked shift regarding the association of a people’s cultures with the ‘devil and his angels.’ Whereas previously non-European cultures were seen as barbaric and counter to the values of the gospel, there has been increasing awareness in the providential value of the world’s peoples and their respective cultures. Vatican II declared succinctly, “Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.”<sup>315</sup> As rightly observed by Orobator, regarding the theocentric culture of the continent, “Africans are deeply religious people. They were already familiar with

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<sup>312</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 17.

<sup>313</sup> Joseph G. Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, Faith and cultures series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 50.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid,89.

<sup>315</sup> “Gaudium et Spes,” accessed September 23, 2019, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), No. 22.

the existence and worship of God prior to the advent of Christianity and its claim that Jesus Christ is the sole redeemer of the world.”<sup>316</sup>

African religions manifest how the experience of the divine speaks to the African consciousness. Indeed, I add here that Jesus Christ alone, in my understanding, is the purifier of all religious expressions and cultures. He is the one who invites us to God, irrespective of our unique diversities as persons, communities and cultures. The Church was therefore, insightful when it encouraged all her faithful to “enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”<sup>317</sup>

Mark Francis’s views on this conversation is premised on how Greco-Roman culture influenced Christianity in its imperial inception stage. He argues that “because of the pervasive and public nature of religion, it was also political.”<sup>318</sup> In this regard many of the functionaries of the cultic religion, assumed these offices because they came with prestige and power. This, among other factors accounts for the overarching and demanding loyalty to the emperor and empire rather than to the values of the gospel.

In short, I surmise that the question of culture and religion is a complex one. If it is to be addressed adequately, we should acknowledge that this process is a painstaking process of mutual tolerance and engagement. Admittedly, it cannot be settled by cultural

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<sup>316</sup> A. E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 74.

<sup>317</sup> “Nostra Aetate,” accessed November 28, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html), No. 2.

<sup>318</sup> Mark R. Francis, *Local Worship, Global Church: Popular Religion and the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 41.

annihilation of one culture by the other. Rather it requires a gradual appropriation of life-giving values in a given culture. Therefore, in Orobator's words, the African church invites Christianity "to drink from the wells of the invincible sources of our religious cultures enable us to generate theology brewed in "an African pot.""<sup>319</sup>

The liturgical reform promoted by the Council had three major effects. First, in the celebration of the mass, a number of cultural elements representative of Bantu worldview and cosmology were included. Among these, was the perception of the church as a family of God. Consequently, in the Mass, women, the youth and children came to play a more prominent role of the liturgy. In many parts of Africa, family is a fundamental social unit that defines and socializes a person's way of being. Orobator posits that "family is an important value and dimension of religious, socio-cultural, political, and economic life."<sup>320</sup> On this score, when Vatican II emphatically declared the church as "the people of God and a communion, we understand this to mean within the context of the African Christian community, the church is family."<sup>321</sup> Hence, children, in the post Conciliar African Church, in Southern and Eastern Africa, were no longer circumscribed to Sunday school only; rather, they were encouraged to participate in the two principal parts of the Mass, namely the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. During the liturgy of the word, it's not uncommon to see children participate in the flowery processing, and indeed in taking an active role in reading scripture. Further, during the Eucharistic prayer, only children are allowed to raise hands during the epiclesis, that is the invocation of the Holy Spirit, provided that they constitute the procession team that is seated close to the

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<sup>319</sup> Elochukwu Uzukwu. *A Theology of Christian Unity for the Church in Africa* in A. E. Orobator, ed., *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016) 119.

<sup>320</sup> A. E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 84.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 84

alter. Further, children are permitted to raise their hands, during the eucharistic elevation, a sacred ritual which involves raising of the consecrated elements of bread and wine during the Mass. At the end of the Mass, children as members of the entrance procession, are constitutive of the exit procession after Mass. It is important to state that there is a paradox in the participation of children in the Mass celebration of the Bantu church.

*Flower girls*, as they are often called in Zambia, form part of the liturgical ambience in many parishes. They are often elegantly dressed either in colorful of which some are made from African *chitenge* material. The paradox is this: it is *flower girls* who raise her hands and eyes towards the consecrated Eucharist during the elevation stage of the Mass, in unison with the duly ordained priest. Altar boys are not permitted, at this stage of the ritual, to display a similar gesture notwithstanding the fact that they share a ‘similar biological ontology’ with the priest. I surmise that in her adolescence the flower girl will sadly come to learn that there are seven sacraments in the church, seven for boys and six for girls.

Regarding, the distribution of leadership roles, it is reported that African women perform about 65 percent of the leadership and liturgical roles in the African Church. Many times, women are the front-liners at the parish office in several urban Churches in Southern and East Africa. Further, some women perform roles such as Parish Chairpersons, Secretaries and Treasurers. They also perform roles as animators of what are called *Schools of Jesus* in which children are taught catechism. Further, they also function as matrons for *flower-girls’* and boys’ groups. Women also play an important role in accompanying young couples as marriage counsellors. Parish women’s groups are also critical in providing funeral support to parish families during bereavements. This

support covers mobilizing of resources and singing dirges which provide the much-needed emotional support and accompaniment to the mourning family. Magesa sums up the participation of women in the liturgy and the Church by stating that “there is increasing collaboration in ministry. For example, there are girls serving at the altar, women catechists, women eucharistic ministers, choir leaders, and so on.”<sup>322</sup> All these changes are part and parcel of the attitudinal and structural changes introduced by Vatican II in the African Church. I add that such dynamism has opened the way for the Church in Africa to be more authentic and reflect the spirit of African culture. It is such changes that aid the appropriation of African culture into the structural reorganization of the church which lends the Church as family, which is by and large an African traditional ecclesiology.

The second aspect to experience liturgical innovation in the post conciliar African Church was the use of local instruments and local songs in the liturgy. Previously, they had been considered totally unacceptable. Indeed, many of the Bishops in the post conciliar African Church, many of whom were Rome-trained, resisted the introduction of local songs, as they were considered inimical to the liturgy. Many dioceses were replete with conflicts stemming from clashes between choirs and the local ordinary and his liturgical commission on account of resisting liturgical instruments such as the African drum, as in some dioceses in Southern Africa. Indeed, I would caricature it as a “war” between the organ and the African drum. In this battle the African drum prevailed, particularly because of its utility during the *Gloria*, that is the praise part, of the Mass. It is in the *Gloria*, in where we see the fullest expression of the exuberance of African

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<sup>322</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 28.

societies and the choreographic nature of African liturgical dance, as it is characterized by drumming, dancing, ululating, clapping, and so on. The Mass, during the Gloria in Bantu Africa, becomes a celebration of a God who loves His people extravagantly. In gratitude His redeemed people, give Him the due glory and honor in joy befitting His Holy Name. The use of traditional instruments and symbols in liturgy, such as drums, shakers, rattles and xylophones, has made the liturgy of the Bantu church more meaningful to the people. Magesa surmises in this regard that “the use of musical instruments in liturgy was seen to signify joy, praise, honor and respect.”<sup>323</sup>

Of all the progressive liturgical movements which emanated or were catalyzed by Vatican II on the African continent and in Bantu cultural symbolism none has been as conspicuous as the Zairean Rite, what is currently referred to as the Congolese Rite of the Mass. The genesis of this rite was “before Vatican II, the bishops of Zaire stated that Christianity's appeal was inhibited because of lack of adaptation to the living traditions of the African peoples.”<sup>324</sup> Hence in 1961 the Episcopal Conference of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) advocated for an "adaptation of the cult." This adaptation of the liturgy was to be premised on a “critical examination of the religious customs and cultural matrix of the African peoples which was identified as the starting point for an elaboration of an authentic African liturgy.”<sup>325</sup>

This rite was “promulgated by the decree *Zairensium* on April 30, 1988 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.”<sup>326</sup> The

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<sup>323</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 72.

<sup>324</sup> “Missal for the Dioceses of Zaire | Encyclopedia.Com,” accessed March 29, 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/missal-dioceses-zaire>.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.



Congolese Rite was first submitted for approval in 1983, complete with a liturgically reconstructed eucharistic prayer. It was considered by the Zairean Bishops that the Zairean Rite was part and parcel of a “liturgy that responds to the most profound aspirations of Africans.”<sup>327</sup> To date, the Zairean Rite, now called the Congolese Rite, has proven successful. In fact, Pope Francis used it to celebrate the first Sunday of Advent in Rome in November 2019.

Another liturgical innovation stemming from the implementation of the progressive spirit of Vatican II has been the emergence of the Small Christian Community (SCCs), which was been considered as the new way of being Church. The SCC concept has had its practical supporters who included the Malawian-born theologian Patrick Augustine Kalilombe. Kalilombe was the Bishop of Lilongwe, Malawi from 1972 to 1979. He advocated for the formation of SCCs in his diocese, and soon this concept became popular across sub-Saharan Africa. According to Kalilombe “In the regular meetings of the small communities the faithful developed the habit of freely examining and evaluating according to Christian principles whatever was being asked of them and then deciding to follow what they felt was their duty before God.”<sup>328</sup> Another proponent of SCC concept is Joseph Healey of the Maryknoll Missionaries, who states, “There are over 160,000 SCCs in the nine countries of Eastern Africa. SCCs are a New Model of Church and a New Way of Being Church in Africa today. SCC are not a movement in the Catholic Church, but the ‘Church on the Move.’<sup>329</sup> So what is a SCC?

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<sup>327</sup> Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 194.

<sup>328</sup> Patrick Kalilombe, *Doing Theology at the Grassroots: Theological Essays from Malawi* (Luviri Press, 2018), 36.

<sup>329</sup> “Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa - by Father Joseph G. Healey, MM,” *Archives*, November 11, 2014, accessed November 28, 2019, <https://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?p=4569>.

Kalilombe contends that in Small Christian Communities “The Church’s mission is to build up the faithful, as individuals but more so as communities, into a prophetic people who act as a ferment in society enabling all members to be critically aware of and actively involved as co-responsible participants in all that is going on.”<sup>330</sup> However, according to Healey “A SCC is a small neighborhood, parish-based group in an urban or rural area in Eastern Africa that is a pastoral model of Church that transforms the parish into a communion of communities and an instrument of evangelization.”<sup>331</sup> In the liturgy of the Church, the SCC acts as a vehicle for liturgical innovation as SCCs bring along their respective cultural varieties which are often constituted by different cultural communities. Magesa, points to the “SCC as a source and expression of inculturation.”<sup>332</sup> The SCC, as a unit of the local church in Sub-Saharan Africa, help in constructing “the church from below, through vital grassroots communities.”<sup>333</sup> Orobator observes that “The attitude toward SCCs in Eastern Africa appears more positive elsewhere on the continent.”<sup>334</sup> In Malawi, the implementation of the SCCs concept was met with severe challenges. During the time of the one-party state some state functionaries viewed the SCC as “a clever plot of the bishop to organize a political opposition party.”<sup>335</sup> In the end Kalilombe paid a high price for implementing the SCC concept when the government of Malawi, under the one party state, protested against the idea and Rome obliged by calling him to the Vatican to ‘hear’ his case. Kalilombe reports that “the Party accused the Church of forming clandestine subversive groups which were working against the party

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<sup>330</sup> Kalilombe, *Doing Theology at the Grassroots*, 36.

<sup>331</sup> “Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa - by Father Joseph G. Healey, MM.”

<sup>332</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 51.

<sup>333</sup> Alberigo et al., *The Reception of Vatican II*, 84.

<sup>334</sup> Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 23.

<sup>335</sup> Kalilombe, *Doing Theology at the Grassroots*, 37.

and not show respect and obedience to the Life President.”<sup>336</sup> Several leaders of SCCs particularly those in rural areas were subjects of suspicion and arrests by the local police and their party functionaries “charged with subversion.”<sup>337</sup>

In Malawi, the Bishops’ conference began the process of establishing a *Chichewa Missal* and the translation of the Mass ritual into local language. This project was between 1962-1964. It proved quite successful when it was eventually rolled out not only in Malawi but also in the surrounding countries of Zambia, Mozambique, and some parts of Zimbabwe. Vatican II had insisted that, “the liturgical books are to be revised as soon as possible; experts are to be employed on the task, and bishops are to be consulted, from various parts of the world.”<sup>338</sup> The formation of the *Chichewa Missal* proved that theology and indeed liturgy could be enriched through use of local symbols, signs and language. According to Patrick Kalilombe the “translation of the missal and Ritual developed into a joint international undertaking when the Nyanja speaking Catholic dioceses of Zambia were drawn in and asked to contribute quite substantially towards the final texts which are widely used today.”<sup>339</sup> Kalilombe further notes, regarding local efforts to inculturate the liturgy “as liturgical texts were being translated into vernacular, logically there was the need to search for appropriate local cultural forms of expression to accompany the new liturgical and catechetical creations.”<sup>340</sup>

Another successful element in the inculturation of liturgy has been the celebration of *Harvest Sunday*. During *Harvest Sunday*, the local community celebrates as one united

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> “Sacrosanctum Concilium.” No. 25

<sup>339</sup> Kalilombe, *Doing Theology at the Grassroots*, 30.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

community in offering due worship to God for the agricultural produce and harvest. It is celebrated once a year at the end of the rainy season and at the first harvest of farm produce. In some parts of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique some communities bring their first produce for blessing and as an offering during the Mass. Harvest Sunday has a unique liturgy complete with songs that accompany the celebrations. Unfortunately, the Church has yet to approve the use of local food and produce during the Mass as key ingredients of the liturgy, for the appropriate reason of safeguarding liturgical harmony. Indeed, the species of bread and wine, which are used during Mass, remain the immutable aspects of the liturgy and, therefore, not open to inculturation, for now at least. Therefore, the faithful have to be content for now, to celebrate harvest Sunday with imported wine and the hosts purchased from far flung areas.

It is not in dispute that Vatican II generated both attitudinal and structural shifts in the African Bantu Church. Since 1965, as Magesa argues, Vatican II facilitated “major shifts in the theological, structural, and pastoral understanding and practice of the Church in the continent.”<sup>341</sup> Inculturation is one such result of Vatican II. With profound insights emanating from theological anthropology, the Church embraced the world’s life-giving cultures as gifts that should be explored and incorporated in the very mission of the Church. The Church is the family of God founded on *Jesu Kristu*, comprising the ancestors, i.e. the living dead, the living and the yet to be born. In this regard one could say that the post-conciliar African Church joined the cosmic dance of the universe in praise of God, using the symbols and signs which typify its world view. In the words of Pope Paul VI in *Africae Terrarum*, he says “we think it profitable to dwell on some

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<sup>341</sup> Magesa, *The Post-Conciliar Church in Africa - No Turning Back The Clock*, 13.

general ideas which typify ancient Africa religious cultures because we think their moral and religious values deserving of attentive consideration.”<sup>342</sup> Kalilombe, notes the burst of progressive activities in the African church that “local tunes and ritual gestures of celebration began to be used while at the same time people went for what they felt were ‘African’ liturgical vestments and utensils.”<sup>343</sup>

However, notwithstanding these progressive movements in liturgical inculturation some issues are still outstanding and, therefore, worthy of future exploration, namely, the healing elements of the liturgy, the use of local foods and the acknowledgements of rites of passage and festal elements of the Bantu people as integral to the ecclesial liturgy. “Inculturation is nothing other than living according to the impulses of the Spirit of life, revealed in the communal experience of a people. It involves observing and articulating from lived experience of culture the divine values connected most clearly with the life-enhancing message of Jesus Christ in a way that gives these values flesh in the here and now.”<sup>344</sup> In the case of the Church in Africa Magesa observes that, of all the Vatican II documents “*Nostra Aetate, Gaudium et Spes, Ad Gentes, and Dignitatis Humanae*, would later probably have the profoundest impact on the Church there.”<sup>345</sup> I conclude this conversation on inculturation in the Bantu African Church, with Cardinal Cupich’s words, “At the heart of our tradition of inculturation is the fundamental belief that God desires the salvation of all he has created.”<sup>346</sup> Liturgical inculturation, therefore, is not an

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<sup>342</sup> Pope Paul VI in Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*.

<sup>343</sup> Kalilombe, *Doing Theology at the Grassroots*, 30.

<sup>344</sup> Magesa, *The Post-Conciliar Church in Africa - No Turning Back The Clock*, 19.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13

<sup>346</sup> Blasé J. Cupich, “Inculturation.”

event that occurs instantly rather it is a painstaking process that requires investments in time and research skills as well as consultations and open and sincere conversations.

## **7.0 Praxis in African Culture and African Christian Theology**

African theology, according to Magesa, “investigates the ways in which Christian thought and practice might articulate a renewed Christian tradition in the African context, one that ultimately means a deeper relationship between all human beings and all creation. The trail it follows is that of the rediscovery of the power of God working in the continent – in conventional language, God’s self-revelation there.”<sup>347</sup> The question of the relationship between culture and theology gained momentum ever since the emergence of the science of anthropology. Culture, is defined by Sir Edward Tylor as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”<sup>348</sup> Such a broad understanding explains why culture becomes instrumental in the study of theology, which grounds all initiatives seeking to inculturate the universal church in local contexts. Using Shorter’s word, culture can be understood as “essentially a transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a pattern capable of development and change, and it belongs to the concept of humanness itself. It follows that, if religion is a human phenomenon or human activity, it must affect, and be affected by culture.”<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 108.

<sup>348</sup> Sir Edward Tylor in Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988),4.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*,5.

What then is the theological hermeneutical praxis in African traditional theology? African theology is rooted in nature, humanity, life and the transcendent. It hinges on community, creation, and the reality of the divine. Holy mother creation supplies the elements of African theology. These elements are all intertwined into a cosmic whole and held in balance by the vital force of life. All things are in motion, by way of a unified spirit, which has different manifestations in matter, towards the One. In Bantu theology, one might see Gregersen's notion of deep incarnation. In this view, "God does not only tolerate material existence, but God becomes involved with the world, appears within it, shares creaturely experiences from within, and – if we follow the particular trajectory of the Jesus story – takes side with the victims of evolution and social injustice."<sup>350</sup> That is creation is mediated by "the Spirit, which is the supposition of the divine stretch, or reach, into the depths of creation in deep incarnation. Deep incarnation is mediated by the Holy Spirit of God at every point."<sup>351</sup> Therefore, in the case of death is passage, a state of liminality. There is neither notion of earthly rupture nor an eschatological end to the universe. Natural mutations and emergent phenomena are either divine intervention or a surreptitious intervention by forces counter intuitive to life. This has interpretive consequences given that all theology stems from the world of experience. According to Kwesi Dickson, "Theologising is preceded by some experience, of the life of faith, an awareness of the significance of one's faith. This experience which is characterized by an openness to fresh dimensions of one's faith may take the form of a revelation, the breaking in of the holy human consciousness in such way as to constitute an irreversible

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<sup>350</sup> Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: From Deep History to Post-Axial Religion," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 2.

<sup>351</sup> Edwards, *Deep Incarnation*, 22.

experience, with important consequences."<sup>352</sup> In African theology, the concept of ancestors is essential. It is understood that the forebearers are the living-dead. Living because they carried along in the ontology of being of the family and community both in Spirit and DNA of the living. They symbolize a living reality to the transcendent, and they mediate for the family and community before the Divine. According to, Jacob Olupona, "Ancestors, having transcended the human realm, occupy a higher realm of existence and are equipped to bestow honor and blessing on the living members of the lineage. A reciprocal relationship links the living and the dead."<sup>353</sup> In this regard, how does this African classic dialogue with the proto classic of Western Christianity, namely the Jesus event. The Jesus event fits perfectly in ancestral theology based on two fronts. First, the suffering and persecuted innocent is rewarded by the glorious wondrous event of the resurrection necessarily because of His innocence. Secondly, Jesus represents the Blessed One, whom the entire creation and cosmos and the ancestors longed to see, the One who unites all things to the Whole. This agrees with Tracy's claim that the Jesus event is a "manifestation from the whole by the power of the whole."<sup>354</sup>

Therefore, I argue that the Jesus event is neither an exclusively Western Christian notion nor the Jewish *Messianic* expectation. It is rather an expectant salvific notion that permeates cultural and confessional sensitivities of human history. Jesus Christ meets the eschatological yearnings that lay deep in the fabric of creation. He is the prototype of hypostatic union. Quantitatively put, he is 100 percent God, 100 percent man and 100

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<sup>352</sup> Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London : Maryknoll, N.Y: Darton, Longman, and Todd ; Orbis Books, 1984),22-23.

<sup>353</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014),28.

<sup>354</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 234.



percent creation. Hence no culture and no human community can elude nor escape the fulfillment that He offers in His incarnation. As in the words of Pope John Paul II “In the Incarnation of the Son of God...the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face. The truth communicated in Christ's Revelation is therefore no longer confined to a particular place or culture but is offered to every man and woman who would welcome it as the word which is the absolutely valid source of meaning for human life.”<sup>355</sup> In this regard, the Jesus event is a transcultural theological classic that meets the three criteria of intelligibility, reasonableness, and responsibility which correspond to the African criteria of life, solidarity and community. Simply put, the incarnation of Jesus Christ meets and transcends the fundamental tenets of ancestry theology. As Lonergan points out “The Person of Christ is an identity that eternally is subject of divine consciousness and in time became subject of human consciousness.”<sup>356</sup> The Jesus Christ Kerygma and the cultural and social symbols it portrays resonates well with the African psyche and ancestral theology. Jesus’ compassion to marginalized groups, women, children, the infirm and diseased qualifies him as The One in the theology of the ancestors, who is a king, a prophet and a priest, hence His involvement and invocation in the rites of passage i.e., birth, puberty, marriage, and death, and indeed in the everyday libation of our communities. According to Magesa, “It is not possible to have an inner understanding of God without the ancestors. Models of divine life on earth, which everyone must imitate, are embedded in the ancestors who connect the individual

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<sup>355</sup> “Fides et Ratio (14 September 1998) | John Paul II.”

<sup>356</sup> Bernard Lonergan and Lonergan Research Institute, *A Third Collection* (University of Toronto Press, 2017), 89.

and the community with the Spiritual world.”<sup>357</sup> The notion of ancestors in the theological framework of the Bantu people has a threefold performative function.

First, it affirms the existential reality of the people’s connectedness to history through lineage lines. In remembering and venerating the ancestors by way of theological tenets and notions, the people affirm the necessity of lived experience as the on-going activity of God. It is in the ancestors that God is actively present in the triple heritage of the people, that is, in the past, present and future. All of the present’s individual and communal activities must be undertaken so as not to subvert the peace of the ancestors. Therefore, some traditions of the Bantu people, according to Olupona “centralize ancestral veneration, because it remains instrumental to lineage, clan, and family formations.”<sup>358</sup> This theological framework attains its transcendental dimension primarily because it is of the view that ancestors have transcended bodily existence and proceeded beyond the spatial and timely realities of human physical existence. Hence, they are in a position to mediate and “bestow honor and blessings on the living members of their lineage.”<sup>359</sup> In effect, there is a reciprocal relationship between the living and the living-dead. Therefore, libations and offerings are made with appropriate calendrical rites to honor the ancestors for several reasons. Chief among the reasons is to “guard against capricious and malicious energies that can cause havoc in the universal order.”<sup>360</sup>

The second reason why ancestors are key to Bantu theology is that they constitute a key element of the spiritual world. Death, in the sense of finality of life, does not exist in Bantu cosmology and world view. Death is a passage to the afterlife. African theology

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<sup>357</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 120.

<sup>358</sup> Olupona, *African Religions*, 28.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 34.

holds the view that “in the afterlife, ancestors possess power and authority unparalleled by living elders, thereby validating their social and moral control over their progeny.”<sup>361</sup> According to this worldview, there is a profound and intimate connection between the living-dead and the living. Hence, this connection needs to be acknowledged with practical life events and celebrations. There are moral and social implications to *ancestry*. The living must live in peace and desist from behaviors that are inimical to the wellbeing of society. Olupona further notes “Although still close to humanity, ancestors mostly cast aside negative individual characteristics that they had while incarnate, becoming ideal men and women able to counsel the living on their social and moral interactions.”<sup>362</sup> According to Olupona, this conviction of the moral status of the ancestors is premised on the view that “after death, the dead assume a perfected moral personality.”<sup>363</sup> This is one of the criteria of being an ancestor too. While alive, the candidate for *ancestry* should have led an upright moral life, replete with healthy social relations. It is such a conception of the ancestors that lays due credence to the salvific nature of Jesus Christ as the Messiah in African traditional religion. Some African theologians and ordinary folk alike have portrayed Jesus using the contextual archetype of the ancestors and their mediatory role to humanity. According to Elias Bongmba, “Christ as ancestor gives life to all. As one who has lived a good life and is now with God, Christ as ancestor inspires ethical engagement in the community.”<sup>364</sup> Some African theologians, such as E.J Penoukou, have described Jesus as

*jete*-ancestor who as an African ancestor provides the power and resources necessary for living life in community. Charles Nyamiti conceptualizes Christ as ancestor

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<sup>361</sup> Olupona, *African Religions*, 29.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Bongmba, *African Theology*<sup>1</sup> in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 252.

through kingship relations and the philosophical category of vitalism. Christ as ancestor is the sustaining force behind human fecundity, wisdom, sacred powers, individual and communal responsibility, and interpersonal relationship. Bénézet Bujo calls Christ a proto-ancestor through a theology that stresses a “commemorative narrative soteriology” that links the community, and the dead.<sup>365</sup>

Thomas Cattoi, referencing fourth century Patristic thought, insists that if Jesus is to be conceived using ancestral categories then “Christ as the ultimate ancestor and mediator, on the contrary, must be understood as equal in dignity to the creator of the universe, whose plan he manifests and carries out in the course of time.”<sup>366</sup> At the same time, this view is not opposed to deep incarnation. Deep incarnation is the notion of connecting the whole of the created universe to the cosmic breakthrough of Jesus into human history. It was first espoused by the Danish Lutheran theologian Niels Gregersen who argued that “God assumed not only the body of a particular human person: Jesus from Nazareth. God also assumed a human being and a vital and fragile body susceptible to decay and death.”<sup>367</sup> The argument by Gregersen posits that in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, there was a whole cosmic renewal of the universe. This approach is a theological novelty in that it presupposes that the incarnation of Jesus Christ into human history is a theological epistemic rupture. Other theologians who subscribe to such a theological notion, include among them Rene Padilla, who states, “The incarnation unmistakably demonstrates God’s intention to make himself known from within the human situation.”<sup>368</sup> Indeed, if Christ is incarnated in the world, surely all cultures have inherent means to grasp and express the Christ event using local categories, symbols and languages. For many of the

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 251–252.

<sup>366</sup> Thomas Cattoi, *Why Read The Church Fathers? Teaching Nicaea as Contextual Theology* in Fernández and Ross, *Doing Theology as If People Mattered*, 57.

<sup>367</sup> Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation.”

<sup>368</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 12.

Bantu Peoples, given the credibility of Christ as proclaimed in the scriptures, he passes as the head of the ancestors and also the head of creation. In Christ, the whole universe and creation alike are reconceptualized and seen anew in that there is a congruence between creation and salvation as they have one source and are inescapably intertwined.

The third theological dimension of *ancestrology* is that the ancestors, in proceeding to the level of the living dead, they enter the cosmic circle of life and return to the living through passing their names to infants in the clan. During the naming ceremony of infants, only morally upright and worthy members of the clan who have attained the uprightness of ancestors can have their names conferred on infants of the clan. Among the Bantu linguistic grouping, in particular the *Lupupa* people of Democratic Republic of Congo, they hold the view that “a spirit returns to be reborn in a lineage when its living descendants maintain an amicable relationship with the ancestors...thus newly born grandchildren often bear their forefather’s or foremother’s name.”<sup>369</sup> In African theological worldview, the ancestors therefore, perform the function of preparing the birth of a person in the specific milieu of his or her time, intermediators to the Divine, and an eschatological reception to the communion to their world. As rightly observed Bujo, “In varying circumstances of life, the essential thing is to go over again and again the life-story of the ancestors, for therein alone can salvation be found.”<sup>370</sup> An immoral and violent member of the clan can not have his or her name passed on to an infant nor can s/he become an ancestor. The criteria of a healthy social relations and a good moral standard are crucial determinants in the understanding of the notion of ancestors.

According to Olupona “Maintaining lineage remains one’s responsibility, whether in the

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<sup>369</sup> Olupona, *African Religions*, 32.

<sup>370</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 29.

human world or in the ancestral world.”<sup>371</sup> Hence the distinct feature emerges regarding the African theological hermeneutical framework in general and Bantu culture in particular, that it revolves around a triangulated world of the sanctity of creation, the lineage and interconnectivity of the human family, and the world of spirits.

John Mbiti observes that according to many African creation myths, “the state of original man was one of happiness, childlike ignorance, immortality, or ability to rise again after dying, God provided man with the necessities of life, and man lived more or less in a paradise.”<sup>372</sup> Regarding the maintenance and sustenance of clan and community lineage, Mbiti states “Every African society has ways of establishing and maintaining contact between human beings and the departed. These include the pouring of libation, giving formal and informal offerings (mainly of food), making sacrifices, propitiating, praying, and fulfilling requests made by the departed.”<sup>373</sup> The departed, in other words the ancestors, play a significant role in African world view. For example, Mbiti notes “The departed are considered to be intermediaries through whom men may approach God and sometimes God may relay his message or activities to mankind. Among the Kurama, this concept has earned the departed the name of “the ear of God.”<sup>374</sup> Regarding the world of Spirits in African theology, it is noted, “The spirits are the stepping stones towards God, the intermediaries through whom men may contact God.”<sup>375</sup> It can be inferred from the foregoing that there is a thin line separating the ancestors and the spirits. The two are often interchanged in some in Bantu theological anthropology. This is

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<sup>371</sup> Olupona, *African Religions*, 32.

<sup>372</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 166.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

because in Bantu anthropological theology, the spirit is always attached to a subject or an object. That is, it is a spirit of someone or something specific. It has a specific origination. Such a theological view is in tandem with the scientific insight that matter can neither be created or destroyed, it merely changes states. Therefore, the spirit in African theology always bears its prototype. More specifically, in Bantu theology it is held that when the living die, they proceed to the Spiritual realm. Death is merely a means of proceeding to the afterlife. It is precisely such notions that demonstrate that in African theological framework life can neither be destroyed nor stopped. Rather, life can take different dimensions and forms. It would appear in many African traditional theological anthropologies, that human beings are predestined for immortality. Mbiti points out that “without exception, African peoples believe that death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter.”<sup>376</sup> He further argues that “the living-dead move on beyond the horizon of human memory, and merge into the group of spirits some of which were once human beings and others of which have other origins.”<sup>377</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that at major communal events such as ceremonies and libations, the living-dead are included. It is also considered that the living dead appear occasionally in various forms at critical moments of the community’s or one’s life. Mbiti states “The departed appear generally to the older members of their surviving human families, for a friendly visit, to inquire about family affairs, to warn of impending danger, or to demand a sacrifice or offering, or observation of a particular request or command.”<sup>378</sup> The appearance of the departed ancestors and other iconic and

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 264–265.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 267.

legendary figures of the community is also key in Judeo-Christian theological anthropology. For example the account of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ as narrated by the Synoptic gospels ( Mathew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36), emphasizes that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus and the three disciples (Peter, James and John) whom he took along to the mountain. This event occurs or rather is chronologically placed as Jesus is about to proceed into his passion. Moses and Elijah appear to affirm his mission despite the gruesome pain and eventual death he would endure. In Bantu theology, the ancestors, ancestors play a similar role to that of Moses and Elijah. Therefore, in Bantu view “God and the departed are pictured as being in close relationship though distinct and not identical.”<sup>379</sup> The Lunda people in Zambia “hold that the departed are intimately linked with God, and act as intermediaries for the living.”<sup>380</sup> Mbiti surmises that “for minor matters, these acts of contact are directed only to the spirits concerned; but for major concerns of life, they are meant ultimately to reach God, whether he is mentioned on every occasion or not.”<sup>381</sup> It is on this account that Bantu traditional communities are dotted with sacred places, sacred forests and shrines which are dedicated for ceremonial libations to the ancestors and the spirits. Magesa explains, “Across the continent, there are countless examples of similar locations, sacred hills, forests, animals, and so on, where access or use of anything found there is normally prohibited because the primary owners are the spirits.”<sup>382</sup>

Because of the prevalence of the notion of spirits in Bantu theological anthropology, spirit possession is a widely believed feature of the Bantu people. In fact, in African

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>382</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 90.



traditional religion, it is believed that many objects and persons are animated by spirits. Depending on a person's interaction with these objects and persons, one might find oneself entangled. Hence one becomes an agent of these spirits for good or for ill. Mbiti notes "the possession is sometimes harmful, but at other times it is useful and may even be induced through dance and drumming."<sup>383</sup> In order to identify the spirit that possesses an individual, focus must be made on two phenomena, namely the sounds made by the possessed person and the behavior of the person. This requires discernment and expertise and it is not a matter of guess work as it demands what Lonergan calls research and observation. If the spirit is inimical to the well-being of society and family then it must be eradicated through the process of identification, naming and exorcism. In contrast if the spirit is amenable to the community and society then its demands ought to be heeded and respected. The Spirits of the ancestors are somewhat substantially different. Since they are in the abode of the Blessed God, they may return to the community and manifest in various forms depending on the behavior of the community, the family and individuals. In general, ancestral spirits appear when there are divisions and confrontations in the family or when innocent blood has been shed. In such cases it is important to observe the natural phenomena as it will manifest with revulsion the immorality of such conduct by conveying appropriate malfunctions. For example, at the death of Jesus, according to the account of Mark 15:33, "At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon." In African, Bantu theological framework, this disruption to the normal routine of life at such a magnitude scale would be taken as a clear message for the people to realize the scale of the gravity of the travesty committed against the innocent person.

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<sup>383</sup> Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 266.

Nature participates in the protest against the behavior of the community by conveying an appropriate sign for the people to read. At the death of the word incarnate, the representation of the hypostatic union (the Father, the Son and the Spirit), a great silence and stillness comes on earth because creation had to respond to the terror of the act of human beings, especially when left to their own whimsiness. There is absolutely no way creation would not respond to the death of God in the flesh. At the death of Jesus even the netherworld and the underworld trembled. Such a disruption to the normal routine of life is also recorded by Matthew 27:51-53;

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

Bantu theological method would interpret such events as characteristic elements of the death of an innocent person. The dead who appeared and entered the city would be cast in the perspective of the ancestors returning to reprove the conduct of the people. In the case of the death of Jesus and the accompanying natural phenomena, Bantu theology conceives of such events as a response by the vital force of life that something fundamentally wrong has been committed. And hence, the response of the Bantu community, would be in no way different from that of the centurion as recorded in Mathew's gospel (Mt 27:54);

The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"

Such a world view, that is able to decipher theological notions from the order of creation, demands a methodological shift in the conduct of theology from a formal

scholarly enterprise which is prominently Western and conceptual to one that is anthropological and culturally centered. Bevans opines that “as theology becomes more of a reflection on ordinary human life in the light of Christian tradition, one might ask whether ordinary men and women might not, after all, be the best people to theologize.”<sup>384</sup> Hence this accounts for the fact that some aspects of African theological anthropology are deeply premised on creation, reflection on sculptures, pieces of art, storytelling and proverbs. This is because when you deconstruct African theology, the afore mentioned elements remain as the skeletal framework of African narrative theology. This African narrative theology, according to Joseph Healey comprises the elements of “African human experience and Christian Tradition (including Scripture and the magisterium). Both are indispensable sources and must be brought into a mutually-clarifying interrelation and interaction.”<sup>385</sup>

In a sense, African theology is creation-centered and oriented. The marked feature of such a theology is “it sees the world, creation as sacramental: the world is the place where God reveals Godself; revelation does not happen in set apart...but in daily life, in ordinary words, through ordinary people.”<sup>386</sup> It is precisely of this orientation that African theology is sometimes referred to as Narrative theology. The starting point of such a theology is “African culture, but specifically African oral literature and the wide range of narrative and oral forms: proverbs, sayings, riddles, stories, myths, plays and songs explained in their historical and cultural contexts.”<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 17.

<sup>385</sup> Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 50.

<sup>386</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21.

<sup>387</sup> Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 28.

Salvation history in African theology is understood within the context of creation endowed with divine energy. Incidentally such theological notions can also be found in *theologia Africana* of the early Latin Church fathers as postulated by Athanasios of Alexandria who held similar notions. As noted by Pope John Paul II “what for Patristic and Medieval thought was in both theory and practice a profound unity, producing knowledge capable of reaching the highest forms of speculation, was destroyed by systems which espoused the cause of rational knowledge sundered from faith and meant to take the place of faith.”<sup>388</sup> In the Bantu world view, just as in early patristics, the God of creation is the same God of human salvation. Creation is not in need of redemption; it is the human being who is in need of redemption because of the failure to function in accordance with the divine energy and direction that is inherent in creation. On this score, when human beings act in heinous and evil ways, creation responds by way of negative signs such as the onslaught of droughts, flooding, climate change, disease, pestilence etc. Augustine Musopole states “Harmonious relationships characterized the state of human beings in the cosmos; by maintaining these relationships human beings would remain true to themselves.”<sup>389</sup> Bujo makes a similar postulation regarding the unitary nature of creation. He says, “Human greed and blind confidence that anything can be achieved, however unnatural, is likely to lead to destruction of self and the cosmos.”<sup>390</sup> Therefore, one could argue, as Ukpong does, that “traditionally, for the African, religion is not merely a matter of going to church or observing a set of principles; it is a way of life that

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<sup>388</sup> “Fides et Ratio (14 September 1998) | John Paul II.”

<sup>389</sup> Musopole, *Being Human in Africa*, 70.

<sup>390</sup> Benezet Bujo, *Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective* in Munyaradzi Felix Murove, ed., *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2009), 285.

permeates all spheres and levels of living.”<sup>391</sup> John Mbiti, on the other hand, observes that it is out of the traditional African world view that Christians in Africa “are sensitizing the Church greatly to invisible and spiritual realities which have generally been forgotten or suppressed in the more technologically-oriented churches of the North of our planet.”<sup>392</sup> These spirits are a medium for good or bad depending on their source and the intention of its driving force. Depending on the person’s engagement with them, these spirit mediums can enter a person or at least become entangled in their circle and be used in line with their specific objective. Mbiti notes “In traditional religion these realities abound and there are religious experts who deal with them accordingly, such as priests, mediums, diviners, medicine-men and ritual leaders.”<sup>393</sup> According to Bujo “ ‘Evil spirits’ provoke quite different sentiments from those aroused by ‘good’ ancestors, and Africa has developed complicated ritual systems designed to protect life against the menace represented by ‘the spirits.’ ”<sup>394</sup>

In short, in the Bantu theological worldview, the whole creation is permeated with the greatness of God’s glory. Hence, Bantu traditional theology gives thanks to God, whose power and marvelous deeds are revealed in nature in the concrete setting of their existential reality. Magesa, therefore, claims that there is need for “serious recognition that the Spirit who is present and at work in Christianity is the same divine Spirit present and at work in African Religions, and indeed in the universe in general, despite different perceptions and expressions in different locations.”<sup>395</sup> Such an understanding of the

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<sup>391</sup> Ukpong, *African Theologies Now*, 11.

<sup>392</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 76.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 27.

<sup>395</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate: From Intolerance to Coexistence*, *Interreligious studies* v. 3 (Berlin: Piscataway, NJ: Lit ; [Distribution] in North America by Transaction Publishers, 2010), 86.

theological framework of the Bantu people has been considered essential by Placide Tempels, who observes “such considerations and such despair are entirely mysterious and incomprehensible so long as we have not grasped the Bantu conception of existence and their interpretation of the universe.”<sup>396</sup>

## **8.0 Application of Lonergan’s Framework on Bantu Theology**

According to Lonergan, the desire to know and self-awareness is subject to a four upward process that moves from experience, understanding, judging and deciding. These processes are actually levels of consciousness. Vernon Gregson, comments on Lonergan’s framework that “Lonergan refers to these dynamic operations of our consciousness respectively as the empirical (experiencing) level, the intellectual (understanding) level, the rational (judging) level, and the responsible (deciding) level, to highlight the various rich dimensions of who we are, which operate on the successive interlocking stages.”<sup>397</sup> This process is what is referred to as the “dynamic power of inquiry.”<sup>398</sup> These processes and levels of consciousness build one upon another in a such way that one stage naturally, in the absence of biases, gives way to the other. There has been a marked shift in the conduct of theology from classical universalist approach to contextual and culturally oriented one, as observed by Stephen Bevans, that “culture and world events become the very sources of the theological enterprise.”<sup>399</sup> According to Lonergan, the transcendental method in theology pertains to all human beings. He says that “in a sense everyone knows

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<sup>396</sup> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Orlando, FL: HBC Publishing, 2010), 63.

<sup>397</sup> Gregson, *The Desires To Know Intellectual Conversion* in Vernon Gregson, ed. *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 21.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>399</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 16.

and observes transcendental method. Everyone does so, precisely in the measure that he is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible.”<sup>400</sup> It is precisely in this insight that I contend that Lonergan’s and Bevens’ frameworks opens up to conversation with other theological methods such as African theologies. Thomas Cattoi observes “that theology mediates between religious experience and culture, while differing in terms of the importance they ascribe to either end of this spectrum or the way in which they conceptualize their interrelationship.”<sup>401</sup> Further, according to Lonergan, theology “is what mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix. Theology, in other words, functions precisely as the way that religion makes sense within a particular culture.”<sup>402</sup>

The question lingers as to ask to what extent our contemporary theological methods and viewpoints are the result of dynamics of power and authority rather than the outcome of our collective reflection on humanity’s social and historical experiences? How do we safeguard theological reflection’s integrity given varied interest groups that wishes to use theology to justify some pre-desired ends? Rowan Williams argues that to safeguard the integrity of theological discourse, it must be devoid of “concealed agendas.”<sup>403</sup> He contends that, “having integrity, then, is being able to speak in a way which allows of answers.”<sup>404</sup> Honest discourse, thus, “does all this by showing in its own working a critical self-perception displaying the axioms to which it believes itself accountable.”<sup>405</sup> I

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<sup>400</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 14.

<sup>401</sup> Thomas Cattoi, *Why Read the Church Fathers* in Fernández and Ross, *Doing Theology as If People Mattered*, 55.

<sup>402</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 11.

<sup>403</sup> Rowan Williams, “Theological Integrity,” *New Blackfriars* 72, no. 847 (March 1991): 140–151.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 314

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*

agree with Williams in so far as he asserts that theology should desist from making affirmations of “total perspective” and “wholeness.” I would add to his caution, that theology desist from pretending to have a wholly neutral perspective. As rightly pointed out by Williams “Discourse that conceals is discourse that (consciously or not) sets out to foreclose the possibility of a genuine response.”<sup>406</sup> Herein lies the strength of Lonergan’s theological methodology. Lonergan argues that for theology to attain its objectivity it must be free of four biases, which operate in block form. The first is “the bias of unconscious motivation brought to light by depth psychology. There is the bias of individual egoism, and more powerful and blinder bias of group egoism. Finally, there is the general bias of common sense, which is specialization on intelligence in the particular and concrete, but usually considers itself omni-competent.”<sup>407</sup> Lonergan proposes concrete suggestions for minimizing bias for the theologian and the historian alike in the light of the social and historical nature of human knowing. The detachment from bias, according to Lonergan is subject to the theologian’s “theory of knowledge and of morals.”<sup>408</sup> On this score therefore the theologian must “Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible.”<sup>409</sup> This heightened level of consciousness is central to Lonergan’s transcendental method. According to Lonergan, “Where other methods aim to particular fields, transcendental method is concerned with meeting the exigences and exploiting the opportunities presented by the human mind itself.”<sup>410</sup> Lonergan argues “For it is now apparent that in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by value,

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 231.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 14.



objectivity is simply the consequence of authentic subjectivity, of genuine attention, genuine intelligence, genuine reasonableness, genuine responsibility.”<sup>411</sup> For Lonergan, this authenticity of subjectivity vindicates genuine inquiry across disciplines and theologies. He explains, “Mathematics, science, philosophy, ethics, theology differ in many manners; but they have the common feature that their objectivity is the fruit of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility.”<sup>412</sup>

Justin Ukpong advocates for creation of is “theologies that are sensitive to different cultural contexts.”<sup>413</sup> He therefore supports theological contextualization by arguing that it “arises from a certain dissatisfaction with the traditional theological model which has proved unable to address some of today’s problems, and from the growing awareness that theological elaborations always address problems within a certain cultural context.”<sup>414</sup> The conduct of theology is not done in a vacuum but rather through a culture and is transmitted through culture with symbols, language and gestures of a given culture and context. In this regard, a sociological examination of the various theological anthropologies reveals that “the African has a different cultural background, a different view of reality and a different approach to life.”<sup>415</sup>

Among the distinctive differences, one ought to include the ideological perspective of the theologian. Add to this the socio-economic background of the theologian and other psychological predispositions of those involved in the conduct of theology. Rowan

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ukpong, *African Theologies Now*, 5.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 10.

Williams has some proposals of how the theological enterprise might escape this conceptual dead-end. First, “Religious discourse must articulate and confront its own temptations, its own falsehoods. It is, in other words, essential to theology that theologians become aware of how theology has worked and continues to work in the interests of this or that system of power.”<sup>416</sup> Lonergan would classify such background context of theology as biases that militate against an objective theological dynamism towards the transcendent.

Williams points out, with regard to language in theological discourse, that “language about God is kept honest in the degree to which it turns on itself in the name of God, and so surrenders itself to God: it is in this way that it becomes possible to see how it is still God that is being spoken of, that which makes the human world a moral unity.”<sup>417</sup>

Lonergan has a differentiated approach to the role of language in theological discourse. He holds that language is primarily relevant at the realm of meaning. The four realms of meaning for Lonergan are “the realm of common sense, the realm of theory, the realm of interiority, and the realm of transcendence.”<sup>418</sup> Lonergan says that “language refers primarily to the spatial, the specific, the external, the human, and only special techniques is it extended to the temporal, the generic, the internal, the divine.”<sup>419</sup> In short, Lonergan declares that language “is a matter of expressed mental acts. The discovery of new usage

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<sup>416</sup> Williams, “Theological Integrity.”,317

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>418</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 272.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 257.

is a mental act expressed by the new usage. The invention of a new word is a mental act expressed by the new word.”<sup>420</sup>

Lonergan has a wider understanding of the dimensions of phenomenology of religion. The phenomenological method is without dispute essential to the study of theology in general and African theology in particular. Magesa, in agreement with Lonergan, says “We experience different realities in our existence as human beings, and these realities construct our practical social, psychological, and spiritual worlds of truths. But even when we experience the same reality, we often interpret it differently.”<sup>421</sup> This approach demands scholars of theology to suspend judgements “even if they maintained them personal and should employ empathetic techniques to gain an understanding of any religion they were studying.”<sup>422</sup> Theological reflection through the perspective of phenomenology, therefore, insists that the theologian does not need to know the goals and purpose of a particular theological enterprise. This approach promotes the appropriation of theology from an insider’s value and perspective. Hence value judgements are suspended in the process of collecting and analyzing theological data. In phenomenology of religion focus is on “analysis of the phenomena of perception as they appear in the individual’s consciousness.”<sup>423</sup> Phenomenology is also understood as the

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>421</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 182.

<sup>422</sup> James L. Cox, *Methodological Views on African Religions* in Bongmba ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 25.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 26.

study of “conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view.”<sup>424</sup>

According to James Cox, phenomenology serves a unique purpose is especially suited in the study of world religions. He declares therefore that phenomenology “aims to promote understanding of religions in particular and of religion in general. Its techniques also attempt to bridge the gap between the subject and the object of religion, the observer and those that are observed, by drawing on common human ways of thinking which can be translated into multiple cultural contexts and individual inter-subjective experiences. The phenomenology of religion also seeks to alert the scholar to potentially distorting biases and unexamined assumptions (both personal and academic) in order that these do not predetermine the outcomes of research in advance.”<sup>425</sup> It is, therefore, my argument that Lonergan’s framework in so far as it is grounded in phenomenology is highly relevant for an inquiry into African religions in general and Bantu theology in particular. The reason for this is that if the theologian “approaches a culture or context openly, is willing to learn the necessary language or languages, and is willing to read and appropriate sociological and anthropological literature about a particular culture, he or she can understand much of what a particular culture is about.”<sup>426</sup> James Cox also subscribes to this idea when he posits that phenomenology “provides a cutting-edge approach to the study of religions with implications for new understandings of African

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<sup>424</sup> David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), accessed March 29, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>.

<sup>425</sup> James L. Cox, *Methodological Views on African Religions* in Bongmba ed. , *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 30.

<sup>426</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 19.

religions.”<sup>427</sup> I add to this, that the strength of the theological phenomenology approach, lies in the fact that it generates what I refer to as an indigenous hermeneutics which then constructs a local theology based on the local culture. The validity of an indigenous hermeneutics is determined by its ability to lead to conversion, whereby the self is then directed towards, life, service and the community. In this regard, African theology in general and Bantu theology in particular, despite following Bernard Lonergan’s fourfold levels of consciousness of experience, understanding, judging and deciding, still falls into the realm of phenomenological theological anthropology

I make this claim on the premises that Bantu theology is inescapably linked to the world of experience. Indeed, the created world is a revelation of the Spirit and it is the Spirit that gives birth to this created world. Little wonder then, that in Bantu world view we have spirits of a given specific space, time and location. For example, among the BaTonga people of Zambia we have *Nyami Nyami*, the river Spirit. She resides in the river Zambezi. She is the river spirit of the Zambezi valley and the local people pay her homage. Often when tremors are felt along the Zambezi valley, the local people ascribe this to Nyami Nyami the river spirit being or stirred disturbed. Nyami Nyami has been symbolized by the local people in the form of having a fish head and a body in the form of a snake. Apparently, this symbolism is a representation of the creatures of the Zambezi valley. However, a blend of the two creatures represent the idea that the river spirit cannot be phenomenologically explained aside from the fact that the lower Zambezi is plentiful with fish and snakes alike. This is the world of *experience* of the BaTonga

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<sup>427</sup> James L. Cox, *Methodological Views on African Religions* in Bongmba ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 30.

people of the lower Zambezi valley. The BaTonga people *understand* this reality as representing the cosmic reality of their world. Hence, in their *judgement* there is need to pay due homage this reality that controls the Zambezi Valley. In this regard, they *decide* to offer libations to this spirit. The BaTonga of the Zambezi valley believe that Nyami Nyami supplies them with plentiful fish and crop harvests and protects them from pestilence and other natural evils. Further, although creatures and spirits form the key features of the phenomenology of traditional religions in Africa, an analogical imagination of the same tends to portray the worship of the creating spirit of the creatures. From this example, we learn that theological epistemic systems, if they are to have a meaningful impact should be are in constant dialogue with people. This is primarily because “People who are the subjects of culture and cultural change and so have a preeminent place in the enterprise of seeking to understand Christian faith in a particular context – and the professional theologian who articulates, deepens, and broadens the people’s faith expression with his or her wider knowledge.”<sup>428</sup> Consequently, this will then lead to the emergence of a specific theological epistemology.

James Cochrane makes a notable observation regarding such local theologies. He observes that “context means the gathering of a range of otherwise disparate discourses and actions into a coherent, complex, and communicatively established perspective on the common struggles and legitimate aspiration of the community.”<sup>429</sup> However, such a theology, in as far as it is contained within the realm of experience, according to

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<sup>428</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 18.

<sup>429</sup> James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 15.

Cochrane, it remains “partial and tentative.”<sup>430</sup> The Tanzanian theologian Nyamiti has a proposed a remedy to address this limitation. He postulates that “in order to arrive fully at the desired goal, the apologetic method has to be completed by and organically integrated with the other methods.”<sup>431</sup> Hence Lonergan’s method in theology adds an important vital emphasis on the scientific and rational analysis of themes in African theology in so far as they are premised on “life, fecundity, force, solidarity, religious experience, social and cultural liberation, development, etc., and their Christian analogates.”<sup>432</sup>

There are two primary differences between Lonergan’s approach to theology and Bantu Anthropological approach to theology. First, whereas Lonergan’s approach is an inquiry into foundational theological truths, Bantu anthropological theology expresses the community’s theological insights. Theology in Bantu culture is by and large a corporate performance of the community. This theology is coupled with imagination and self-expression. Holy mother nature is the primary supplier of objects of Bantu religious consciousness. Second, Lonergan’s approach is a normative process that espouses the transcendental approach to theology with emphasis on human subjectivity which finds fulfillment in the Transcendent. Lonergan’s theology is largely speculative, while Bantu theology is pragmatic and practical.

According to Alison Benders, “to comprehend the meaning of self-transcendence, we should recall that the inner dynamic of authentic subjectivity is not just knowing what is true, but also deciding what is good; the limit of this subjective orientation is infinite truth

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>431</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *The Way to Christian Theology for Africa* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1979), 6.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 5.

and value, which Christianity calls God.”<sup>433</sup> Bantu theology is a communal reflective process that utilizes the individual as belonging to a community of knowers and searchers. There is no African religion nor African theological method that would advocate to turning solely to the self for the self-sake to source for religious data. This is because African theology is profoundly relational in its perspective. This relationality aspect of African theology far outweighs intentionality, so much that in African Bantu theology the verifiable realm of meaning and subjective operation is in the context of the community and the created universe. For Lonergan, this nature is equated to nurture, that is in the mind, that is human consciousness which is a reality of existence. In fact, Lonergan contends that “conscious and intentional operations exist and anyone that cares to deny their existence is merely disqualifying himself as a non-responsible, non-reasonable, non-intelligent somnambulist.”<sup>434</sup> In Bantu theology however, however, this nature acquires a cosmic dimension. It is the created universe with the materials and data that it supplies that becomes the basis for theological reflection. In this regard, it places emphasis on cooperation with nature, through which the Divine manifests itself. For Lonergan, this process reaches fulfilment in Transcendence (or being in love with God) and conversion. There is what appears to be a paradox in Lonergan’s notion of conversion. He claims that conversion does not begin at the intellectual level despite his theological epistemic system overtly relying on human rationality and intentionality. Rather, he argues, “first there is God’s gift of his love. Next, the eye of his love reveals values in their splendor, while the strength of his love brings about their realization, and

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<sup>433</sup> Benders, *A Comparative Study of Self-Awareness and Self-Transcendence*, 45.

<sup>434</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 17.



that is moral conversion.”<sup>435</sup> As a result, Lonergan is of the view that “though religious conversion sublates moral, and moral conversion sublates intellectual, one is not to infer that intellectual comes first and then moral and finally religious.”<sup>436</sup> Therefore, in Lonergan’s theological method, according to Benders, “to the extent that full self-transcendence is a fundamental reorientation of one’s subjectivity toward infinite truth and value, it is a religious conversion.”<sup>437</sup> Interestingly enough, Lonergan’s method in the conduct of theology has serious ramifications on the conduct of contextual theology as it promotes the notion of universality of theological and religious truths. Lonergan’s method turns the study of theology into a study of the structure of the religious and theological consciousness. This is because, as Husserl observes “it assumes the universality of the rational subject...who can, through objectification, have access to a truth external to any particular historical cultural standpoint.”<sup>438</sup> Benders, too makes a similar observation that “while his work does have implications for morality and can be used systematically, as he has demonstrated, his focus has been oriented toward human interiority, which is universal and normative; human interiority is not the domain of any particular religious tradition.”<sup>439</sup>

In this regard, Lonergan’s method, if it can have any bearing on Bantu theology, the subject has to be placed in the context of local culture, language and the created order of the universe. On account of the fact that contextualization has become a novelty in the conduct of theology it has become paramount that African theologians have to investigate

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Benders, *A Comparative Study of Self-Awareness and Self-Transcendence*, 45.

<sup>438</sup> James L. Cox, *Methodological Views on African Religions* in Bongmba ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 31.

<sup>439</sup> Benders, *A Comparative Study of Self-Awareness and Self-Transcendence*, 48.

further the role of the subjective which tends to “the experience, social location, culture and social change”<sup>440</sup> of the peoples of Africa. Nyamiti makes a similar observation, except that it has an apologetic theme towards African theology. He argues that in the African theological method,

one may start with a deep anthropological and sociological study of the African themes. This would then be followed by a profound theological study- exegetical, historical and dogmatical- of the Christian analogous themes. The African and Christian themes should then be compared by carefully pointing out the parallelisms and difference between them. In all probability one would notice from these similarities and divergencies that the African themes or values exist also in Christianity, but in a far more perfect way and on an essentially different and infinitely higher level.<sup>441</sup>

I dispute the premises of Nyamiti’s apologetic argument in support of the altruistic elements of African theology, since his approach offers a romanticized reading of some elements of African theology, which I would in no way consider to be superior to other cultures. At the same time, these are characteristics that are peculiar to Africa and Bantu culture in particular. I argue instead that the themes in the bible and in the Christian tradition have their origins in the anthropological elements of human beings in traditional worldview and religion, of which, African culture is but one of the many. My argument, like that of Stephen Bevans, is that “theology is a wider activity than just scholarship and that various cultures have other preferred ways of articulating their faith. Works of art, hymns, stories, dramas, comic books, cinema—all these media can become valid forms for theology in particular cultures.”<sup>442</sup> To this list I add the aspect of language and scripture interpretation. Hence, all genuine local theology is heavily influenced by local culture and world view. As observed by Vernon Gregson, “Theologians are men and women

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<sup>440</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 16.

<sup>441</sup> Nyamiti, *The Way to Christian Theology for Africa*, 5.

<sup>442</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 17.

who study in order to understand the origins and sources of a religion and who try to communicate the meaning and significance of that religion to the culture in which they live, or to which they direct their concern.”<sup>443</sup> Oduyoye, on this score contends that “theology to be authentic and relevant, must reflect a particular context.”<sup>444</sup> Theology does not always have to be done in a scholarly, ecclesiastical or purely speculative undertaking. Therefore, as observed by Ngindu Mushete, that “every people, every human community, conceives and organizes its historical existence not according to a universal, immutable model, but according to its own particular situation in space and time.”<sup>445</sup> This theological expression involves many other areas of human endeavor among them include, homilies, poetry, paintings, song etc. Theology is and has always been enfolded in ritual. Therefore, Lonergan would conceive of the religious world view of the Bantu people which is rooted in the ancestors and the natural world as foundational theology or common-sense theology. Why? Because Lonergan of the four distinctive ways in which appropriates religious truths, namely “ in the scope of our experiencing, in the sight of our understanding, in the truth of our judging, and in the goodness and beauty chosen or created in our deciding.”<sup>446</sup> Because for Lonergan, religious experience is treated at the level of awareness, that is “experience or consciousness, or our decisional openness to the Transcendent.”<sup>447</sup> Juergen Habermas has a similar observation regarding contextual theologies, when he explains that they function on the premises of “mundane reasoning,” that is in the realm of common sense. The study of scripture as a theological

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<sup>443</sup> Gregson, *Theological Method and Theological Collaboration I* in Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 74.

<sup>444</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 52.

<sup>445</sup> Ngindu Mushete in Gibellini, *Paths of African Theology*, 24.

<sup>446</sup> Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 16.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

enterprise stems from a realization that scripture is part and parcel of God's self-revelation. This revelation is not necessarily immediate and literal as it is done through language which is but among many signs and symbols of God's self-disclosure. According to Sandra Schneiders, "Language is our highest form of symbol making as well as our most refined instrument of interpretation. It is the medium of both understanding and expression, and therefore it is not surprising that metaphorically attribute speech to anything we experience as symbolic."<sup>448</sup> That is, scripture is not synonymous with God, but rather it is but one of the means that God chooses to reveal his divine self to humanity. My contention with such approaches is that they approach the discipline of theology with a framework of suspicion otherwise simply known as the "hermeneutics of suspicion." This is not to say that there are no merits in such approaches. In a sense, the strength of such an approach is that it establishes the dynamic balance of faith and reason. David Jasper aptly posits that, "On the other hand, we may come to read a text with caution, even skepticism, determined to test every claim and proposition against such the light of reason or the evidence of history. This we call a "hermeneutics of suspicion," and it has characterized most (though not all) thinking about hermeneutics in the past three or four hundred years."<sup>449</sup> The hermeneutics of suspicion is one among the approaches of interpreting theological texts and elements with a focus on social justice. In the light of rising inequality in the world today, this approach has rapidly gained recognition in the field of theology. It is pertinent too to the causes of theology on the African continent in the light of glaring injustices, inequality and marginalization of some communities. As observed by Orobator, the hermeneutics of

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<sup>448</sup> Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 37.

<sup>449</sup> Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*.

suspicion would enable “African theology to confront issues of a socioeconomic and political preponderance. This inability constitutes both a symptom of and a reason for the lack of creativity.”<sup>450</sup> Hermeneutics, in a sense, has some implied meaning of a methodology of attempting to decipher the meaning and implications of a sacred text. It is often a painstaking process that requires deconstructing the text and reassembling it into parts that are meaningful both to the theologian and his audience. However, the process of interpretation is often complex. Lonergan says,

There is the realm of common sense with its meanings expressed in everyday or ordinary language. There is the realm of theory where language is technical, simply objective in reference, and so refers to the subject and his operations only as objects. There is the realm on interiority where language speaks indeed of the subject and his operations as objects but, none the less, rests upon a self-appropriation that has verified in personal experience the operator, the operations and the processes referred to in the basic terms and relations of the language employed. Finally, there is the realm of transcendence in which the subject is related to divinity in the language of prayer and of prayerful silence.<sup>451</sup>

For Lonergan, it would appear that he gives a broader understanding of language as transcending mere words but including feelings, symbols and postures. Hence the need to use several symbolic languages or rather means of theological expression. Why? Because it does happen that what might be clear and apparent to the theologian might not be clear and unapparent to his audience. Lonergan and James Cochrane share a similar perspective on this score. Cochrane contends that “local theologies are connected to the *sensus fidei*, and bring a social intelligibility because they are rooted in local knowledge.”<sup>452</sup> When the same perspective is applied to scriptures, one notices the need to ground the scriptures in local language and local symbols, without which, the

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<sup>450</sup> Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 27.

<sup>451</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 257.

<sup>452</sup> Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity*, 124–125.

consequence will be what David Jasper surmises, “some texts that we find deeply meaningful can seemingly have no meaning at all for other readers.”<sup>453</sup> Sandra Schneiders, similarly, contends that, “around the expression “word of God” clusters a collection of interrelated theological terms such as revelation, inspiration, authority, infallibility, inerrancy, and normativity that are understood in radically different ways by believers in various traditions.”<sup>454</sup> The interpretation of sacred texts has also an anthropological dimension. According to Schneiders, “At the center and intersection of nature and history stands the human being in and through whose interpretive activity being achieves meaning. Nothing is truly symbolic unless it is interpreted, unless its meaning is grasped in understanding.”<sup>455</sup> Hermeneutics is critical to the enterprise of theology because, “it is in our interpreting that all of reality becomes truly expressive.”<sup>456</sup> Hence in the conduct of African theology as noted by Oduyoye “just as they had transmitted history orally, Africans retold these stories, elaborating them and drawing out what struck them as particularly relevant and enduring.”<sup>457</sup>

According to Magesa “African theology (as an academic discipline) looks into the systems and structures of African experience and thought that inspire relationships between people and the spirit powers”<sup>458</sup> This justifies the claim that the best method in Biblical interpretation is a hermeneutical approach that utilizes a diversity of methods. According to Chris Ukachukwu Manus this approach “is a vision which invites biblical exegetes to move beyond the classical diachronic method that has so far dominated

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<sup>453</sup> Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 8.

<sup>454</sup> Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 27.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>457</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 45.

<sup>458</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 108.

Western biblical interpretation to more synchronic reading of the sociohistorical factors operative in a given nation/region in the light of the scriptural passage.”<sup>459</sup> Be that as it may, this undertaking must be open to the workings and inspirations of the Holy Spirit, that Spirit of truth, freedom and wonder.

David Tracy has done much to contextualize Lonergan’s broader theological epistemology. In his work *Analogical Imagination*, whose premises are firmly grounded in Lonergan’s method in theology, Tracy notes that theology is a public discourse. He premises his project on two fundamental elements. As he aptly puts it, “This book will argue that all theology is public discourse.”<sup>460</sup> Tracy presupposes that theology is done in a social context and is rooted in social groups and their dynamics. He argues, “If one is concerned to show the public status of all theology, it becomes imperative first to study the reference groups, the ‘publics’ of the theologian.”<sup>461</sup> The second foundation of his argument is what he refers to as, “the rise of historical consciousness among theologians.”<sup>462</sup> In light of these two foundations of his argumentation, he claims that it is the task of theology and religion to, “ask and respond to such fundamental questions of the meaning of and truth of our existence as human beings in solitude, and in society, history and the cosmos.”<sup>463</sup> In responding to such theological questions, “Each theologian addresses three distinct and related social realities; the wider society, the academy and the church.”<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Chris Ukachukwu Manus, *Methodological Approaches in Contemporary African Biblical Scholarship* in Emmanuel Katongole, ed., *African Theology Today*, African theology today series v. 1 (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2002), 18–19.

<sup>460</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 3.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid,3.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid,4.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid,5.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid,6.

While Tracy and Lonergan share a similar epistemic system built around rationality, Tracy alone insists on theology as public discourse. Consequently, he is of the opinion that, “behind the pluralism of theological conclusions lies a pluralism of public roles and publics as reference groups for theological discourse.” Tracy contends “To refuse to face the complexity of the social reality of the theological may prove as damaging as an earlier theological generation’s refusal to face historical consciousness.”<sup>465</sup> The principles behind David Tracy’s analogous imagination are echoed by Charles Nyamiti, an African theologian who observes that “African themes have to be understood in the light of their cultural context and as such expressed in terms of analogous Christian themes; and conversely the Christian mysteries have to be expressed in terms of the analogues African themes seen in the light of their cultural ensemble.”<sup>466</sup> This view affirms what Ngindu Mushete postulates: “A universal theology is as mythical as universal philosophy. It has no foundation in revelation, faith and history.”<sup>467</sup> Mushete is in agreement with Tracy when he claims, “All theology is culturally and socially situated. There is an interplay between God’s word and human society, between theological development and social analysis.”<sup>468</sup> It is apparent that Tracy offers an important portrait and context in the conduct of theology. For Tracy, theology is a process and not an event. In this process of theologizing, we ought to pay particular attention to how various social groups, what he refers as “publics” both generate and articulate their respective theologies. However, he does suggest a caveat with regard to the conduct of theology to the effect that theologians should ensure that

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid,6.

<sup>466</sup> Nyamiti, *The Way to Christian Theology for Africa*, 21–22.

<sup>467</sup> Ngindu Mushete in Gibellini, *Paths of African Theology*, 19.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.



theological “arguments are in principle open to all intelligent, reasonable and responsible persons.”<sup>469</sup> This requirement clearly affirms Tracy’s thought as originating in the tradition of Bernard Lonergan.

While one might laud Tracy on several fronts, in particular the epistemological foundations of his hermeneutical framework and also the insistence that the conduct of theology should be accountable to the three publics, one might also disagree with the adequacy of his framework. To what extent does the conduct of theology attain this triple differentiation in terms of different publics? Is it not a fact that the three publics that he singles out in his work tend to often overlap? Take for instance, the conduct of theology in a secular university. It may happen that the theologians over and above being professional theologians are as well members of a particular church. In short, where does Tracy draw the limits of each “public” in the conduct of theology. While I concede to a call for theological postulations to meet the criteria of being intelligent, reasonable and responsible by way of being accountable to its public, I nonetheless contend that there are clear cases where specific theological positions which are embraced by a particular public are rejected by another. In such a case, who adjudicates as to the appropriateness of a theological position. Take for example, the current theological method, in African theology, which embraces the role of ancestors and the natural world as profound sources of theological insights.

The hermeneutical process in most African theologies embraces the role of creation, life and community and traditions as an overriding framework for the theological enterprise as opposed to theological academia divorced of an ecclesiastical

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<sup>469</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 6.

confessional orientation. The broader community overlaps with the notion of social public. According to Bujo “The whole cosmos is implicated in this communal vision. Being as relation does not only return to the three dimensions of the African notion of community, but also to being in and with the world.”<sup>470</sup> David Tracy’s three publics of theology argument is broad enough to cater for some sub-groups in each public. My project regarding theological method, is congruently similar to Tracy’s, although I am introducing in the novelty of theology as a culture, an ontological constitutive element of a person, that is the way of being of a people. Regarding the conduct of the theological enterprise in Africa traditional religion, Oduyoye observes that “a theology divorced from ethical demands would have little relevance in Africa.”<sup>471</sup> Such a thesis seems to create what Ukpong calls the two approaches to the theological enterprise in Africa: “the moderate expressed by terms adaptation, Christianization and accommodation; and the radical expressed by the terms inculturation, interculturalization, incarnation and Africanization.”<sup>472</sup>

Lonergan’s framework of theologizing premised on the integrated fourfold consciousness of experience, understanding, judging and deciding is relevant to African theology in so far as it is a tool for critical analysis and possible reconstruction of religious experience of the Bantu people as the historical consciousness of the community expands with the knowledge of hindsight. The utility of Lonergan’s method then is in calling for “critical attention to the language, context, and use of appropriate symbols of indigenous religious tradition.”<sup>473</sup> Lonergan intends to turn theology into an objective

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<sup>470</sup> Bujo and Ilunga Muya, *African Theology in the 21st Century*, 117.

<sup>471</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 96.

<sup>472</sup> Ukpong, *African Theologies Now*, 27.

<sup>473</sup> Bongmba, *African Theology*<sup>1</sup> in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 244.

discipline. David Tracy, in commenting on Lonergan's *Method* says Lonergan's "notion of objectivity is structured in accordance with the notions of intentionality and being already determined."<sup>474</sup> I affirm the existence of method in African theology. This method parallels Lonergan's four stages of consciousness. The religious experience and praxis of the Bantu people is methodically demonstrated through the method of theological anthropology and phenomenology which is premised on world of experience. The Bantu people understand experience to be the reality of divine activity. Hence, nature and human life are sacred. Therefore, if there is violation of this sanctity, restitution is needed. In Bantu judgement, by way of reason and faith, the daily activities of the natural world are sustained by the creator, who is God, the maker of the universe and all that is in it. The decision is made to engage appropriate traditional rituals to invoke the ancestors, the living dead to intercede in praise, honor and worship of God, the creator of the universe. African theology, just like African religion, according to Magesa "forms the African people's ethical consciousness as a whole united system wherein each factor influences the other."<sup>475</sup> Therefore, contextual theology ought to encompass transcendental, sociological and historical perspectives. Simply put, Lonergan thinks theology while the Bantu people do theology. Both approaches affirm the self-implication of the subject. For Lonergan, such occurs at the level of interiority, while for the Bantu people such is done at the level of social, active and pragmatic participation.

Lonergan's appeal to cognitive operations as a methodological approach to theology might prove useful in the appropriation of the theological worldview of the Bantu people, but when it comes to functional specialties it might encounter a challenge

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<sup>474</sup> David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 151.

<sup>475</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 60.

on account of the fact that the conceptual language that it employs might not carry corresponding gravity in the often practical theological world view of the Bantu people. The theology of the Bantu people is overtly creation-centered and has an overarching functional and performative orientation. The Bantu theological epistemic system would not perceive each stage in Lonergan's framework as a functional specialty, but rather as part and parcel of an interrelated whole. Lonergan claims that the progression between functional specialty is conscious by means of satisfying all necessary questions at each stage. It appears to Robert Doran that in Lonergan's theological framework "there is an individual core of spontaneous elemental imagination which is to be recovered by intelligent, reasonable, existential subjectivity in the interests of self-appropriation."<sup>476</sup> Consequently, therefore "it is this recovery which both moves psyche into the thrust of intentionality and provides one with the symbolic foundations for engaging in a hermeneutic of culture and religion."<sup>477</sup> Lonergan would place the festival and rites of passage of the Bantu people at the communication stage of the functional specialty. In Bantu theology, though, such events are the very performative expressions and core of theology. As Nyamiti explains, "African religious behavior is centred mainly on man's life in this world, with the consequence that religion is chiefly functional, or a means to serve people to acquire earthly goods (life, health, fecundity, wealth, power and the like) and to maintain social cohesion and order."<sup>478</sup> This is because theology in the Bantu theological view is by nature inherently functional. It performs specific functions within

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<sup>476</sup> Robert M. Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 2nd ed., Marquette studies in theology 3 (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 1994), 135.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>478</sup> Charles Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God*, Spearhead no. 49 (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1976), 11.

the community, the family and a person's life. Orobator, affirms the functionality of African theology by saying that it is premised on three functional areas namely promotion of life; solidarity and service to the community.

The functionality of African theology is that it is used for divine action in areas where the community feels incapacitated. This is not to say that there is a contradiction between the functionality of African theology and the functional specialties in Lonergan's framework. Rather, what Lonergan goes about explaining in speculative form, the African theological framework demonstrates in pragmatic terms. In other words, while Lonergan affirms a universal notion that human beings can rationally come to know God, Bantu theology affirms that we can only know God through an active relationship with the created universe and the ancestors. This is notwithstanding the fact that there are fundamental similarities between the two at the level of meaning and in terms of theology's ultimate function. Lonergan, theology "mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix."<sup>479</sup> By this claim Lonergan concedes to the fact that theological meanings are culturally oriented. Hence the mediation is done with signs, symbols and language that have cultural subjectivity. This claim justifies and acknowledges the significance of contextual theologies. Veeneman, comments on Lonergan's method, that "this claim is ultimately what makes Lonergan's theology a theology of correlation. Even though he is putting it somewhat differently, it is clear from this statement that theology is intended to connect a particular religious tradition to a particular context."<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.

<sup>480</sup> Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method*, 55.

## 9.0 Conclusion

It is not in dispute that there is a strong link between theology and epistemology. The fact that all theology stems from the religious experience of revelation confirms the primacy of culture as a shroud in which seeds of theology are planted. Theology therefore is not just a function of formal undertakings; it is rather an outcome of a conscious reflection on religious experience. My argument, just like Lonergan's is that at the heart of theology lies the question of self-identity. Over and above the question of method in theology, the crux of understanding theological notions and frameworks lies in the question of self-understanding of a person or people. Bernard Lonergan refers to this as identity and subjectivity. He contends that the self can be understood rationally. Lonergan's approach employs a materialistic understanding of the human person by strictly focusing on how the human mind understands and processes reality. Hence his argument that God can be objectively understood and discerned. His argument makes logical sense as to deviate from this materiality would place his discursive and formal theology on spurious grounds. Bantu theological anthropology, in contrast, insists that the self can only understand itself in relation with the other. God can be experienced in a communal setting and in the everyday life promoting events and acts.

The best hermeneutical approach to explaining a theological experience lays squarely on the objectives of the theological undertaking. At best, it is recommended to use multi-faceted approaches in interpreting theological data. We see this approach in the conduct of African theology, in particular Bantu theology, in that it utilizes both oratory and symbolic language in its expressions. In contrast to African theology, Lonergan's theology is a formal and discursive theology, which articulates the process of how

theology ought to be done. It is essentially prescriptive. Bantu theology is pragmatic and oriented towards resolving socioeconomic issues. It hinges on experience and motivated by a functional push, a problem-solving orientation. Hence the pragmatic dimension of African Theology.

The theology of the Bantu people is placed at the disposal of the community to resolve experiential life issues. Hence it is not speculative theology at the level of outcomes but rather a medium and tool of human engagement to resolve the endemic problems of the community and the individual. African Theology only attains the speculative meaning and dimension when it engages the human faculty of rationality, human consciousness and the epistemological and cognitive faculties. It is a legitimate process of knowledge production in its rational dimension. Lonergan on the other hand, unlike African theology is not entirely abstract. He posits 'experience' as the starting point of theology. Though Lonergan does not show the practical implications of his theological considerations for the day to day life of the ordinary person, in contrast, African theology is a reflection on concrete daily realities and how to make them better understood and lived. For Lonergan therefore, according to Gregson "Method in theology, just as method in general, is a recurrent process. And what appear as present achievements must eventually be evaluated by future theologians, as they will attempt to pass on the valuable accomplishments of the past to their present generation."<sup>481</sup>

Another distinctive feature in African theology is the fact that it has neither books of scriptures nor an institutional framework, it is a theology of God's people. It is rather a narrative theology rich in symbolisms and signs. There are no formal buildings where

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<sup>481</sup> Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 115.

African theology is conducted as it is done in the communal arena, in the home, and at shrines. However, in west Africa, African theology has priests and priestesses who are the key practitioners of traditional religion. It should be pointed out however, that if Africa sustains the dynamism of Small Christian Communities, they have potential to become fertile ground for the growth of the highest form of theological speculation on the continent. This unit of the African Church has so much untapped theological potential in articulating the theological aspirations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Further, there are multiple theologies and methods in African theology, unlike Lonergan's transcendental method which affirms universal application. Whereas Lonergan's method affirms objectivity in its logical affirmations by asserting that true and genuine subjectivity is objective, African theology and Bantu theology in particular affirms objectivity at the functional level, that is if a theology sustains life, supports community solidarity and affirms the spirit of the community of the living and the ancestors. Lonergan on the other hand has a somewhat different theological motif of the community, which he understands as an audience for reception of theological convictions. According to Gregson "the concrete context for theological Communication is one's religious community in the world. For Christians, that is the Church; and Lonergan in fact, reserves his treatment of the Church for this functional speciality, Communications."<sup>482</sup> Lonergan holds the view that the realm of experience can rationally be used to shift into the realm of transcendence, that is about notions of God and theology because the individual or rather an authentic and rational person is a self-transcending subject. Bantu theological method in contrast

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid.



affirms that the realm of experience is a reflection of the realm of transcendence. The realm of experience is in a radical and profound way related to the realm of transcendence. In Lonergan's method transcendence or rather the Transcendent has the realm of experience as a historical premise. In Bantu theology, the opposite is true. The realm of experience, which includes material reality and the created universe, has its origination in the realm of transcendence (the Transcendent, Vital Force/ The Spirit). However, the two theological methods, Lonergan's and Bantu's, share a common affirmation regarding the overarching realm of transcendence. The realm of Transcendence has a much higher viewpoint of reality than the realms of experience, understanding, judging and deciding.

Although the two theological epistemic systems might share foundational sources of origin, in so far as they are both grounded in the realm of experience, yet there are fundamentally different theological epistemological systems which nevertheless invariably end in similar intents and purposes. The similarity lays in the awareness that theological epistemology is grounded in what Lonergan states as "the social character of human knowledge...and its historical character."<sup>483</sup> This is similar to what Magesa surmises as the foundation of African epistemology, that is "life can be appreciated fully only through personal participation in the activity of the community involving the three tiers of God and the ancestors, with the community and tradition, with oneself and creation."<sup>484</sup> That is the conversion of the human person; while this happens at the individual level in Lonergan's framework, it has a communal dimension in the Bantu

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<sup>483</sup> Crowe, *Method in Theology*, 43.

<sup>484</sup> Magesa, *Jesus The Life, Naming Jesus as "Healer" in Africa*, in Festo Mkenda and Diane Stinton, *The Way, The Truth and The Life*, 119.

framework. For Lonergan, this conversion is at the intellectual, moral and religious levels as it brings about authentic subjectivity, which is grounded in objectivity. Conversion in Bantu theology would imply connecting one's life to the vital force of life, that is to be in authentic communion with ancestors and the living. Hence my categorical position from the insights garnered in the course of this project is similar to that of Bujo, that is;

I believe that a truly dynamic Christianity will only be possible in Africa when the foundation of the African's whole life is built on Jesus Christ, conceived in specifically African categories. Such an African Christocentric ethic does not of course exclude rational reflection; but to work out a theological discourse, rational reflection must be in continuous dialogue with the propositions of faith.<sup>485</sup>

It is appropriate to end with the words of Scripture, to emphasize the strong link between theology and epistemology, as demonstrated by the theological insights in the letter to the Hebrews in :1:1-3;

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word.

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<sup>485</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 91.

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