RECONCEPTUALISING, RECONFIGURING AND RECONSTITUTING THE STATES OF AFRICA: INSIGHTS FROM THE THEOLOGY OF COMMUNION

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Outlining the Argument

Two concepts, "Problem" and "Project", readily come to mind in describing the continent of Africa with its 54 political States, the most recent being South Sudan. In the international comity of nations, the continent of Africa is a problem and a burden. It is a problem for reasons of the myriads of its seemingly intractable and endless crises: food crisis, humanitarian crisis, epidemics, inter-ethnic or religious conflicts, political instability and violence etc. In the eyes of the world, then, Africa is a problem child; a burden and a cog in the wheels of international progress and advancement. Africa is a cripple in the midst of athletes that run at supersonic speed. In view of these, it would appear that the rest of the world has taken the continent of Africa as a project; indeed, a massive project that requires enormous resources of all kinds. Think of the huge financial and economic "aids" that have been poured into different States of Africa. Africa can, then, be described as one huge Reconstruction Project. Employing Socrates’ myth or analogy of the cave, Luemba would liken this reconstruction project to an attempt or effort to lift Africa out of the cave. According to him:

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2 I prefer to use the term “States” than nations or countries, throughout this paper. Essentially, they mean the same thing.
“through series of economic recovery plans or through financing of several development projects, the international community has attempted to ‘raise the head’ of a sick and imprisoned Africa. These efforts are comparable to the attempts to liberate prisoners from a cave.”³

But it is not only institutions and persons outside the continent of Africa that are interested and involved in this task of reconstruction; Africans themselves are equally concerned and involved in this project of reconstruction. In fact, Africans have often been challenged to take the lead in the huge task of reconstruction. Pope Benedict’s exhortation to Africans, “Stand up, take your mat and walk” (Jn 5: 8), can, indeed, be interpreted from this perspective. Africans must not lie around and wait for someone else to lift her up. She must pick up her mat and walk, even when she needs the aid of Grace. Speaking in a similar light, President Barack Obama of the United States of America reminded Africans that:

You have the power to hold your leaders accountable, and to build institutions that serve the people. You can serve in your communities, and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease, end conflicts, and make change from the bottom up. You can do that. Yes you can! Because in this moment history is on the move. But these things can only be done if you take responsibility for your future. It won't be easy. It will take time and effort. There will be suffering and setbacks. But I can promise you this: America will be with you as a partner, as a friend. Opportunity won't come from any other place, though—it

³ José Francisco Luemba, L’Afrique Face à Elle-Même, Le Courage de la Vérité, (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2010), 29. Translation from French to English was done by me.
must come from the decisions that you make, the things that you do, and the hope that you hold in your hearts. The crux of Obama’s speech is that Africans must grow up and face up to their responsibilities like adults.

This project of reconstruction is one that is, indeed, multifaceted and all embracing, such that no spectrum of the African life and society is left out; not even the field of Theology! Hence Jesse Mugambi will speak of “reconstruction as the paradigm of African Theology.” According to him, reconstruction, as a paradigm, challenges theologians and other specialists to review the role of academic disciplines in social engineering, to make African leadership more accountable to the ordinary people.

A project of reconstruction, especially one of a significant magnitude like the one that is the subject of our discussion, is one that requires a lot of critical reflection. It demands critical study and analysis, careful planning, and right approach. A reconstruction project requires that all angles must be explored, studied and critiqued to ensure the success of that project. This accounts for the tons of academic reflections and studies that have been done and written on what could be described as a “reconstruction roadmap” for the continent of Africa. There have been approaches from economic and financial angles, which seek to discern the right economic models that will get Africa off her feet. The drive towards democratization is one of such roadmaps, designed from the political perspective that is believed to hold a key to the liberation of the African continent from its present state of underdevelopment. The once touted “transfer of technology” option was, at a point, conceived to be the solution to all of Africa’s problems. All these different “roadmaps” whether taken individually or collectively have the same common objective: to set

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Africa on a firm standing among the international comity of nations.

**The African Crisis—Identifying the Root Causes**

Proper diagnosis is a precondition or prerequisite for proffering right solutions. Right solutions cannot be applied when a symptom is mistaken for a cause. While the causative and symptomatic distinction may oftentimes be clear and easily identifiable or distinguishable, it is not always so in all instances. As such, some phenomena may have both the features of a cause and a symptom. In this case, it may be proper to speak of a causative symptom. For instance, the internecine ethnic conflicts and violence that have rocked many African States can, indeed, be identified as one of the causes of the underdevelopment of Africa: such violent situations do not provide peaceful and enabling ambient that is needed for meaningful development of persons and institutions. Yet, can it not be equally held that such conflicts are themselves symptoms or manifestation of certain political structures or organizations that are inherently dysfunctional which often provoke such internecine conflicts and violence? In this instance, then, it will be too simplistic to identify political conflicts in Africa as merely a cause or rather one of the causes of its present situation of impotence and underachievement. We shall further explore this argument using the Nigerian situation as a typical example.

Traditionally, *le crise africaine*, has been often attributed to a *double causality: endogenous and exogenous*. The former includes: "the organized pillage by the ruling class, ... the practice of distributing State resources to cronies [that] derives from a mentality of predation has led to the ruin of a number of African countries..." "[M]ost of the wars and conflicts which have further

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6 Cf. Luemba, 14.
7 Luemba, 14
impoverished the black continent can best be explained within the context of the geopolitical and economic manoeuvrings or intrigues which involve the control, by powerful interest groups, of natural resources such as crude oil, uranium, copper, diamond, cobalt, gold or aluminium...."\(^8\) The *exogenous causality*, on the other hand, is what can generally be described as *the responsibilities of the West*.\(^9\) This will include: the slave trade in which over fifteen million men and women, most of whom, if not all, were among the healthiest and most productive of the African population were sold into slavery; the colonial experience which traumatized and destabilized the African society; and, of course, post-colonialism which continues to exploit, intervene in and emasculate the African continent. Commenting on this form of post-colonial politics of interventionism and emasculation, Diop and others stated that "the neck-deep collusion or connivance of Paris with Africa's most corrupt leaders is undeniable, yet this fact remains a taboo in the French media... [F]rom Cote d'Ivoire to Togo, every crisis in Africa is an occasion to attest to French interventionism in the continent. She props up dictatorial regimes while at the same time secretly funding the most virulent opposition groups; she trains and arms ethnic and private militias; and in what could be described as a macabre or sinister comedy, pretends to watch over the good performance of democratic African leaders. These happen to be her puppets chosen from the most narrow-minded and corrupt political class."\(^{10}\) Of course, what Diop and others wrote about France and

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their former colonies is equally true of other western powers like the USA, Britain, Germany, etc.

Luemba, however, dismisses as obsolete, this approach of identifying the root cause of the African crisis and dilemma. The paradigm of Africa’s primary responsibility must serve as the theoretical framework for a new reading and interpretation of the African crisis.\(^\text{11}\) I entirely agree with Luemba that we must move away from an alibi mentality which seeks to exonerate us from taking real and full responsibility for resolving our problems. Africans must become adults and face up to their responsibilities. This is, in fact, a key mark of adulthood. An addendum which I would want to add to the fresh hermeneutics of understanding, interpreting and responding to the African problem is that such hermeneutics must be done in the light of history. In other words, it must incorporate elements and methods of historical criticism. It is in having an eye to history that Africans can, as part of their effort to seek solutions to their problems, discern what historic baggage or baggage of history that needs to be dropped or better still, what aspects of their history that needs to be redefined. This brings me to the second and very important part of this paper.

The Concept of Statehood and the African Crisis

Although it is always valid and legitimate to speak of the crisis of the continent of Africa, we must constantly keep ourselves from slipping into that error of thinking and speaking of Africa as if it were just a simple and unified reality. The similarity and commonality of the lived experience of crises does not justify or validate an approach that ignores or minimizes the fact that we are dealing with crises that are part of the lived experiences of persons or people living in territories with delineated boundaries that have sovereign status. And so, when we speak of the African crisis or the

crisis of the continent of Africa, we are, indeed, speaking of the crises of the States in and of the African continent first taken individually and then collectively. The recognition of this fact is, indeed, a very significant variable in placing in better focus the *African crisis* and in isolating the root causes of this crisis. And so, a complement to a global approach to the crisis of the continent of Africa is an approach that highlights the individuality of States that constitute the African continent. This latter approach makes possible the formulation or articulation of a very fundamental question, namely, *are the crises of the individual and collective States of the African continent not bound up with the question of Statehood?* In other words, *is the notion of an African State not itself a key or central question in the whole spectre of crises that has marked the continent?* In fact, one may even ask an even more fundamental question: *does the continent of Africa really have what can, in the true sense of the word, be called States?* Is Nigeria, for example, a (true) State? Or is the Democratic Republic of Congo a (true) State? Of course, questions such as these would lead inevitably to the question of the meaning of State or what constitutes a State. This in turn will open up the discussion on the various theories of State and theories of their evolution. We cannot in this paper go into such discussions so as not to lose sight of our primary focus and not to clutter the paper with many digressions. But what is evident is that the question of Statehood is an unresolved question in the continent of Africa.

Does, therefore, the mere fact that a defined territorial area that shares a common flag, one national anthem, a single government, etc., make such delineated territory a State? Could it not be that what we ordinarily consider to be a State is actually a conglomeration of States? For instance, up until midnight of July 8, 2011, what could now be referred to as “Old” Sudan was for all terms and purpose understood, even in international circles, to be a single State in the continent of Africa. But a few seconds after midnight, that single State ceased to exist. In place of one single
State of Sudan, there became two States: South Sudan and what may be referred to as “New” Sudan. That historic event is, indeed, an unmistakable statement of the fact that for that territory of “Old” Sudan, the question of Statehood was an unresolved issue. And there is no way one can fully interpret and grasp the crisis of “Old” Sudan and, indeed, of other neighbouring States without taking into cognizance the fact of this unresolved question of what State meant for the erstwhile “citizens” of that territory.

Although, one might wish to explain the crisis that, for decades, engulfed that region of Africa in terms of a political crisis, such explanation will remain, however, superficial, inadequate but also false or at best misleading if done without full reference to and recognition of the socio-economic and other developmental crises the struggle to uphold a certain notion of State—as a territory comprising of South Sudan—engendered during all those decades of conflicts and war. Can one adequately explain the intractable crisis in today’s Democratic Republic of Congo, without taking into consideration its present configuration as a single State or entity with a territorial dimension that surpasses the whole of Western Europe? Is its present constitution as a single State not itself a problem with multiplier effects that have social, economic, and environmental consequences? Similarly, can one adequately account for the crippled state of the so-called giant of Africa, i.e. Nigeria, in spite of its enormous human and natural resources, without factoring in the unresolved question of what a Nigerian State actually means? Similar questions may be raised about States of Africa.

The fact is that the concept of African States is an inherited and imposed one. It is the result of the historic balkanization of the African continent at the infamous Berlin Conference of 1885. And so, contemporary African States continue to bear the identity conferred on them by their erstwhile colonial masters. It is no longer a point for academic speculation or debate to argue that the conceptualization, configuration and constitution of African States
by colonial powers were inspired by mere economic interest and political expediency. In other words, there was no real intention to configure and constitute on the principles of virility and sustainability what became known as African States. It is not surprising, then, that most if not all African States suffer from a certain internal structural weakness that is linked to their very configuration and constitution as a State. There is, in other words, a personality crisis or weakness in their very constitution. This personality or identity weakness is the root or, at least, in some way or the other instrumental to the rest of the crises that each entity suffers as a State. One might liken this to the multiple difficulties or problems, that one who suffers from a serious personality or identity disorder experiences. African States suffer severe identity crisis in their corporate personality. And as long as this crisis of corporate personality or identity is unresolved, it is unlikely that the continent will resolve the other socio-political, moral and economic crises.

What is amazing and curious is that, in most analyses of the African crisis, little or no serious attention is given to the corporate personality of what we know as African States; and in particular how this question is intimately linked with other socio-political, economic and moral problems that bedevil the various African States. It appears that many citizens of various African States have taken for granted and accepted as an unquestionable dogma, the colonially bequeathed corporate personality and identity such that any attempt to raise a discussion on this subject is perceived and characterized as treasonable offence: territorial boundaries are fixed and immutable. These may be described as faithful disciples of Pontus Pilate who declared: ‘what I have written, I have written.’ In like manner, these affirm: ‘what is fixed is fixed.’ Thus, there appears to be a morbid fear to question and critically examine and even reject the corporate personality and identity which were defined and imposed on the African people by the colonial imperialists. This primitive fear gnaws at the heart of the opponents
of a sovereign national conference in Nigeria. Citizens of many African States are, therefore, yet to appreciate and comprehend the challenge to learn to reflect for ourselves employing conceptual categories that are properly ours. African States must, in other words, both individually and collectively reconceptualize and reinterpret for themselves what it means to be State. They must strip themselves of that imposed colonial concept of State and discover and interpret Statehood for themselves using their own images, idioms, colours, language, concepts and categories. This is the new point of departure for writing our common history.

But there is even a worse kind of presupposition rooted, perhaps, in gross deficiency of history, or a facile analysis of it, which makes it rather difficult for some contemporary commentators and analysts to appreciate the importance of the question of Statehood in relation to internal and sometimes external crises in various African nations. Dipo Onabanjo in the cover story of Tell Magazine speaks of the conviction of the founding fathers of Nigeria at her independence. According to him, they had “expected that a united country with a strong faith in its abilities would not have difficulty achieving peace and progress that will make it a force to reckon with in the comity of nations. However, after 51 years of independent existence, these dreams of the country’s founding fathers have sadly remained tall dreams as the country, buffeted by a cross-current of opposing influences appears to be drifting dangerously away from the set goals.” Without going into a detailed critique, I will quickly point out that Onabanjo seemed to have presumed that Nigeria as State was the deliberate creation of some Nigerians whom he ascribes the title founding fathers. Nigeria was founded not by any group of Nigerians but by British colonialists who had not even the slightest vision or

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12 Luemba, L’Afrique, 15.
13 Luemba, L’Afrique, 15.
expectation that Onabanjo outlined. The so-called *founding fathers*, i.e. the pioneer political leaders were men and women who tried to make the inherited entity called Nigeria work, without subjecting the nature and status of that corporate entity to critical questioning. By grossly failing to fully appreciate the fact that that entity as structured by the British colonialists was one in which, ‘the British through the policy of “divide and rule” exemplified in the differential treatment of regional elites, the amplification of pre-colonial differences, the heightening of inter-ethnic tension, sowed the seeds of inter-regional and inter-ethnic suspicion.’ How could these *founding fathers* have presumed that an entity already configured and structured along such serious divisive line could function successfully? Could it be that this uncritical and perhaps naive presupposition is responsible for the “cross-current of opposing influences” that is buffeting the Nigerian ship?

Attempts to Restructure the African Continent

Looking at the post-colonial and contemporary history of Africa, one may identify a number of occasions or instances that could be characterized as attempts to redefine and reconstitute the corporate personality and identity of the African States. The earliest of this was Kwame Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism. According to Mugambi, “Nkrumah cherished and promoted the idea that African peoples were one community—irrespective of the colonial boundaries which the Berlin Conference had endorsed in 1885. He believed that it was possible to transcend the language, immigration and tariff barriers imposed by the former colonial powers, and establish one economic and political community covering the whole

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continent.” Similar endeavours that follow, in some degrees the vision of Nkrumah, though in a less ambitious dimension, are the various regional integration bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), etc. Both the Nkrumah and the Regional Integration approaches to redefining, restructuring or reconfiguring the African States in ways other than the colonialists’ vision and intent, though well intentioned, suffer from a similar flaw, namely, naivety. Nkrumah’s naivety could be best described as the naivety of the Tower of Babel. The regional integration bodies suffer from a different kind of naivety. These bodies pretend to be capable of forming an integrated body with a single or common identity and corporate personality from different individual countries or States which have unclear, ambiguous or even dysfunctional corporate personality and identity. How much, for instance, can a State like Nigeria, with its own unclear status and corporate identity as a State, contribute to the quest for a common corporate image or identity of a larger entity like ECOWAS? Symphorien Ntibagirirwa encapsulates this critique perfectly when he affirmed:

Integration is impossible without first affirming one’s identity, and without affirming one’s identity it is difficult to consciously contribute to the eventual result or product of integration. To affirm one’s identity is to be capable of responding to the question: ‘Who am I?’ The whole dynamics of opening up oneself to the other centre on this very question. It is in recognizing and affirming one’s identity that one is able to know what about his person, he can bring or give to others and what he expects from others

16 Mugambi, Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction, 39.
in return. This mutual exchange or self-gift is the true basis for all philosophy of solidarity.17

The present States of Africa must, therefore, first individually pose the question: "Who Am I?" But they must also pose a follow-up question, namely; "Who Do I Want or Wish to be?" This latter question is rooted in the fact that what each of the present State of Africa is, is the result of a hetero-definition, i.e. a definition imposed on her by another. Each State must, therefore, seek to discover what she wishes to be in terms of her corporate personality or identity. In other words, each must strive for an auto-definition of herself. It may well be that at the end of that quest, what she wishes to be may correspond with what she presently is and in that case, there would be no need for a reconceptualization or reconfiguration of her corporate identity. In that case, that State undergoes the process that in theology is known as reception.18 But if, on the other hand, the auto-definition is out of sync with her imposed hetero-definition, then, there will be need to reconceptualise, redefine, reconfigure and reconstitute its corporate existence, i.e. corporate personality and identity as a State.

Perhaps, it is the likelihood of such political re-engineering that paralyzes many with fright. They, rightly or wrongly, imagine that such restructuring might be highly explosive and would, in

18 Reception is a key theological notion and process. Reception, according to Anthony Akinwale, is a process through which the Church in a given place discusses, interprets, and finally makes part of its own life the teachings or practices, decrees and decisions of [a] Council. Cf. The Congress and the Council: Towards a Nigerian Reception of Vatican II, (Ibadan: The Michael J. Dempsey Centre, 2003), p. 4. In this case, we may speak of a State receiving or making as its own, the corporate identity, status and personality that was conferred on her by her colonial master.
fact, open a floodgate of wild, bloody and uncontrollable anarchy that would result in the dissolution of many African States. The unmanageability of such a situation, they further imagine, would be worsened by the myriads of major and minor ethnic nationalities that will demand their own sovereignty. Such a scenario would lead to a balkanization of Africa, far worse than that of the Berlin Conference. This will ultimately weaken the African continent and further subject it to the predation of foreign powers thus, forever nailing the continent of Africa in her self-made coffin. This reasoning, therefore, presupposes that a proposal of this kind is a prescription for auto-destruction. It is, in other words, a Hemlock Therapy. In the face of such a suicidal option, it would then be best for the African States to continue in their present configuration and structure. This, in fact, is the classical argument of opponents of the convocation of a sovereign national council to redefine the Nigerian State.

One cannot dismiss with a wave of the hand the fears and arguments of those who espouse this position. Several secessionist agitations in different parts of Africa, with that of Northern Mali being the most recent on the list, seem to lend credence to this fear. But are these agitations, one may ask, not themselves a demand for reconfiguration and reconstitution, a demand which, when persistently ignored, begins to take up a radical character that may slowly but inevitably slide into violent and bloody confrontations. One can indeed note the increasing frustration and gradual radicalization in the position of one of the few African recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize, Prof. Wole Soyinka, who for decades had been in the forefront in demanding the convocation of a sovereign national conference that will examine and restructure the Nigerian State. Exasperated by the obstinate refusal of successive Nigerian governments (both military and civil, backed by individuals and institutions with vested interests in the present dysfunctional configuration of the Nigerian State), to heed to this demand, Soyinka at a public forum proposed an alternative to a national
conference. He declared: "[t]here need be no further calls for a national conference. Let each regional grouping with compatible ideas of the ultimate mission—the future of the humanity for which they are responsible—begin to call the shots, and relegate the centre to its rightful dimensions in any functioning federated democracy. Let each state call its own conference of peoples to articulate in just what direction they wish to direct their leaders and relate to the centre and other states."\(^{19}\) It can be said with all certainty that if Soyinka’s invitation is followed through by any region or regions of the Nigerian State, such action will certainly provoke a serious political tension of no small magnitude between the Federal government and those regions; one that may eventually snowball into a more violent crisis if not civil war. But such crises are inevitable when pacific or peaceful demands for restructuring and reconfiguration are ignored or suppressed. This, then, belies the position or argument that the adoption of the proposal that aims at the reconstitution of African States is a *Hemlock Therapy* for the African continent. On the contrary, it is the refusal to adopt such a proposal that is, in fact, a sword of Damocles, that threateningly hangs on the head of States like Nigeria, DRC, etc., that stubbornly refuse to address the question of their corporate personality and identity. In recent history, one can point to the Balkan crisis that followed on the heels of the inevitable breakup of former Yugoslavia, as an example of how never to wish away strong national or ethnic sentiments of components of what pretends to be a State. And so, pretending that a problem does not exist or burying it in the sand, will never make the problem go away, it merely postpones the doomsday.

One can further fault the argument of those who insist that a platform that may lead to the reconfiguration of African States is suicidal rather than beneficial, on their unstated but false

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presupposition that national boundaries are immutable. Again, recent history has amply demonstrated the contrary. The former Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) is a remarkable example of this fact of human history. There are no permanent boundaries!

But the greatest flaw in the position of those who object to the project of reconstruction and reconfiguration is their inability to grasp the intrinsic connection between the question of Statehood and the myriad of other crises that bedevil African States. Writing on the threat of the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram, the Tell Magazine in its cover story has this to say:

...beyond the immediate problem of containing the onslaught of Boko Haram, there are sufficient grounds to believe that a bigger challenge facing Nigeria is to address once and for all the lingering questions over the political future of the country. The belief is that the phenomenon known as Boko Haram today is predicated on perceived injustice and social ills that have been associated with the Nigerian federation for sometimes now. As Ajayi puts it, the country is sitting on a keg of gunpowder because there is so much distortion in the Nigerian system.20

A superficial analysis of the “much distortion” which exists in the Nigerian system, may merely be reduced to questions about political arrangement of power sharing, or economic inequalities among the various components of the Nigerian State, etc. But a more critical analysis will indicate that such distortions or dysfunctions are ultimately tied to the very concept or idea of the Nigerian State itself. Unless, one arrives at this depth of comprehension and interpretation, one will merely be dealing with symptoms and shadows. It means, therefore, that an enlightened

and rigorous discourse on the present configuration of most if not all African States is a *sine qua non* for finding a comprehensive answer to the African Crisis. For such discourse to be meaningful, fruitful and beneficial, it must be informed and guided by rational principles and ideas. But above all, it must draw its resources from all fields of human knowledge including theology.

**A Theological Perspective to the Question of Reconceptualization and Reconfiguration,**

Here we come to the third part of this paper, i.e. the theological contribution to the discourse of the African Crisis. Pope Benedict XVI in an address, reiterated in his Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Africai Munus*, called for transforming theology into pastoral care, namely, into a very concrete pastoral ministry in which the great perspectives found in sacred Scripture and Tradition find application in the activity of bishops and priests [and theologians] in specific times and places. But the pastoral ministry into which theology is to be translated is not, however, limited to spiritual matters; it includes matters of politics, economics, society-culture: the subject of pastoral care is one who is influenced by, and strives after his/her salvation in, a context which is political, social, cultural and economic. What great perspectives found in sacred Scripture and Tradition can theology bring into discourse of the *African crisis* vis-à-vis its relation to the question of the present configuration and constitution of African States? This question is made pertinent by the insightful remark of the Bishop of Rome when he reminded African Christians that their contributions will only be decisive if their understanding of the faith shapes their

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understanding of the world. Although the task and mission of theology is not in the political, economic, and social order, theology must, nonetheless, constantly cast the reflected light of that divine life and revelation in a manner that consolidates society, and endows the daily activities of men and women, in the political, economic and social arena, with a deeper sense and meaning. African theologians must, therefore, offer insights drawn from their faith in the Crucified and Risen Lord in shaping the African society. The theology of communion offers a good starting point for developing sound principles that can be employed in the reconceptualization of Statehood in Africa.

The Theology of Communion

Christians and Christian theology have down the centuries come to accept as foundational the notion of a God who has revealed Godself as personal and thus relational. Far from the notion of an abstract or impersonal God or God who is shut up in Godself, Christians profess faith in a God who is Father of all things and who has perfectly and definitively revealed Godself in Christ through the Spirit. Thus, Christian theology understands God as a perfect being in communion. Created in the very image and likeness of God, men and women are also created as beings in communion: communion with God and with one another. Our relationships, therefore, are to be governed, shaped and guided by the essential characteristics of the Trinitarian communion. It is not surprising, therefore, that the church’s self-understanding derives from the very notion of communion: κοινονία, communio. According to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the

22 Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity (21 May 2010), Insegnamenti VI/1 (2010), 758, cited in Africae Munus, #32.
23 Gaudium et Spes, 42
24 Gaudium et Spes, 40
Church is the people of God called into communion with God and with his fellow human persons. Baptism sacramentally initiates believers into the life of communion both with God and with the ecclesial community; it calls the baptized into a new mode of living, a new relationship. Indeed, communion lies not only at the very core of created human nature but also at the core of God’s salvific plan for humans. Hence, the Fathers of Vatican II noted that, “God has, however, willed to make men and women holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness.”\(^\text{25}\) And so, communion is, indeed, part of God’s providential will for man since it flows from Him and points to His own nature.

At the very roots of the notion of communion is the idea of liberty, freedom and deep rooted spontaneity. These are distinctive of the nature of God himself but they also characterize the human person. Communion cannot be possible without the exercise of full liberty since communion is the meeting of two liberties: the one who extends the invitation and the other who embraces or welcomes it. Intimate and complete union, the highpoint of every communion, results from voluntary and spontaneous mutual self-giving. This does not admit of any force or compulsion. In this voluntary self-giving, one is even willing to offer up one’s life as a perfect expression and testimony of his/her total self-donation to the other.

We see this character of communion in the very person and life of Jesus Christ. Intimately united with his Father, he willingly emptied himself and assumed a lower state in order to accomplish the Divine plan (Phil 2: 3-9). But his kenosis was not only motivated by his intimate communion with his Father, but was equally motivated by his desire to enter into similar communion with humans. Thus, he willingly laid down his life, without any coercion or pressure, in order to open the path towards that full

\(^{25}\) Lumen Gentium, #9. Emphasis added.
communion between God and humans, and amongst humans themselves. He underscores the spontaneity of his decision when he declares: no one takes my life from me, I lay it down and I take it up again.

But bound up with the idea of liberty is the idea of mutual respect and dignity. To affirm the liberty of the other is to affirm and accord the other the respect and dignity due to him/her. It is to acknowledge the other as a subject that stands on the same pedestal as oneself and not an object which stands at an inferior level or status in relation to oneself. Communion, therefore, is connotative of equality. The Christology of the Nicene and Post-Nice Fathers like Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Nazianzus, etc., intuits this insight, hence their vehement opposition to Arius and his supporters. To speak of Christ as not consubstantial with the Father is to destroy the very foundations of communion that is the very life of the Trinity; it is to introduce the notion of superior-inferior relations, which is foreign to the very notion of communion. Arius’ heresy lies in his inability to conceive a communion of Trinity, i.e. a relational God who is perfect communion and by that virtue, perfectly consubstantial.

Even in the earlier efforts by the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries to expound the mystery of the Godhead, particularly of the unity and oneness of God, one can discern, even though not yet very distinct, the underlying notion of communion as key to this theological exposition. In that Divine communion which is expressed in the plurality of the Divine Persons who are in relation with and to one another, Christian theologians, illumined and guided by the light of the Divine mystery itself, have come to understand that perfect unity in God is not necessarily best explained or expressed by the singularity of Person but rather by the plurality and distinction of Persons. In other words, plurality is not antithetical to unity. In fact, only plurality and not singularity or uniformity can best express the very nature of the Godhead which is a communion of Divine Persons.
It might appear theologically incorrect to speak of communion as connotative of equality especially when speaking of the communion between God and humans. Certainly humans in communion with God would not imply being equal to God. Yet, it is not theologically inappropriate to do so. In Christ, God established full communion with humans. But that communion was only made possible through the incarnation of the Word of God. In lowering himself at the incarnation, he made himself equal with humans in their humanity; or to use the expression of the Cappadocian Fathers, made himself consubstantial with humans. But by rising from the dead and ascending in glory to his Father, he divinized humans, that is, raised the human up to the divine state, without which humans will be incapable of eternal communion or fellowship with God. It needs, however, be pointed out that divinization makes humans only ἀμοιβής (homotheos – the same as God) and not ἀμοιβής (homotheos – the same as God).

The aspects of liberty, dignity and equality which are characteristic of the notion of communion are very much evident in the mystery of the Church itself. The Church as the body of Christ is a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity of humankind. But the incorporation into this body or communion by way of Baptism cannot take place except there is a manifest or unequivocal free assent on the part of those who wish to be so incorporated. In other words, one is never incorporated through coercion, subtle or manifest. The one who seeks to enter into this communion must do so, only after having responded freely to the invitation of the Gospel. This aspect of liberty or spontaneity is clearly underscored in the dialogues found in the liturgy of the Christian initiation, in which the minister questions the catechumen, or in the case of a child, his/her parents and godparents, of their free choice to renounce Satan and enter into “a new mode of living, a new relation” with God and with those who have also freely chosen to become God’s adopted sons and

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26 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, #1.
daughters through the waters of Baptism. Once that choice is made, and baptism conferred, the individual enters into this communion and stands in equal dignity and privilege with the rest of his brothers and sisters. From then on, there is no more Greek or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. All stand equal with the same dignity before the presence of God. Not even the diversity of charisms or offices or the condition or manner of life\textsuperscript{27} can alter or destroy that Christian equality and dignity that they all share in common. And so whether one is an eloquent preacher, a brilliant teacher, a powerful exorcist, a great prophet, or a zealous evangelist or missionary, all stand equal before Christ. That one is entrusted with the ministry of the episcopacy, or presbyterate or diaconate does not confer on him a higher baptismal dignity or privilege than the rest of his sisters and brothers.

Communion is predicated in the very act of mutual self-giving, the voluntary entrusting of oneself to the other or another. The act of mutual self-giving in turn guarantees and ensures unity. One cannot, therefore, speak of unity in the absence of that act of self-giving. Indeed, it is because the self-giving of the Father, Son and Spirit is absolutely total and complete that Christian theology can truly speak of the perfect unity and oneness in God. It is by virtue of the total and unreserved self-giving that the three persons of the Trinity are One God.

The mutual giving of one self to the other which is the foundation of communion is itself predicated on communication or dialogue. Dialogue is itself a form of self-disclosure, i.e. making oneself known and understood by the other. It is the unveiling of the secrets or the inner recesses of one’s self to the other. This is what creates the bonds of trust which is the springboard for total self-giving. Dialogue, then, is key to communion.

\textsuperscript{27} Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, #13.
Delineating a Theology of State and Politics

Having completed a general exposition of the theology of communion, we shall in this fourth and final part of this paper, employ the insights from this theology to set out broad outlines of the principles that could serve as building blocks for a Catholic/Christian theology of State that can inform the reconceptualization, reconfiguration and reconstitution of the States of the African continent. It is a theology of State that embodies deeper insights than the Divine theory of State. The principles of a Catholic theology of State will include the following:

1. Unity rooted in communion is a positive act of God’s providential will for humans. In other words, God positively desires and wills that men and women live in communion rather than in isolation. For this reason, communion and unity must be proposed to Christians and non-Christians alike as a positive value to be pursued over and above every form of division, factionalism, sectionalism, ethnicism and even nationalism.

2. The human person finds his/her full integrity and completeness only in the relationship of communion—with God and other human persons. The human society, which is what the State is, is therefore a society of beings in communion. The State can, in some way, be understood as being in the service of the “vocation to the communion of persons” 28

3. Since the unity that is rooted in communion is predicated on the spontaneity, freedom and liberty of the subjects of communion, the State must affirm, uphold and sustain this principle of liberty and freedom not only of single members

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28 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2419.
of the society but also of homogenous groups or communities of persons.

4. Communion is realized when one spontaneously and freely chooses to enter into communion with another. Since States are at the service of the “vocation to the communion of persons” as stated above, no State can compel any group of persons, homogenous or otherwise, to be part of that society of beings in communion, which we earlier indicated is the essential character of a State since compulsion is antithetical to the idea of communion. A community of persons, whether they are homogenous or otherwise, possesses the fundamental right of choice, in other words, they have the right to opt in or opt out of a particular society of beings in communion.

5. Communion cannot be possible without dialogue. For this reasons, every State, which is a society of beings in communion, must allow for unrestrained dialogue among the component members of its corporate personality. This dialogue may include issues which even touch the corporate identity or personality of that State.

6. Every State must be founded and structured on the principles of co-equality and consubstantiality of all the component members of that State or society of beings in communion. Any policy or governmental action that disregards or undermines these principles puts at risk the continued corporate existence of that State and in fact, provides sufficient ground for any of the component members to opt out of that society of communion.

7. Plurality and distinctions are important aspects of communion. But more significantly, plurality is not in any
ways opposed to unity. Plurality can, indeed, enrich and reinforce unity. States must therefore uphold and promote the distinctive and plural character of its corporate personality. And so it is indeed possible that men and women in the variety of their origins, cultures, languages and religions, are capable of living together in harmony, not only in a religious or spiritual community, i.e. the Church, but also in a socio-political community, i.e. the State. And so, acts or policies that seek to enforce or enthrone uniformity and singularity are detrimental to unity and, in fact, undermines the continuing corporate existence of that State.

Evolving a Unique African Socio-Political Model

The above principles, though essential for the process of reconceptualization, reconfiguration and reconstitution of African States may not, in or by themselves, be sufficient for the *auto-definition* of African States. The process of *auto-definition* is, in fact, twofold. The first or basic level is the readiness and capacity to freely redraw the boundaries of a State other than the ways that was previously drawn by the colonial masters. For instance, the boundaries of Nigeria or DRC may have to be redrawn in ways that may give rise to new States. This first level of *auto-definition* is to free each State from its previous *hetero-defined* image or status; to define each State in its relation to itself and in relation to other States.

But the more crucial level of its *auto-definition* lies in its internal socio-political structuring or organization. Here, each State will have to figure out the kind of political structure or system that will best guarantee its internal cohesion and stability while at the

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29 *Africae Munus*, #39.
same time taking into adequate cognizance the peculiarities and uniqueness of its component parts. The key principle here is the recognition of the diversity of the societies that make up each State of the African continent. An attempt to employ a uniform political structure or system that ignores these diversities and peculiarities will only be counterproductive. What this means is that each African state, without necessarily returning to its pre-colonial structures and status, must nevertheless, plumb into the riches of its pre-colonial socio-political systems and discover for itself the forms of political structures that it can best operate. It may require the adoption of a socio-political hybrid which combines both the traditional African forms of political structure and organization with some form of modern political organization. This hybrid political structure and organization affords the possibility of operating different systems at different levels. For example, in much of the highly rural areas of Africa, States may have to operate a form of political structure and organization that is best fitted to that area or region. It would, for example, make better sense to operate a traditional form of political organization in a rural area than to replicate a party based democratic form of political organization. The latter may make better sense in a megacity like Lagos or Abuja or even a relatively cosmopolitan town like Ibadan. Needless to say, coming up with a workable socio-political hybrid system or structure requires a lot of critical thought and analysis. Yet, it is one way out of the internal contradictions that are inherent in many African States.

Once again, the Nigerian State presents a good example of such incoherence. Constitutionally, Nigeria defines itself as a Republic, a Federal Republic. If one is to go by the very essence and implications of that concept, a monarchical form of government will be inconsistent with a republican and democratic form of government. Yet, the monarchical form of government even though not officially recognized in the Nigerian constitution, exerts much influence in the lives of many Nigerian societies. In
fact, there are regions of Nigeria, where the success or failure of political administration, whether civil or military, depends on the support of the local monarchs. Indeed, there are occasions where the constituted civil or military government will require the public support of a monarch or groups of monarchs to “sell” certain government policies. What this means, therefore, is that the Nigerian State is operating on a hetero-defined system while ignoring very important aspects of its traditional systems that need to be integrated or remodelled to fit into this received system. But of course, there are other parts of Nigeria where a different system of political system other than the monarchical system is dominant and influential. That too needs to be integrated. What this means then, is that African States, besides having to face the task of reconfiguring its component parts or entities must in addition evolve a political system that does not necessarily operate a univocal political structure or organization or worse still ape the so-called western democracies.

Conclusion

I wish to conclude by pre-empting what might be a possible critique of the position advanced in this paper. Would restructuring, reconfiguring and reconstituting the States of Africa resolve all the crises in the African continent? Certainly not! This paper does not make such a naïve claim. The reconstitution of Sudan into two States has not resolved the conflict and other human crisis in that region! Yet, although reconfiguring and reconstituting African States would not eliminate all crises in Africa, it will, certainly, resolve a good deal of crises. The submission of this paper is, therefore, that there are a good number of crises in Africa that will never be resolved if the question of Statehood is not critically examined and dealt with. And there will be some others that will remain only partially resolved if the solutions proffered are done
without reference to the question of Statehood. And so the key submission of this paper is that the resolution of the question of the status of the African States is pivotal or foundational to the resolution of the issues of inter-ethnic and religious violence, political instability, human and economic development, weak structures, food crises, and indeed, the overall developmental process of the African continent.

We do recognize that the urgency and critical nature of the question of Statehood varies across the African continent. While it may be a critical issue in a State like Nigeria, it may not necessarily be so in a State like Benin Republic or Ghana. But this does not imply that it is not a foundational question for those States. One may, for example, raise the question of viability and sustainability of a State like Benin Republic or Togo. If by reasons of their present configuration or constitution, these States are unviable and thus incapable of sustainable development, does that not already in itself constitute a basic problem that will set off other crises within that State? And in that case, would it not be legitimate to question the rationality of either State continuing to exist as presently configured or constituted? Would it not be more meaningful to explore an alternative configuration, which might mean the merging of two or more States, or the merging of parts of a State to other neighbouring States? In fact, the whole project of reconceptualization, restructuring, reconfiguration, and reconstitution of the States of Africa, is to create viable and workable States since, as presently constituted and configured, many States of Africa are either unviable or unworkable.

This project of reconfiguration is indeed no mean task. It is, indeed, a herculean task, and thus, one that requires a lot of courage. Bambo Sakho identifies *l'absence de courage* as one of the key factors that have contributed to the retardation of development in Africa. And so, just as the subtitle of José

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Luemba’s book aptly suggests, Africans and African States must acquire le courage de la vérité: They must have the courage to face up to the truth of their corporate being, their corporate personality and identity. African States must look into themselves to critically assess if their present corporate identity as defined by the various States that make up the continent of Africa will truly set them on the path of successful and meaningful development, progress and greatness. If it does not, then each State must have the courage to begin to unmake and remake her corporate personality in a manner that will enable her reach for the greatest heights of her potentials. But in order for this process to succeed and not degenerate into a wild, chaotic and unmanageable process, she must first articulate and establish sound framework and principles that will guide that process of reconceptualization and reconstruction. These principles must be profound and comprehensive, and drawn from various sources: from traditional African systems, wisdom and philosophy.

What we have done in this paper is to elaborate some principles—drawn from the wealth of Christian theology—that could go into the articulation or elaboration of much broader principles. These principles are meant to serve as pedagogical materials or formative tools that will prepare the hearts and minds of the African people for this herculean but inexorable task that is required for setting aright the direction and future of the African continent.