PEACE BUILDING, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION
AND RELIGION IN AFRICA:
CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS:
The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians was founded in 1986 by pastors, university and seminary professors from mainline Christian churches. The objective is to critically reflect on and search for ways of establishing dialogue in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like Nigeria. The pressure in 1986 came from the upgrading of Nigeria to full membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference. The focus of the association expanded from Muslim-Christian relations to interdisciplinary research—bringing together scholars from disciplines such as political science, history, law, economics, sociology, philosophy, psychology and anthropology, religious studies and theology—to engage in creative conversation for the good of Nigeria, Africa, the diaspora and the world. This is the focus of the Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology published since 1987.

Contributors, invited or voluntary, should have an eye on the multi-disciplinary interest of the Bulletin. Submissions are in English, but the editorial board and consultants have facility for translating from French to English.

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EDITORIAL

The secularist thesis that locates religion in the private sector but at the same time recognizes its power to generate or direct moral behaviour is not the dominant viewpoint on the functioning of religion in Africa. From the Cape to Cairo religion occupies public space and mobilizes public discourse. In Eastern Africa, the Uganda Lord’s Resistance Army is still a force to contend with in negotiating peace. In West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, Boko Haram (Western education is religiously forbidden) occupies public space and connects with radical Islamic movements that more or less strive to control the 7000 kilometre stretch of the Sahel-Sahara desert belt, from Mauretania to Djibouti or to Somalia. In the heart of Africa, Christian religious leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo struggle to serve and to live out their convictions in the midst of violence and war. They not only come to the aid of tens of thousands of beleaguered refugees but they also play the prophetic role of denouncing the mayhem and violence perpetrated by the warring parties. Indeed some of these religious leaders laid down their lives for their convictions. The eulogy of Msgr Munzihirwa by Augustin Ramazani, published in this issue of the Bulletin, is a sterling example of commitment and dedication to peace-building that dramatizes the cost of discipleship.

This issue of Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology addresses, from diverse perspectives, the role of religion in peace-building in the continent of Africa plagued by violence and war. A recent collective work, Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in neoliberal Africa¹, drew attention to the ambivalence and ambiguity of religion vis-à-vis violence. Religion could become an instrument of conflict and of peace-building. In the lead article to this issue of Bulletin, Matthew Hassan Kukah, Bishop of Sokoto diocese in Nigeria, makes the point that Muslim-Christian relations

¹ Edited by Smith and Hackett (Notre Dame Press, 2012).
in Nigeria are informed by colonial history, political and economic interests and religious propaganda. Despite the Boko Haram violence, genuine efforts have been made and could still be made to engineer better relationships. Bede Ukwuije argues from the resources of African literature, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, that God is not captive to human designs; the freedom of the Jewish-Christian God from being instrumentalized is testified by the Hebrew Scriptures and also by African religious-literary resources. Dianne Diakité reflects on how the matricentric, or the focus on mothering, in West African and diaspora social life, positions women in the religious (orisa) and socio-political domains to holistically promote peace as well as reduce violence and disease in Africa and the Caribbean. Gerald Boodoo and Elochukwu Uzukwu trace the history of violence in Africa from the longue durée of the encounter with Western global designs (the 15th century Europe-Africa-Americas slave triangle.) Peace-building, generated by the "worldling" or local remaking of Africa, emerges from the creative linking of local African histories with modernity.

Augustin Ramazani Bishwende argues that religious leaders do not fold their hands watching the war that has been ravaging the Congo since 1994. Jesuit Bishop, Christophe Munzihirwa Mwene Ngabu, murdered in 1996, was an able peace-builder, a host of Hutu and Tutsi refugees, and a martyr for the cause of peace. Finally, this issue of Bulletin presents the other type of violence that ravages Africa, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Religious persons and leaders, the Holy Books (Bible and Qur'an) and religious bodies have impacted the attitude to the sufferers. Elias Bongmba reviews in detail a recent collective publication Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain to highlight the struggle against HIV/AIDS in the literature and in practitioners’ experience.

Editor

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2 Edited by Beverley Haddad (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2011.)
INTRODUCTION:

The institution of the Secretariat for Non-Christians on May 17th, 1964 marked a major turning point in the history of the Church’s view of its missionary life. The further publication of *Nostra Aetate* on October 28th, 1965 blazed the trail for the commitment of the Catholic Church to dialogue. As fallout of the Second Vatican Council, it is important to examine the impact of the Council on Christian Muslim relations.

If we are to be guided by the empirical evidence, it will be right to say that after almost fifty years, not much progress has been made in the way of dialogue. What is more, it also seems that the conversation has been unidirectional, that is, that it is the Catholic Church which has been responsible for almost all the initiatives towards with Islam.

This short paper, assessing the impact of dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, will focus first of all in briefly tracing the origins of this dialogue. Secondly, I will examine the content of the dialogue forums in Nigeria, i.e. the key issues around which dialogue has been formulated in Nigeria. Thirdly, I will examine the agents of dialogue by looking at the institutional infrastructure for dialogue in our country. Finally, I will look at the challenges of dialogue in a multi-ethnic and multiparty environment as we have in Nigeria.

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1 Matthew Hassan Kukah is the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Nigeria.
2 Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions
ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA:

The history of the relation between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is closely tied to the history of the Nigerian state. The tensions generated by the colonial state laid the foundations for most of the tensions that still persist today. Before the emergence of the colonial state, the relations between the peoples of what would later become Northern Nigeria were marked by the conflict, war and violence that were the hallmark of the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate.3

The British colonial state was built on a mutual suspicion between the colonial state and the Muslim community because of the violence that attended the process of the establishment of the state. The colonial state, for economic and political reasons soon made common cause with the conquered Fulani ruling class. To consolidate this relations and to further exploit its economic benefits, the colonialists propped up the existing feudal system that they had overthrown by a power sharing mechanism that entrenched their powers by designing an architecture of power that subordinated the non-Muslim communities across the Middle belt to the structure of feudal power that would later be known as the Emirate system. Large swathes of lands and communities who had successfully repelled the Fulani ruling classes in wars were now parcelled out and brought under the rule of Emirs. An understanding of the history of this injustice is fundamental to appreciating the reaction of say, the peoples of the Plateau to the situation in Plateau state today. The decision by the colonial state to further create the Sabon Gari (strangers’ quarters) system of exclusion and separation in pursuit of a policy known as non-

interference further deepened and widened the chasm of fear and suspicion between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria⁴.

In 1964, the Muslims set up the Jama’atu Nasril Islam (Society for the Victory of Islam, JNI) as an association to defend and protect the interests of Muslims. It would later expand to include Muslims outside northern Nigeria and transform itself into the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA).

Thus, even before Nigerian independence, and after, the political struggles of the peoples of the Middle Belt were tied to unwinding these foundations of injustice: this explains the struggle for a Middle Belt Region and also accounts for why the first political association to be formed in the region was known as the Non-Muslim League⁵. The Northern ruling class had shown that it was not willing to create any distinction between the boundaries of Muslim culture and politics in Nigeria. The non-Muslims, feeling left out and treated very clearly as outsiders, decided to seek common cause by also defining their own identity. While the political class struggled within politics, seeking a new political space, the Christians on the other hand, sensing and feeling discriminated against on the basis of their religion, decided to also seek a platform for defining their identity and asserting their rights and freedoms.

Thus, within the Christian community, this struggle for freedom found expression in the setting up of the Northern Christian Association. Its objectives were the protection and preservation of the rights of Christians in the North. It is important to note of course that this was in keeping with the regional nature of the politics of the time. The details of this association, the subsequent politics at the national level are outside the scope of this short presentation but it will be helpful to look at how these

relationships have shaped up at a national level. To do this, I will highlight some key areas where these contestations have taken place.

1: Religion and the Politics of Power sharing:

The greatest source of tension in Nigeria has been the lack of an adequate power sharing mechanism to institutionalize and guarantee the pursuit of a good society based on justice, equity and fairness. Whereas other parts of Nigeria have tended to concentrate on democracy and the building of a secular state, the Muslims in northern Nigeria have focused more on some form of a theocracy and a variant of feudalism.

Politics in Nigeria has been dominated by region, religion and ethnicity. Whereas others navigate around the themes of ethnicity or region, the Muslims continue to talk about one North which, intrinsically, is synonymous with Islam. The anxieties of the non-Muslim minorities still persist largely because, whereas they are geographically considered to be part of the North, they do not believe that they are getting a fair share in the power game because of their religious affiliation. And, clearly, those within the Middle Belt who have become Muslim, as it is the case in parts of Benue, Adamawa, Plateau and others, have seen a noticeable change in their bureaucratic, professional, economic or political lives. This remains an area of tension.

At the national level, the perceived monopoly and domination of the levers of power by the Muslim North has remained a matter of concern for others in the country. For example, Nigeria has had a total of 13 heads of State. Out of this total only 5 have been Christians. Under the military, General Gowon was the only non-Muslim who became the Head of State. Some of these concerns have filtered into the discussions surrounding the Jonathan Presidency, the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency which has been subjected to various interpretations. Clearly, these anxieties
account for a substantial percentage of the crisis of confidence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

2: Religion and State Policy: The Sharia Law:

The issues of the role and place of Islamic law since the conquest and displacement of the Sokoto caliphate and the subsequent emergence of the colonial state have been a source of concern to all sides in the Nigerian project. All Constitutional debates about the future of the country have always been marred by the debate over the status and place of Islamic Law in the statutes.

While Muslims have presented the application of Sharia law as a *conditio sine qua non* for a stable polity and a guarantee of justice, non-Muslims have come to see it as a grand design to acquire, control and monopolize power by the Muslim elites. Their conduct before, during and after these debates have shown very clearly that in the main, the call for the application of Sharia law has always been at best, a gimmick for political mobilization. For the politicians on both sides, this issue has come to be seen as a platform for perceived compromise among the elites but also as a viable strategy for mobilization.

Two examples will suffice. In 1978, at the height of the Sharia debate in the National Assembly, all the Muslim delegates walked out of the Assembly. They finally came back, negotiated some favourable terms and the matter was resolved. Interestingly, all but two of the members of the Committee that resolved the crisis ended up as members of the National Party of Nigeria, NPN. A key member, Alhaji Aliyu Shagari, who also walked out, was later to become the President of Nigeria the following year. It is also instructive that after his election, there was not a mention of the word Sharia right through until he was overthrown by the military on December 31st, 1983.

A second example is what happened over twenty years later when the State of Zamfara declared Sharia and was later on
followed by the other States in the North. Despite all the hullabaloo over the decision, not much came out of it. It turned out that it had been merely a strategy by a man who had limited resources but huge political ambition to climb to power. The sum total of all this is that in reality, the Northern Muslim elite have no serious commitment to living under Sharia law in the way and manner that non-Muslims understand or misunderstand. Indeed, it is the prejudices and stereotypes of non-Muslims which have continued to fuel so much passion and frenzy over this debate. In the end, it all comes down to the wise words of an Islamic scholar who has noted:

You do not require the law of Shariah to make you behave honestly. You do not require the law of Shariah to be imposed to make you speak the truth and to appear as witness in court or, wherever you appear as witness honestly and truthfully. A society where robbery has become the order of the day, where there is disorder, chaos, usurpation of others’ rights, where the Courts seldom witness a person who is truthful, where filthy language is a common place mode of expression, where there is no decency left in human behaviour, what would you expect Shariah to do there? How the law of Shariah would genuinely be imposed in such a country, this is the question.

Sadly, things that are taken for granted and look normal and harmless regarding religion are not so in Nigeria. The reason is that religion has been conscripted into the politics of the country, no thanks to the legacy of the dead, but not buried, Hausa Fulani

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6Hazrat Mizra Tahir Ahmad Khalifatul Masi, Sharia: The Relationship between Religion and Politics in Islam: (A speech delivered by Interreligious Consults, Suriname, June 3, 1991)
caliphate. So where do we go from here and how does our nation intend to confront these challenges so that religion can really and truly be freed from the stranglehold of modern day politicians who are prepared to make religion political and make politics religious. To try to answer these questions, let me review the state of affairs since the return of the country to democratic rule in 1999.

BREAKING NEW GROUNDS FOR DIALOGUE: FROM BELLIGERENCE TO ACCOMMODATION:

Perhaps, the first sign that the face of religion would change in the political life of Nigeria, especially among the Christian community, was at the inauguration of the Obasanjo Presidency after he had openly declared himself “born again” in the course of his sojourn in prison. This came to a head with the Thanksgiving Prayer Service which was organized by the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) a day after his inauguration. This is not the place to review the legacy of the Obasanjo administration, but for the purpose of our review, we can note the following:

- The successful completion of construction work on the Ecumenical Centre after it had been abandoned for over twenty years.
- The appointment of a Presidential Chaplain for the Villa
- The construction of a Presidential Chapel in the same Villa.
- He supported the setting up of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council, NIREC.
- He strengthened the National Christian Pilgrims Board by appointing a National Chairman

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7 This event took place at the International Conference Centre, ICC, Abuja on May 30th, 1999 and was well attended by the leadership of CAN, senior clergymen and diplomats. The author was in attendance.
In the case of Islam, the Muslim community enjoyed patronage from the President. Among other things for example:

- **He organized the fund raising for the renovation of the National Mosque**
- **He openly participated in the Muslim Ramadan and broke his fast with Muslim leaders.**
- **He developed very close ties with the then Sultan, the late Alhaji Maccido and took a title**
- **He maintained the tempo of support for the Muslim Pilgrimage**
- **He ensured transfer of power to the Muslim North.**

The President’s final decision to sack his chaplain for involvement in politics was significant.

What was significant of course was the fact that these gestures had brought religion closer to the Presidency in a way and manner that had never happened. However, as was clear, there were tensions. First, the two Muslim and Christian bodies, making up the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), could not agree on who would Chair the meetings and had to settle for a position of Co-Chairmen. For the period of the Obasanjo administration, not much happened in NIREC between the two faiths beyond the routine meetings. There were arguments as to the role and place of women: for, whereas the Christian body decided to bring in women, the Muslims did not take easily to this. The second area was the confusion as to the roles of the Muslim religious leaders who were, in reality, traditional rulers. To bridge this gap, the Christians decided to appoint two Christian traditional rulers to the Council.

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8 The Chaplain, Professor Obaje stated that he had been anointed by God to become the Governor of his home state, Kogi. His attempts of course fell flat and he ended up falling between the stools of two kingdoms.

9 The significance of this point has probably never been fully appreciated. For, whereas the CAN concept of Leadership meant Priests and Bishops, for the
The activities of NIREC slightly changed with the tragic death of the then Sultan Maccido in a plane crash. Alhaji Sa’ad Abubakar, his brother, a retired military officer and a gentleman with very good education and with a wide experience within and outside Nigeria, succeeded him.

There was noticeable change in the last five years since the emergence of Alhaji Sa’ad Abubakar, the new Sultan of Sokoto and President of SCIA (Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs), and Archbishop John Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja and President of the CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria), as Co-Chairmen of NIREC. Under their leadership, NIREC changed the face of Christian-Muslim relations significantly and came into national and international memory. Under the leadership of both men, ordinary Nigerians began to feel somewhat relaxed and positive about the prospects of religion being a force for good and not associated with violence. Both men have appeared publicly in such national initiatives as Health campaigns (Malaria, HIV/Aids, Polio etc.), they have travelled together for international Conferences, have signed Statements together in moments of national crisis and so on. Both Federal and State Governments began to feel more confident in terms of how they can relate with both faiths.

On April 20th 2010, CAN took a very prophetic step. It organized one-day seminar in Abuja under the theme: My Muslim Neighbour. Both the Sultan and Archbishop Onaiyekan presented insightful papers which spoke closely to the issues of collaboration and cooperation in a manner that was unprecedented. Both men in separate statements focused on issues of religious freedom, love, tolerance, evangelism, good governance etc. About a month later, the SCIA, at one of its annual meetings in Kaduna, took an unprecedented step and decided to devote a session to addressing the issues raised by the CAN initiative. For the first time in their history, they also extended invitations to the leadership of CAN along with other religious leaders to participate at a special session.

Muslims, Traditional rulers have always presented themselves as the religious leaders while in reality, they are not!
of their historic meeting. At the session, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Anglican Bishop of Kaduna, presented an excellent paper, *Islam in the Eyes of a Non-Muslim.* After the presentation, three other Christian leaders including this author were formally requested by the Sultan to speak for between 5 and 10 minutes. This event was spectacular and epoch making. It has offered a major platform of hope for the future of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria.

It is of note, that in its over 40 years of existence, the Kaduna meeting was the first of the SCIA that was hosted by a Governor who is a Christian. This was sequel to the new twist in the political developments of the country after the death of President Yar’adua. Secondly, it was also the first time that non-Muslims were invited to the meeting of SCIA. A combination of these factors is indicative of the fact that Nigeria is on the verge of a new phase in securing a new place for religion in national life on the one hand, and hopefully reducing the tensions that had come to characterize Christian-Muslim relations in the country. It depends on whether the leadership of both faiths carries through with the same trust and enthusiasm that has been displayed by Abubakar and Onaiyekan.

Unfortunately, the CAN elections of 2010 turned the tables. First of all, CAN had broken faith with its unwritten law that Vice Presidents of CAN will always naturally succeed their President at the end of their tenure. This was how things had been from the beginning of CAN. But in 2003, Rev. Peter Akinola, the Primate of the Anglican Church decided to contest the elections even though he was not the Vice President. Amidst tensions, controversies and allegations of bribery and blackmail, he won the elections against

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11 Mr. Patrick Yakowa had been sworn in as the Governor of Kaduna State after the sitting Governor Architect Namadi Sambo had been nominated Vice President by the new President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan.
Archbishop John Onaiyekan, the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and the sitting Vice President.

After his tenure, Rev. Akinola could not win a second term as the leadership of CAN then elected Archbishop Onaiyekan. He too held the position for one term before Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, again defeated him. Sadly, the virus of corruption had already entered the body of Christ as regionalism and ethnicity seemed to now play a role in turning bribery into a major part of CAN elections. The 2010 elections were even worse, again marked by some degree of regionalism.

The Presidency of Pastor Ayo has been controversial because of the adversarial manner he has handled relations with Muslims. He has tended to see politics in everything and has pitched the body of Christ against the Muslim power blocks. The Sultan has been most matured and balanced in the way and manner that he has handled dialogue even in these very difficult situations. What then is the future of Christian Muslim relations in Nigeria? I will conclude by making just three key points.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE

First, there is an urgent need for the leadership of both Muslims and Christians to find the best way of freeing religion from the grip of Nigeria’s murky politics. The notion that any of these groups can become the praying wing of the party in power is gaining ground. Christians must quickly return to the fine principles of ecumenism which were the founding ideals of the Organization. It seems that Christians now see CAN at the State and Federal levels as being at

12 It is important to note that Archbishop Akinola and Obasanjo are both Yorubas from the same town of Abeokuta, Ogun State.
13 Pastor Oritsejafor’s elections were quite messy and the allegations of bribery were rampant and public knowledge. As with Obasanjo’s Presidential ambitions, Dr Goodluck Jonathan comes from the neighbouring state of Bayelsa while the Pastor hails from Delta. The Presidential elections had again assumed a regional, religious and ethnic colouration.
the service of those in power. Thus, a culture of Chaplaincies, Pilgrim Boards, and Prayer Warriors has emerged. The difficulties here lie in the fact that in all cases, the contest for positions of Chaplains, Chairmen of Pilgrims’ Welfare Boards is taking its toll on the Christian community especially as the body of Christ is presenting itself as being made up of contending and competing political associations. The motto of CAN is, *That they may be One*. Sadly, today, the motto looks like, *That we may be one with the Political authorities!*

Secondly, the impression has gained ground over time that both Jama’atu Nasril Islam (Society for the Victory of Islam, JNI) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) were set up to fight each other. The dubious notion that both sides see these associations as platforms for defending our members and our faith is dangerous and it is a program for tension and even violence. It is one of the reasons why the relationship between Christians and Muslims has been so ineffective and the integrity of the bodies open to question. These postures have made the leadership rather vulnerable: posturing and defending my people become an excuse for wanting a piece of the pie\(^\text{14}\).

Thirdly, there is need for us to appreciate the opportunities for dialogue opened up for Nigerians under a democratic setting. I am convinced that although our democracy is not perfect and we are far from the goal posts of credibility, we still have the best opportunity for building a new and viable nation.

However, it is important that religious leaders really understand the nexus between religion and politics. Now, with the return of democracy, our role is to be vigilant but to focus more on the quality of the democratic outcome given that what we fought for is now here. The temptation for compromise is there when members of our faith, region or ethnic groups take power. The real

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\(^{14}\) For example, a leader of one of the CAN branches told me that he had to mobilize people against Archbishop Onaiyekan’s Presidency because the Archbishop was *too friendly with government* and was not getting *things* (read money!) for Christians.
role of the prophetic leader requires offering directions for the attainment of the *common good* of all. And here, religious leaders should no longer present themselves as defenders of their people, but defenders of the people, God’s children as opposed to the adherents of our faith.

There is need for the Catholic Church to reclaim its authority as a founding father of CAN, so as to rescue the Association from sliding further deeply into the morass of politics due to greed and the manipulation of the leadership. Clearly, the last ten years have witnessed some serious challenges for CAN to the point that many in the Catholic Church have continued to wonder whether it is useful for the Catholic Church to remain in the body. The Catholic Church has been at the forefront of creating these kinds of platforms especially in areas of conflict such as the Philippines, Ghana and South Africa.

Our country is ours to build. The Catholic Church must revisit its teachings in such areas as the common good, as a by-product of the Social Teachings of the Church, as a means of encouraging our politicians to help rebuild our broken society. It is important that both faiths reclaim the moral ground which has become infested with so much corruption. This collaboration is important both for religion and the nation itself.

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15 Rocco Viviano 2004. ‘*Responses of the Catholic Church to Islam in the Philippines from the second Vatican Council to the Present day*’ in, Anthony O’Mahony & Michael Kirwan (Eds): World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues Melisende: London. Vivano notes that: *'The Bishops-Ulama Forum in the Philippines came into being as a means of helping to provide a spiritual basis for negotiating and end to the conflict’* p400.
TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF GOD’S FREEDOM IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Bede Uche Ukwuije, CSSp

INTRODUCTION

The Contemporary world is witnessing the increasing phenomenon of the manipulation of God’s name for the service of violence and domination. The conflict between the two monotheisms, Christianity and Islam, seems to suggest that religion is being transformed into ideology to the detriment of human beings and their social life. These developments challenge Christian theology to take a radical stand on the God whom Christians worship and how this God can contribute to a better togetherness in the society. This reflection contends that the being of God made visible in the humanity of Jesus Christ and in the activities of the Holy Spirit offers a basis for a healthy togetherness in the Nigerian society. Precisely, the Christian faith confesses God as the mutual self-donation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a relationship fundamentally marked by freedom and communion. God’s Trinitarian revelation disqualifies every tendency to violence and domination in the name of God.

The reflection comprises of three sections. Section one will analyse the growing concern that the domestication of God in religion has become a major source of conflict in the contemporary

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1 Bede Ukwuije lectured in Spiritan Intl. School of Theology Attakwu Enugu, and Institut Catholique, Paris. He is currently Assistant General, in the General Council of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Rome. This article is a reworked version of a paper that Ukwuije presented by at the Annual Conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN), Ibadan, April 2012.
world, especially in Nigeria. Section two will propose a theology of the freedom of God. It will be hinged on two pillars: (a) a critique of religious absolutism and defence of God’s freedom and transcendence, (b) a retrieval of the biblical and dogmatic interpretations of God as Trinity—relational God that offers the possibilities of singularity and plurality. Finally, section three will sketch out the implications of the doctrine of the freedom of God for the contribution of Christianity to peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian society.

RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

*God domesticated*

Politics and religion have never been separate in Nigeria. At different times and in different traditions, religion has been an agent of social change. “Religion contributes to national integration, political mobilization, the formation of ethnic identity, and nationalism.” However, what baffles the imagination is the space religion occupies in conflicts in contemporary societies. In his widely analysed book, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Samuel Huntington claims that global conflicts after the cold war will be determined by religion, which for him is synonymous with culture/civilization. He affirms that, after the cold war, the major distinctions between peoples are no longer ideological, political or economic but cultural. People define themselves through lineage, religion, language, history, values and largely civilisation. States are in search of power and wealth but they largely depend on culture. Hence the new world conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor but

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between people belonging to different cultural entities—religious divides.

Without totally buying Huntington’s thesis, about future conflicts being determined by religion, one has to recognize the undeniable predominance of religion in today’s conflicts, especially in Nigeria. One of the major problems of Nigeria is the conflict between two civilizations, Christianity and Islam. They “tend to see one another as rivals fighting for control of converts and of the state itself.” There is also a resurgence of African Traditional Religion exploited for different reasons, including political domination. Moreover, “the political actors that control the state seek the means to profit from religion in a variety of ways—by using it to acquire power, stabilize or destabilize politics, consolidate political constituencies, and reinforce ethnic identities”.

A DANGEROUS EXPLOITATION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION (ATR)

There are no clear statistics about the presence of religions in Nigeria. However, it is widely accepted that about 6% of the population clearly declare for ATR. This is just an indication because ATR is the base that nourishes the life of Nigerians, and Africans in general, despite their religious affiliation. Before the coming of universalistic religions, like Islam and Christianity, ATR en-globed the cultural and political life of people. It could not spread because it is foreign to proselytism and is restricted to kindreds. The spread of Yoruba orisa religion, the Fon vodhun, candomblé and santeria to Haiti, Brazil and Cuba was due to the

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5 Toyin Falola, Violence in Nigeria, p.49.
transportation of slaves from the West-African coast. With the war waged against ATR by Islam and Christianity, its public practice is reduced.

There is however, a resurgence of ATR in Nigeria; this time organised by people seeking relevance. The present conditions of insecurity in the villages and cities push people to search for protection. This has revived the vocations of diviners and modern tradi-practitioners who are more like business men and women than the custodians of tradition and ministers of wholeness. They are at the service of a new political elite in search of cultural and traditional authenticity in order to safeguard their power or mask their crimes; hence the resurgence of magical practices and beliefs as well as accusations of witchcraft which are fundamentally anti-cultural and antireligious.

A careful observation of different militarized ethnic factions in Nigeria shows that, though they carefully avoid the name of God, which is normal in ATR, they are all affiliated to one ethnic deity or another. The Odua People’s Congress (Yoruba) pays allegiance to Oduduwa, the founder of the Yoruba. The Egbesu Boys of Ijaw serve Egbesu, an Ijaw war deity. The Bakassi Boys and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) derive their protection from the powerful Igbo deities to whom they offer rituals. Even the different vigilante groups like the Aguleri vigilantes are consecrated to some deity. It is not an exaggeration to say that almost all political leaders in Nigeria and Africa belong to secret cults; they fly to the patronage of one deity or another. The saga of the famous Okija shrine uncovered in 2004 is only but a tip of the iceberg. This has also opened a new perspective for home movies. It has to be stated however, that we

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are no longer dealing here with ATR but a perversion, a manipulation of religion for personal, economic and political strategies.

INCOREASE OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

The general assumption that Northern Nigeria is totally Muslim and the South totally Christian is false. Islam is widespread among the Yoruba in the South. There is a northern Islam controlled by the heirs of the 19th century Jihad and by the sultanate of Bornu, but there is Islam in the Western regions that is more recent and tolerant. There are different sects and fraternities that sometimes oppose each other. Regularly, Muslim fundamentalists emerge in order to defend the values if Islam against the ideals of a secular state and democracy.

The most symptomatic is the adoption of Sharia law in 12 states of northern Nigeria in the year 2000. This was greeted by a general crisis which seriously threatened national security. The emergence of Boko Haram (literally meaning Western education is forbidden) is in the line of this fundamentalism. It is diametrically opposed to the Nigerian constitution, to democracy and to the country’s secular status. The litany of attacks against Christians and government establishment perpetrated by this group is horrendous.8

8 Suffice it to name the following: 26-30 July 2009, Bombings in Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Yobe, 700 people were killed and 3,500 persons displaced; 16 June 2011, suicide bomb attack in Abuja at the police Headquarters; 27 August 2011, United Nations House in Abuja was bombed (23 persons killed); 5 November 2011, Potiskum, Damamturu and Maiduguri, coordinated attacks on churches and police stations (more than 90 persons killed); 5-6 January 2012, Gombe, Gombe State, shooting at worshippers in a Deeper Life Church; 5-6 January 2012, Mubi, Adamawa State, sporadic shooting at a gathering of Igbo Christians (22 people killed); 25 March 2013, bombing of a bus station in the Christian dominated area of Kano, more than 25 people killed and 60 injured. For comprehensive list of the horrors of religious violence in Northern Nigeria, see, Isaac Terwase Sampson, “Religious violence in Nigeria: Causal diagnoses and strategic
Recently, it has extended its action to the kidnaping of foreigners in alliance with Al-Qaeda which operates across all borders.

THE FUNDAMENTALIST TEMPTATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity in Nigeria is diverse: Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Adventists and a host of Pentecostal Churches. A majority of these churches is regrouped under the banner of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). To this we have to add a host of African Independent Churches more or less syncretic. The objective was to pressurise the government to return the schools expropriated from the churches. The association keeps fighting today against the attempt to Islamise Nigeria by Muslim fundamentalists. Maintaining the objectives of CAN has not been easy. The pulling out of the Catholic Church from CAN on September 24, 2012 revealed the dissensions within the Association. The Catholic Church feels that the Association led by a Pentecostal pastor Ayo Oritsejafor “is being dragged into partisan politics thereby compromising its ability to carry out its true role as conscience of the nation and the voice of the voiceless.”

Fundamentalists do not lack among the Christians. The launch of anti-Islamic criticism from Christians, especially those belonging to the Pentecostal movements, does not help to calm the


10 See *The Premium Times*, of January 24, 2013.
situation. They display great hostility to Islam and claim that the Islamic North is an obstacle to Nigeria’s development. Moreover, the new Pentecostal movements project an exclusivist Christology as well as an instrumentalization of the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost fire) devoid of sound theology. On the other hand, certain Pentecostal movements are more and more business oriented. They propagate a theology of material prosperity, display of the pastor’s wealth, obligation to pay tithes, investment in the media as means of evangelization. The theology of material prosperity appeals to entrepreneurs and young people alike, who see wealth and health, prestige and prosperity as obvious signs of divine favour. However, the connivance between the leaders of some of these groups and politicians in Nigeria contributes more and more to conflicts and disunity among Christians. They reveal themselves to be more like platforms for the conquest of political power than instruments of evangelisation.

THE NEED FOR APPRAISAL

The domestication of God inherent in the manipulation of religion in Nigerian politics has attracted severe criticism. People question the capacity of religions to contribute to nation-building. Some call for the division of Nigeria into two or more nations. Some others call for a re-enforcement of a secular state in light of Western separation between religion and the state.

There are different ways of reacting to these analyses. The first could be to go on crusade against religions in Nigeria and make them bear the responsibility for violence in the country. This would be an unrealistic way of dealing with such a complex situation in a complex country like Nigeria. There are various sources of

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Towards a Theology of God's Freedom

violence and insecurity. These include, struggle for scarce resources (land, water, especially between herdsmen and the sedentary populations), power struggle, corruption of the political elite and security agents, ethnic divisions, uncontrolled urbanisation, unemployment, cultural crisis due to globalization etc. Some others may like to maintain religion but would be suspicious of everything that has to do with monotheism. But from the above analysis, it is clear monotheism is not the only source of religious conflict, though the two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, sometimes exaggerate, thereby amalgamating the confession of the One God and absolutism.

I want to propose a path which I feel is more appropriate from the point of view of Christian theology. This is what I call the theology of God's freedom. The question Christians should ask is: how can the Christian confession of God help to create a healthy relationship among different religions and cultures in Nigeria? This will be examined in the interpretation of the Trinitarian confession as the doctrine of the freedom of God. This interpretation will however integrate the critique of absolutism presented by humanist literature in Nigeria, especially in the thoughts of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. I will then show a connection between their conception of the freedom of God and the Christian understanding of God as Trinity which has its basis in the concept of the relational God in the Old Testament.

THEOLOGY OF THE FREEDOM OF GOD

Critique of religious absolutism

The most systematic critique of absolutism comes from the humanist literature of two Nigerians, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. They accuse Christianity and Islam of transforming religion into ideology to the detriment of human beings and social
They consider monotheism as absolutist and violent. Over and against this tendency, they propose a conception of life in the society as complex integration of singularity and plurality among persons who know that they are dependent on one another and that they share the same community of destiny. They ask the different religions to respect the freedom and transcendence of God. Achebe exposes his position through the principle of duality while Soyinka builds on the principle of integration.

The principle of duality—Achebe

In his article, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," Chinua Achebe opposes the duality that underlies the Igbo world vision to absolutist tendencies. This duality is expressed in the Igbo proverb, *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya*, (Something stands and something else stands beside it). This principle pervades the conception of all reality, the human person, the deities, the society and the entire cosmos.

Achebe notes that the human person does not exist alone. He/she has a double, *chi* in the invisible world. *Chi* plays different roles in the life of the human being. The first role is to assign a limit to the aspirations of the human being, by checking the thirst for almightiness. The second role implies the first; it creates the human being. Each human being is created by his/her *chi*; that is what makes him/her unique. An Igbo proverb says that "Mmadu anayi agbalaha chi ya n’oso", (One does not run faster than his/her *chi*). However, *chi* is not almighty. Achebe quotes the Igbo proverb, "Onye kwe chi ya ekwe", (If one says yes, his/her chi says yes). This means that a great part of initiative belongs to the human being and that his/her *chi* cannot accomplish anything without his/her cooperation. One’s daily life is a constant negotiation with

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his/her chi. The glory for his/her success and the blame for failures is shared equally with the chi.\footnote{Cf. Chinua Achebe, “Chi in Igbo Cosmology,” p. 137.}

Besides the relationship between the individual and the chi, is the relationship with the community. The human person cannot have priority over the community. The realization of one's life follows the logic of a harmonious vision that encompasses the individual, the community and the cosmos. The society is ready to fight any disorder that endangers this harmony. However, the community itself is not absolute. The name community is composed: ohaneze, that is oha-na-eze (the multitude and the kings). The community is constantly checked and structured by the ancestors, chi (the other of the human person) and the gods.

The gods also are not absolute. This is evident in their names. Achebe gives a very clear analysis of the names of two Igbo deities, Chukwu (the supreme deity) and Chineke (the dual deity). Chukwu is a compound name made up of chi and ukwu (great), which means the great chi. It follows that this deity shares responsibilities with the chi of each individual. Achebe explains that Western Christian missionaries saw a connection between Chukwu and the Christian God, because of the implication of supremacy. That is why they quickly adopted Chukwu as the Supreme Being. According to him, the missionaries confounded this deity up with another, Chineke. He explains that Chineke is a compound word made up of three words Chi-na-eke. Chi as we have seen is the other of the human person. The word “eke” can signify the act of creating or destiny. All depends on the translation of the word “na”. Achebe offers three possibilities: (a) if “na” is the relative pronoun “that”, then Chineke means the chi that (who) creates; (b) if “na” is the auxiliary verb, “to”, then Chineke can signify an affirmation, God creates or God is creating; (c) if “na” signifies the conjunction “and”, then Chineke can signify a dual deity chi and eke. This third meaning introduces a fundamental difference. It means that the word “eke” is not a verb, to create, but
a noun, destiny. *Chineke* will then mean a dual deity, the *chi* and another feminine deity, *eki* (destiny).

Achebe opts for this last meaning. It follows that the Igbo God is not the almighty, omnipotent creator but a deity that negotiates its powers with the human being and the society. This understanding of God has implications for the conception of social life, the harmony of the public and the private, the masculine and feminine, the community and the individual. This, according to him, explains why the Igbo abhor the concentration of power in the hand of one authority. They take time to negotiate before a decision is reached.

The refusal of absolutism in the Igbo world vision makes it possible to integrate new forces in the solution of existential problems and the donation of meaning to human life. Achebe illustrates this stand through the conception of art in the Igbo world. It is unthinkable to isolate a work of art to the detriment of others. All artistic works are exhibited in the festival arena, *Mbari*. Art is “ike”, force/motion, it cannot be fixed; art is a process and not a product:

Process is motion while product is rest. When product is preserved or venerated, the impulse to repeat the process is compressed. Therefore the Igbo choose to eliminate the product and retain the process so that every occasion and every generation will receive its own impulse and kinesis of creation.16

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It comes out clearly that in the Igbo world view, the identity of the human person is not fixed; it is not given once and for all. It is always a process and a task to be accomplished. The human person is in a state of becoming and his/her possibilities are beyond the present conditions of his/her existence. The truth of one’s identity unfolds in the process of communion with others.

Achebe develops this idea in different novels. In *Things Fall Apart*, the intransigence of the missionary Reverend James Smith and the new converts vis-à-vis the tradition is portrayed as ridiculous. The attempts he made to demonstrate the supremacy of the Christian Church over every other form of worship did not convince the people. The religious project was put at the same level with political projects like the globalisation attempt made by Captain Winterbottom, the English Administrator in the *Arrow of God*, who wanted to subject all the villages to the order of her Majesty, the Queen of England. In *A Man of the People*, the Politicians of Bori wanted to achieve national unanimity by all means, lies, coercion, bribery, assassination of opponents and of conscientious objectors. All these projects failed woefully. The summit of the obsession of absolutism is seen in the *Anthills of the Savannah*. The title of the novel is enough to explain what is at stake. In an anthill, all the termites walk and work mechanically without freedom of reflection. This was a satire of a totalitarian state instituted by the military regime of the time. The rule of the military leader did not last; it was gradually eroded by the opposition of intellectuals and the resistance of the masses. When the government was overthrown, freedom was greeted with joy by the masses. Achebe’s proposal is compacted in a remarkable scene in an ecumenical celebration at the home of Beatrice, the friend of Ikem, an assassinated journalist. People from all walks of life and different religions, Muslims, Christians, taxis drivers, students, the


military, etc.—a kind of social microcosm that broke the social, religious and cultural divides—gathered to celebrate the baptism of a new born baby. The uncle of the baby addressed this prayer to the Almighty:

Owner of the world! Man of countless names! The church people call you three-in-one. It is a good name. But it carries miserly and insufficient praise. Four-hundred-in-one would seem more fitting in our eyes. But we have no quarrel with church people; we have no quarrel with mosque people. Their intentions are good, their mind on the right road. Only the hand fails to throw as straight as the eye sees. We praise a man when he slughters a fowl so that if his hand becomes stronger tomorrow he will slaughter a goat....What brings us here is the child you sent us. May her path be straight....

Achebe warns against the domestication of God. God is free and transcendent. People have the right to worship and confess the god of their choice, they can even confess many at a time, no power is absolute, but they should never pretend to the monopoly of God. Staging a war in the name of God is even more incomprehensible. As a Christian, Achebe indicates what ideal Christianity should be. In Things Fall Apart, What attracted Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo, to the new Christian community was not “the mad logic of the Trinity” which he could not understand; “It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow.” This poetry felt in the bone marrow is the hymn of love, the alternative society proposed by the Christian religion. It was marvellous and unheard of that a young boy like him, condemned by his father, would sit in the same church with titled men, the Ichies and Nzes of the

18 Chinua Achebe, Anthills of the Savannah, pp.227-228.
community, together with women and children. The outcasts, *osu*, were also welcome.\(^{20}\) Above all, they sang very melodious hymns, that all have one Father in heaven who loves them equally and that all are brothers and sisters.

**The principle of integration—Soyinka**

Another great writer, Wole Soyinka, the Nobel Laureate of Literature, 1986, proposes the principle of integration as response to absolutism. He presents himself as a veritable iconoclast ready to foil every attempt to impose an exclusivist, totalitarian system, be it religious or political on the society.

Soyinka’s principle of integration is represented by the archetype of *Ogun* in Yoruba tradition. *Ogun*, the god of iron and the artist, incarnates multiplicity and flexibility. He represents freedom and openness to life. He is the god of justice who defends the poor and the oppressed and fights for the restoration of cosmic integrity. Adopting archetype *Ogun*, Soyinka argues that the human being fully alive is one who does not live for himself but for others; one who is capable of integrating the other in his own vision of himself, who sees life as a process of becoming in which identities are forged in history.

From this perspective, Soyinka criticises all forms of religious absolutism. He argues that rigid and totalitarian systems are incapable of keeping people together and opening up possibilities for the future. He continues to plead for the respect of the polytheistic imagination of Yoruba religion against the thesis that Yoruba Religion is monotheistic. He argues that the affirmation of the existence of a Supreme God belongs to Christianity and Islam and that the African is not obliged to subject himself to a Supreme Being in order to accomplish his humanity.\(^{21}\) He maintains that the polytheistic imagination promotes democracy and division of


\(^{21}\) Wole Soyinka, *Que ce passé parle à son présent*, Ibid., p. 37-38.
labour in the society while the monotheistic imagination leads to autocracy and domination.

Neither the oral tradition nor written history bears the trace of a Yoruba monarch who claims that his power comes uniquely from Osun, Obatala or Sango, from Ogun or Orisa oka. That is the beauty of power. My Sango has obtained greater authority than your Obatala; you don’t even need to think about it. And if you choose to invoke the authority of the first among the gods, Olodumare, then comes the referee, Orunmila, the voice of divination, to whom gods and mortals access, irrespective of their positions in one hierarchy or the other.  

In his abundant literary work, Soyinka critiques the centralisation of power in the hands of traditional chief priests (cf. *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Strong Breed*). But he is more severe to monotheistic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. He sees the Arabo-Islamic penetration of Africa as the equivalence of European imperialism. He notes that the installation of Islam was done to the detriment of cultural traditions of the people. Soyinka is not tender either towards Christianity. He states that Christianity presents a jealous God against other gods of the world. According to him, it was Christianity that produced Descartes’ dualism and

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24 Ibid.
Hegel’s totalitarian dialectic. In his Stockholm speech, 1986\textsuperscript{26}, he stated that it was Christianity that provided dogmatic justification to Apartheid in South Africa in the same line with Hegelian logic. The idea of One Universal God leads to religious wars. Soyinka opines that Christianity domesticated by Africans is even more dangerous than missionary Christianity.

Achebe and Soyinka echo the conviction already expressed by the great Senegalese writer, Cheikh Hamidou Kane in \textit{Aventure ambiguë}. The context is the confrontation between modern culture and Islamic culture. In a letter written by the Chief of Diallobe to his son Samba Diallo who was residing in Paris, the Chief affirms the transcendence of God:

\begin{quote}
It is high time you came back in order to learn once more that God is commensurable to nothing, especially to history whose adventures contribute nothing to His attributes. I know that the West, where I was wrong to send you, has a different faith on this issue, of which I recognize the utility but which we do not share. Between God and man, there is no atom of consanguinity or any kind of historic relation..... God is not our kinsman. He is entirely outside the flow of the body, blood and history that unites us. We are free. This is why I find it illegitimate to justify apologetics by history and unreasonable to accuse God for our misery.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

The author opines that the defence of God is the last invention of man against his fellow man in order to promote himself and exploit the other. The hard and intransigent Holy Teacher of Diallobe


\textsuperscript{27} Cheikh Hamidou Kane, \textit{L'Aventure ambiguë}, Paris, Juillard, 1961, p. 175 (The translation is mine).
Bede Uche Ukwuije

(Saint Maitre des Diallobe) discovered this truth before his death. He said to the Chief of Diallobe,

But I ask you, can one defend God? Who can do it? Who has this right? To whom belongs God? Who does not have to right to love him or to disregard him? Think about it Chief of Diallobe, the freedom to love or hate God is the ultimate gift of God that no one can remove from man.28

These criticisms of absolutism in monotheistic religions cannot be ignored. They reveal their relevance in the present Nigerian context. They bring out the essence of that which binds human beings together among themselves and with the divine and humanizes the world. The authentic practice of religion brings people of different cultures and origins to understand that they are bound together by a community of destiny. It brings them to understand that singularity and plurality are not opposed to each other—rather they are two dimensions of the same reality bound together in a healthy tension.

It would be good to see how the universality proposed by humanist literature challenges the different religions especially Islam and Christianity. However, in this reflection, I will limit myself to the point of view of Christian theology. Christians are challenged to rediscover the richness of Christian monotheism. In the following section, it will be shown that Christian Trinitarian monotheism is already a criticism of violence and offers resources for building a communion of differences. Christian Trinitarian monotheism has its roots in the relational and transcendent God of the Old Testament that allows room for singularity and plurality.

28 Ibid. 137.
THE RELATIONAL AND TRANSCENDENT GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Despite the struggle to impose strict and exclusivist monotheism on Israel especially in the Deuteronomistic theology, the God of Israel remained understood as a relational God that embodies singularity and plurality. This dimension of the God of the Old Testament is important for the renewal of the understanding God in the present days when God is mobilized for violence.

At the beginning, the people of Israel were not strict monotheists. They lived in the environment of the Ancient Near East where many gods were recognized and worshipped. Israel had her own god, YHWH (Yahweh.) The term used by scholars to describe Israel’s situation is monolatry, the worship of one God among many. Yahweh was closely linked to his people to the extent that he was at the same time conqueror and defeated according to his people’s situation.\(^\text{29}\) Yahweh’s presence was concretized by the sacred object, the Ark of the Covenant, which was sometimes helpful during wars with their neighbors.

In a recent research, Elochukwu Uzukwu noted that there was a “fertile mixing of religious symbols in the Ancient Near East.”\(^\text{30}\) However, the idea of monotheism emerged progressively as the Hebrew people struggled for space among their neighbours of the Ancient Near East. This “resulted in the internationalization of the local Hebrew deity Yahweh as El and Elohim.”\(^\text{31}\)


\(^{30}\) Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2012, p. 112. In a very creative way, Uzukwu shows the connection between the relational God of the Old Testament and the conception of God in West African Traditional Religions as well as the resources this connection offers to Christian Trinitarian theology. I will borrow his analysis in this reflection.

This history of a multiplicity of deities in the Ancient Near East is largely affirmed by scholars. There is even a divine council presided by *El Elyôn* to which belonged Yahweh. Gradually, the qualities of other gods were transferred to Yahweh. According to Uzukwu, this was done through the fusing into Yahweh of the qualities of Canaanite or West Semitic deities.\(^{32}\) Unlike the radical exclusion that characterized Deuteronomistic history, it was a serene dialogue or learning process, an acculturation that accounts for the emergence of a melody of epithets or qualities of Yahweh the God of Israel. Uzukwu sees this process as positive because it contributed to the richness of the Hebrew confession of God prolonged and deepened in the New Testament.

The integration of different divine characteristics in the same Yahweh was seriously challenged by the encounter between prophetism and Baalism. Baal means “Lordship” attributed to Semitic gods. It later came to denote a divine type, the storm god.\(^{33}\) Initially, Yahweh enjoyed the same characteristics with Baal, a warrior mountain god that does as he says, the liberator of Israel, the god that rides on the clouds (Ps 68:5; 104:3; Deuteronomy 33:26), the god that manifests himself in the thunder and storm, earthquakes, volcano, tempest, thunder and flashing of lightning (Ps 18:4-14; Ps 77:19). The images of Baal are creatively integrated in the beautiful hymn to Yahweh (Ps 29). However, the domestication of Baal by Ahab and Jezebel, and the crimes they committed made necessary a distinction between Yahweh and Baal. Both have become incompatible. It is either Yahweh or Baal.\(^{34}\) This rejection of Baal was expressed in the Elijah cycle narratives. Yahweh’s revelation to Elijah at Horeb is presented as a severe critique and polemic against Baal.

Elijah’s name, *Eli-Jah*, Yahweh is *El* (God) “captures in militant and uncompromising terms the attitude of the champion of

\(^{32}\) Ibid. 113.

\(^{33}\) Cf. Ibid. 119.

\(^{34}\) Cf. Ibid. 120.
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the Yahwistic exclusivism.” In 1 kings 17, Elijah demonstrated that he was a powerful prophet. He challenged King Ahab, foretold drought, multiplied flour and oil for the widow of Zarephath, raised the widow’s son. In 1 Kings 18, Baal proves to be impotent, incapable of renewing the seasons, bring down rain, etc. After these exploits, Elijah engaged a terrible battle with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Elijah was vindicated by Yahweh who sent down fire to consume his offering while Baal did not show up. “The victory of Yahweh at Mount Carmel demonstrates that he is Lord of heaven and earth, of the seasons, and most importantly the LORD God of Israel.” When fire consumed the offering, the people fell on their faces and confessed: “The LORD is God; The LORD indeed is God.” (I Kings 18: 38-39. Encouraged by this victory, Elijah massacred the prophets of Baal.

The rest of the story narrates the disenchantment of the Prophet of Yahweh. Elijah was being pursued by Ahab and Jezebel. Apparently he had no one to defend him. Yahweh was silent and seemed to have abandoned him. The prophet relived the experience of Moses’ exile in the desert. The experience was so devastating that Elijah attempted what looks like a suicide. “He [...] went on into the wilderness, a day’s journey, and sitting there under a furze bush and wished he were dead.” And he said, “Yahweh, I have had enough. Take my life: I am no better than my ancestors. Then he lay down and went to sleep.” I Kings 19: 4-5) The Lord sent an angel to feed him; he regained strength and walked for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

The experience of Horeb was exactly the opposite of Elijah’s triumph at the encounter with the prophets of Baal. Yahweh was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in fire. Yahweh came in “the sound of a gentle breeze” (“une voix de fin silence”, I Kings 19: 11-14). The revelation of Yahweh at Horeb confirms a

35 Ibid. 121.
36 Ibid.
distinction of Yahweh from Baal, the storm god, while at the same time taking a distance from fundamentalism in the name of God. It shows that God is beyond God. God is beyond all our habitual patterns of knowing God.

Elijah emerged from the experience commissioned to anoint Hazael King of Aram, Jehu as King of Israel, and Elisha as his successor. Yahweh the God of Israel while being particular to Israel is beyond exclusivism. Yahweh, God (Elohim), the quintessence of being God, is the God of Israel as well as the God of the Phoenicians, Syrians, or the Gentiles. As Uzukwu rightly put it, "The revelation at Horeb where distance and silence are preferred modes of divine transcendence and availability to all created the environment for wider communal celebration and intercultural communication that propagated the knowledge of the relational God."38

The nearness and otherness of God in Elijah’s experience recalls the manifestations of God to Moses at the same Mount Horeb. First, God ordered Moses to take off his shoes (Exodus 3:5). He has to encounter God as God is, without encompassing him in his own personal framework and strategies. God presented himself as “the God of your fathers.” When Moses inquired more about the name of God, he received the answer “I AM THAT I AM”...Thus shall thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me unto you.” (Exodus 3:13-14) Later, after accomplishing a wonderful task for God, Moses wanted to become more familiar with God. He asked to see the face of God (Exodus 33:18-23). God refused and promised Moses that he will only see his back. God is present and at the same time Other. God’s otherness is a limitation of idolatry. Moses has to follow the trace of God in history. God is free, he cannot be domesticated. The presence and otherness of God are indications of the relational character of God.

It has to be noted that the silence, transcendence revealed at Horeb does not underestimate the oneness of Yahweh. This is

38 Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, p. 124.
Portrayed in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, mono-Yahwism, as a covenantal or conjugal relationship. This is evident in Hosea’s stress on relationship and intimacy as well as in the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God is One Yahweh” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Here the terms of the confession are rooted in the historical covenantal relationship bonding together Yahweh-Israel and Israel-Yahweh. Instead of the concern with numbers (mono), the emphasis is on “the singularity of Yahweh and Israel; the unicity or singularity of the ‘Lord alone’ whose only witness is Israel.” Here lies the specificity, it “tends towards soteriological and kerygmatic monotheism rather than Greek philosophical monotheism or the dogmatic monotheism of Islam.” It is not said that there are no other gods, rather there is a particular relationship between Israel and this God which binds Israel to him and obliges her to identify to him. Here lies the implication of the choice presented to the people by Joshua (24:15-18).

The notion of Israel as witness to Yahweh among the nations is further developed in Deutero-Isaiah and the wisdom tradition in the context of exile. “During the period of exile or captivity when a militant Yahweh was totally powerless, we see monotheism emerging without political support.” Babylonian gods are declared as no gods at all. Israel is witness and God’s icon (Isaiah 46:8-10). She is the quintessential humankind representing the quintessential deity, the transcendent and only God. This recalls the presentation of the humankind in the Genesis account of creation as “the quintessential representation of Elohîm.” There is here a kind of universalism that brings a novelty, “a novel cosmic creation in which Israel has the role as witness.” Israel will witness to the ends of the earth that Yahweh is the universal Creator (Isaiah

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40 Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, p.126.
41 Ibid. 127.
42 Ibid. 128.
Election is mission; it is witness. This means also that Israel is not the only witness of God. God raises witnesses for himself in different parts of the universe. That explains why Cyrus, the pagan king from Persia, is presented as messiah (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

Wisdom literature expanded the dialectic of transcendence-closeness of God. “Wisdom personified and related to God...emphasized universalistic mediation, dialogue and communication.”  

Proverbs 8:22-31 states that wisdom, the first to be created by God, the delight of God before all things assisted God in the art of creation. Wisdom comes forth from the mouth of God (Sirach 24:3) yet finds its dwelling in Jacob (Sirach 24:8). There is here a clear articulation of singularity and plurality.

The presence and otherness of God are indications of the relational being of God. This understanding of the relational God will be prolonged in the Trinitarian conception of God in the New Testament. Trinitarian relationship shows fundamentally the freedom of God. This freedom of God shines out clearly in the kenosis of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

**THE TRINITARIAN SELF-GIVING GOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The Trinity as the story of God’s being is totally revealed in the event of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The confession of faith that God is love is totally made manifest in the total freedom of self-donation of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

The Father is present in the life of Jesus right from the beginning. The synoptic gospels narrate that at the baptism of Jesus, the heavens opened and God spoke, affirming Jesus as his son: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with who I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). Though John does

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43 Ibid.130.
Towards a Theology of God's Freedom

not narrate the baptism of Jesus, “the testimony of the Baptist in John 1:29-34 bears the same Trinitarian structure as the other Gospels. John saw the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove (John 1:32); then there was the voice of the Father, the one who sent John to baptize and gave him the sign of the Messiah, he on whom the Spirit came.”

The Father spoke out again at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36).

John dedicates the first part of his Gospel (chapter 1-12) to the relationship of the Father and the Son. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus’ life was entirely turned towards the Father. The Lord’s Prayer is an expression of this theocentrism. He teaches his disciples to surrender themselves to the will of the Father. Jesus leaves every privilege to the Father (Mark 9:23). This is evident at the episode of the temptations where he refused to take the place of his Father. The name Jesus calls God, “Abba” (Father), has no equivalence in Judaism. It is an expression of a personal relationship with God. It expresses a consciousness of his divine sonship.

The Gospels confirm that it is on the cross of Jesus Christ that God revealed himself as Father; a Father who does not withhold his Son but allows him to assume his combat against evil and violence for the benefit of humanity. John says that God revealed himself as love by dispossessing himself of all he had (cf. 1 John 4:8). The Paschal faith proclaims that God demonstrated his fidelity as a Father by raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus shows that the last word does not belong to death because God is the Father of life. In fact God did not contradict himself in

45 Ibid. 147.
46 This reflection draws largely from my book, The Memory of Self-donation, chapter IV, pp. 89-99.
his self-dispossession, rather by giving himself totally, he revealed himself as the living and true God.

The Holy Spirit is also characterized as self-donation par excellence. He is a gift of the Father and the Son. He works tirelessly on our behalf, bringing human beings to participate in the Trinitarian communion. In fact the Spirit of God continues the solidarity of God with the entire creation. The indwelling of the Spirit in creation reveals that God is not indifferent to the suffering of creation. The spirit "works towards the glorification of God through creation when all things will be completely united in love and all forms of bondage overcome." The mode of presence of the Spirit and his manner of accompanying creation involves self-emptying, self-humiliation on the part of the Spirit.

In the synoptic gospels, the self-emptying of the Spirit is evident in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact the history of Jesus begins with the ruach, the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit that Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary (Cf. Luke 1:34-35). It is through the Spirit that Jesus discovered himself as the Son of the Father and learnt to call him Abba. At the baptism of Jesus the Spirit created the bond between heaven and earth and opened the way for the voice of God to speak and claim Jesus as his Son (Cf. Matthew 3:13-17). The same Spirit led Jesus to the desert and saw him through the temptations (Cf. Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:2). By conquering the temptations Jesus revealed himself as the new Adam who has come to reconcile the whole creation through the restoration of filial confidence in God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in him. The Spirit rested on Jesus throughout his ministry as he proclaimed the reign of God. Jesus himself saw his mission as a commission from the Holy Spirit (Cf. Luke 4:16-24).

In all these, the Spirit takes the form of a humble servant and manifests the Son of God.

The Spirit accompanied Jesus through his total surrender on the cross. The cry of Jesus on the cross "My God my God why have you abandoned me?" (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34) makes people think that Jesus was totally abandoned by God or that Jesus lost hope in God. But a closer look shows that it is the cry of faith addressed to the Father he trusted using the psalm of confidence (Cf. Ps. 22:2). This total confidence in God is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the bond that held the Father and Son together during the crisis of the cross. That is why the Spirit is called the relation of relations. The work of the Spirit is seen again at the event of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is through the Spirit that God raised his Son from the dead.

Emerging from the humiliation of death into the glory of God, Jesus sent out the Spirit into his community. The Spirit continues to dwell and act in persons and groups in the form of charismata, gifts or energies. By so doing, "the creative Spirit preserves the world from the powers of annihilation and prepares it for completion in glory." 48 Given since the creation of the world, the Spirit sets us free from all that prevents us from being ourselves. He prevents us from yielding to nihilism vis-à-vis the resistance of the world. He brings us out of ourselves and makes us discover our adoption by God in Jesus Christ. She makes us discover that we are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

The Spirit intercedes for us as the whole creation is groaning in travail. He recreates the harmony of the whole creation. At Pentecost the Spirit heals the disciples of their fear and sends them out to announce the love of God to all nations and cultures (cf. Acts 2, 2-11). He creates the communion of cultures and languages as the disciples could make themselves heard in different languages. It is because the first Christian communities are moved by the

48 Ugwu, The Holy Spirit as Present and Active in Cosmic Turmoil and Human Suffering 185.
memory of the self-donation of God in the Spirit that they mustered the courage to face God’s mission in the world.

The communion and synergy of the Father, the Son and the Spirit led the early Christian communities to offer them the same adoration and glory. The dogma of the Trinity which emerged in the 4th century in the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople is simply the systematization of the Trinitarian faith that has been there in the Bible. God’s being revealed in the kenotic relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit has remained the centre of the Christian confession of faith. It is this mystery of relationship, freedom, unity and distinctness that the Fathers of the Church tried to express through the designation of the Trinitarian relations as persons, hence the expression, *three persons in one God.*

**GOD AS A MYSTERY OF PERSONS**

*The concept of Person*

What does it mean that there are three persons in one God? The word person has remained a problem and has defied translation in many languages. It was Tertullian who employed the word *persona* to designate the three divine relations. He wanted to fight against Sabellianism, a heresy of the 3rd Century according to which “there are three divine manifestations behind which a fourth reality remains in hiding.” *Persona, prosōpon,* signified “the being in and for themselves of the Father, Son and the Spirit respectively.”

However, this concept, *prosōpon* in Greek signified also mask and ran the risk of falling back to Sabellianism.

In order to avoid this problem, the Greek Church translated *persona* by *hypostasis.* However, when one said *hypostasis,* the

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Westerners heard *substantia*, in the sense of *natura* or *essentia*, and saw in it the danger of *tritheism*. Finally, Augustine noted that the West conserved *persona* while the East kept *hypostasis*, while recognizing on each side that their concepts are limited when naming the three divine persons. Augustine recognizes that the three persons are not properly so called in a human sense. However, it is better to say something than to keep quiet.\(^{50}\)

In the Middle Ages, following the thought of Aristotle, Boethius defined the concept of person as *naturae rationabilis individua substantia*, "an individual substance of a rational nature." In the expression of Thomas Aquinas, person is "*substantia individua*"\(^{51}\), an essence existing in and for itself, separate in its existence from others, unable to impart its existence to others. As such, the concept of person bears the characteristic of what is traditionally called incommunicability and can lead to the belief that there are three divine essences or at least a division in God's essence. That is why Aquinas tries to resolve the problem by saying that the three divine persons are "*subsisting relations*.\(^{52}\) By explaining the concept person to mean relation, Aquinas offered the possibility of moving away from the static definition of Boethius. He opened the way for a retrieval of the intuition of a Greek Father, Jean Damascene, who coined the term *perichoresis* to describe the dynamic relationship of the persons of the Trinity. *Perichoresis* literally means "moving around in each other."

Despite this overture by Aquinas, the problem became complicated in the 19\(^{th}\) Century because of the apparition of "personality", with the notions of *self-consciousness* and *subjectivity* which theologians try to attribute to God. Here again appears the risk of tritheism. Can theology say that there are three *self-consciousnesses* in one God?

\(^{50}\) Augustine, *De Trinitate* Book V, Chapter 9 par 10.

\(^{51}\) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1 Q 29 art. 2.

\(^{52}\) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1 Q 29, art 4.
This explains why Karl Barth prefers to use the expression “modes of being” or “manners of being” to name the three divine persons. For Barth, the three modes of God’s being represent the uniqueness of God’s essence in his revelation, understood as “God’s self-interpretation.” This expression for him helps to give a more accurate account of the “triplicity of the unique God” as he manifests himself in the biblical revelation, namely, the revelation, the revealer, and the revealed; or again holiness, mercifulness and divine love; or the Creator, the Redeemer and the Reconciler. In the three modes of being, God is the Lord. This affirmation does not ignore the difference among the three modes. For Barth the difference is situated in their relationship of origin. “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are different because, without implying any inequality of essence and dignity, without diminishing or augmenting anything of their divinity, their relationships of origin are unequal.”

Despite Barth’s contribution, the concept of person remains difficult to translate into simple language. The idea of the divine persons as relations given by Aquinas comes closer to the Greek understanding of hypostases and seems more adequate. It is preferable to keep on using the concept and recognize with Augustine that our human language cannot but approximate when it is a question of describing God’s being. The concept of person understood as relations is very close to the African understanding of the human person and explains well the original meaning of the Greek hypostasis.

**Personhood as Hypostasis**

In African traditions, the human person is understood as a network of relationships. The best word to define this network is

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53 Eberhard Jüngel, The Doctrine of the Trinity, God’s Being is in Becoming, p. 17.
54 Ibid., p. 65.
"relatedness". As we have seen above, it is also designated with other terms: the principle of duality (Achebe) or the principle of integration (Soyinka) and embodied in the Igbo proverb, "Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya" (something stands and something else stands beside it). This means that to exist is to be related in a multiplicity of ways. On the other hand, what is not related does not exist. This principle is the measure of all things not only in Igbo tradition but also the traditions of the people of West Africa. As Uzukwu rightly stated, "the fundamental assumption that reality is plural—dual or twinned, multiple or a combination of twinned components—structures the human access to the universe."

It is said among the Igbo that before a child is born, it is already alive in the land of the spirits and its coming into the world is the visit of an ancestor. This visit is called re-incarnation or metempsychosis, though the concepts do not represent exactly what the visit means. Each person incarnates into the human world through the creative act of a protective (dynamic) spirit assigned to the person by God. The spirit is known by various names in West Africa—chi (Igbo), ori (Yoruba), kra or okra (Eve, Asante), ka (Ancient Egypt). Hence, the human person is sacred because the human person as such is a network of relationships between the visible world and the invisible world. The sacred is approached with reverence and deep respect. Profanation of the sacred is considered as aru (abomination) and can lead to excommunication. Therefore, profanation of the human person is an abomination.

Myths of creation in West African traditions affirm this principle of duality. Among the Dogon (Mali) the primordial

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57 Ibid. 10.
58 Cf. Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, p. 36
deities (Nommo Anagono) were created in pairs, male and female. The primordial ancestors (Anagono Bile) were also created male and female. The duality, as we saw with Achebe, pervades the political reality. The Asante King (Ghana) receives power or authority through the Queen Mother. Also in Uganda, the Ganda King receives authority through the Queen Mother. All through these traditions, the "relational tension mediates being-in-the-world—it is structural to the social health or wholeness of the community."  

There are evidently close connections between the African understanding of the human person and the Hebrew understanding of the relational God analysed above. It also comes very close to the Heideggerian understanding of being, Dasein: being-with, being from, being for. Being is not the self-subsistent, incommunicable or as Boethius would put it, "naturae rationabilis individua substantia", "an individual substance of a rational nature" which signifies an essence existing in and for itself, separate in its existence from others, unable to impart its existence to others. Being is characterized by overture to the other. It is said that one ek-sists, that is, receives oneself from the other.

This understanding of being is also close to the Cappadocian identification of the hypostasis with personhood not with ousia (substance). This means, according to Lacugna "that the ontological question of 'what something is' is not answered by pointing to the 'self existent', to a being as it is determined by its own boundaries but to a being which in its extasis breaks through these boundaries in a movement of communion." Thus a person is not an individual but an open and ecstatic reality, referred to others for his/her existence. "The actualization of the person takes place in

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59 Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 11
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self transcendence the movement of freedom toward communion with other persons.”62 Hence priority is given to person over being. It is personhood that constitutes being.

From the foregoing, one can infer that God cannot be located in ‘substance’ alone (what God is in himself) but also in his personhood, (what God is toward another). In fact, what God is in himself is manifested in what God is towards another. God exists as a mystery of persons. “Only in communion can God be what God is, and only as communion can God be at all.”63 God is love. Love is freedom, the opposite of self-possession and of the Western emphasis on autonomy. Freedom is self-transcendence, going beyond oneself toward another.

The conception of the divine persons exposed here-in has radical implications for human life. This achievement of personhood requires asceticism, putting to death in ourselves all those practices that confine us to biological existence and lead us to death. Person is an experiential concept; with every new relationship, we exist in a new way, we receive being from another.64 Living as persons in communion, in right relationships is the meaning of salvation and the ideal Christian faith. This understanding of God should form the basis of a political theology that defines how the Christian conception of God can contribute to a peaceful co-existence of differences in Nigeria.

TRINITARIAN RELATION AS BASIS FOR A PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

When political theology is mentioned, one thinks immediately of Johan Baptist Metz. The German theologian envisages political theology as a corrective opposed to the tendency of contemporary

62 Lacugna, God For Us, p. 260.
63 Ibid.
64 Cf. Catherine Lacugna, God for Us, p. 291.
theology to conceive the human being only from the private domain.  

Political theology is an attempt to express the Christian eschatological message in the circumstances of life in the society. This brings theology to understand the Church as “an institution of social critique that is situated neither besides nor above the social reality. Such a church will avoid the trap of aligning with a particular political ideology. This sets her free for a possible cooperation with the different institutions and groups in the state and society.”

It is from this perspective that I want to sketch out the implications of the doctrine of the Christian confession of God as Trinity, understood here as the doctrine of God’s freedom to a peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian society. Suffice it here to emphasize two points: ecclesial auto-critique, interreligious dialogue.

*Ecclesial auto-Critique*

The Church has neither the power nor the capacity to dominate the world. The proclamation of the relational Trinitarian God excludes violence. Neither the Church nor the world can domesticate God. God is free; he is the subject of his own history. The credibility of the Church depends on her capacity to be converted to the freedom of God. If the Church tells the story of the self-dispossession of God in the life, death and resurrection of Christ for the benefit of humanity, she is the first to subject herself to the judgment of this history over which she has no control. She will first of all search to control the tendency to violence and domination within herself.

Here shines out the relevance of the proposition of *Ecclesia in Africa*, prolonged by *Africae Munus*, to conceive and live the

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66 Ibid. 24.
Church as Family of God. It is an invitation to conceive the Church in the image of the Trinity, which has as basis, the relationship of communion and love. If Christians want to be taken seriously as partners in the construction of peace in the contemporary society, they must question themselves on their relationship with one another and with others. If Christians ask the world to live out the invitation to forgiveness and reconciliation, they must show the possibility in Christian communities. If they want the world to practice fraternity, there must be exemplary Christian communities. A Church Family of God in which people love in the Trinitarian manner—love as self-dispossession—will be a credible partner for the construction of peace in the society.

Interreligious Dialogue

The second dimension of this political theology is interreligious dialogue. Dialogue “is a meeting of different religions, in an atmosphere of freedom and openness, in order to listen to the other, to try to understand the persons’ religion, and hopefully to seek possible collaboration.” The question of God has been at the center of the Church’s reflection on dialogue. This is clear in Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate, NA). The notion of the relational God is translated through the concept of God as Father of all men and women and the recognition that all are brothers and sisters “Humanity forms but one community. This is because all stem from one stock which God created to people the entire earth” (NA 1).

The Church goes further to recognize that the different religions are ways through which human beings search for solutions to the mystery of human existence. Judaism and Islam are singled out as those religions which together with Christianity "worship the one God." This in no way jeopardizes the Church's confession of the unicity of Christ, the fullness of the revelation of God (NA 2). It is possible to live together while confessing differently our faith in the one God. This position was reaffirmed by Benedict XVI at the Second Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. Violence against the other in the name of God is clearly rejected: "We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8) (NA 5).

Dialogue is possible where people accept to come out of themselves and welcome the common destiny we share as humans. Concretely, it can take different forms, as clearly explained by Cardinal Francis Arinze: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of doctrine and dialogue of experience. There is dialogue of life when people share life and existential problems together in family school, place of work, politics, etc. People live together yet confess differently. There is also dialogue of action, when Christians and other believers cooperate for the promotion of human development at different levels. The third is dialogue of doctrine, when experts of different religions gather to exchange information on the teachings and beliefs of their different religions. They reflect on what teachings they share and where they differ. Normally, this type of dialogue is done by specialists who accept to

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69 Vatican II, Nostra Aetate, n.3:
70 Benedict XVI, Africae Munus, n.94
examine the challenges of the society in the light of their different religions or rather question their different religions in the light of the present challenges of the society. The last aspect is *dialogue of experience*—that is when people who are deeply rooted in their religious traditions gather together pray, meditate, and contemplate the almighty, absolute transcendent God. This brings about transformation of the persons involved but also intercession on behalf of society.

Dialogue has become urgent in the present Nigerian situation. Christians have to avoid the dangerous face to face confrontation with Islam, which is the goal of Boko Haram. Already some Christian fanatics are calling for crusade against jihad. They are calling on Christians to join in the battle between God and evil. Even if Christians have reasons to fear vis-à-vis the growing Islamic fundamentalism, one can ask whether the best solution would be to oppose one fanaticism to another. Paradoxically, it is during this period of confusion that Christian-Muslim dialogue functioned the most in the Nigerian history. In his *Appeal to Nigerians*, Bishop Matthew Kukah of Sokoto diocese explained

In Kano, amidst fears and threats of further attacks on Christians, a group of Muslims gathered round to protect Christians as they worshipped. In Minna and recently, in Lagos, the same thing repeated itself as Christians joined hands to protect Muslims as they prayed. In the last week, Christians and Muslims together in solidarity are protesting against bad governance and corruption beyond the falsehood of religion. Once freed from the grip of these dark forces, religion will be able to play its role as a force for harmony, truth and the common good.

This dialogue will lead the Christians to discover the immense work of grace the Holy Spirit is doing in other religions and cultures. The Holy Spirit is the relational force through which God enters into relation with human beings. Obedience to the Holy
Spirit leads the Christians to accept that the Truth of human existence proposed in the gospel is beyond their religious borders. Vatican II council affirmed the unity of the human family in God and the mysterious presence of God to all: “For 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.” This conviction should move Christians to joyously collaborate with other religions in the search for lasting peace and reconciliation in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The manipulation of the name of God in politics in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, has led people to question the capacity of religions to contribute to a healthy co-existence of differences. This challenges the different religions, especially Islam and Christianity to re-examine their understanding of God and the way they bring this understanding to bear on their relationship with others in the society. From the Christian point of view, I have proposed a political theology that re-interprets the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as doctrine of God’s freedom. The revelation of God as Trinity, which has its roots in the concept of the relational God of the Old Testament, is a rejection of violence and domination. A deepening of this understanding of God will enable Christians to take a distance from the growing religious fundamentalism in the world. It is only when men and women of different religions learn to respect the freedom of God that they have the possibility of contributing to peace and reconciliation in the society.

72 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, 1965) # 22.
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After several decades of African continental and diasporic feminist/womanist scholarship, the case has been made that Africana girls’s and women’s diverse social, cultural and geopolitical contexts demand localized approaches to gender justice and human flourishing. This essay contributes to the discussion by returning to the question of whether—despite such important differences—there might be resources in Africana spiritual grammars and religious cultures that find resonance in African and African diaspora women’s social formation and peace-building efforts. It specifically theorizes Africana women’s contributions to community institutions, social change and sustainability by placing womanist and feminist studies scholars in conversation around the central place that mothering holds across Africana societies.

Mothering is interrogated here as a term whose semantic purview expands well beyond the literal to register the metaphorical and even the socio-ontological. I proceed with full

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1 Dianne M. Diakité is an Associate Professor of Religion and African American Studies at Emory University, Atlanta Georgia, USA. This article is adapted from a longer keynote address, “Rethinking Indigenous Africana Sources of Womanist-Feminist Activisms in the 21st Century,” delivered at the Womanist Consultation with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Accra Ghana, July 8-12, 2012. The address will be published with other conference proceedings in a forthcoming issue of the Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion.

2“ Africana” is employed in this essay as an inclusive term for African-descended persons, cultures, practices, etc. from continental Africa and the wider African diaspora.
awareness that African feminists, from Buchi Emecheta to Mercy Oduyoye to Nyambura Njoroge have brought under scrutiny the suppressive social stigmas attached to women who are not biological mothers in Nigerian, Ghanaian and Kenyan societies.\(^3\) Without losing sight of their critiques of biological motherhood as ideal womanhood, I ponder whether critical and inclusive reflections upon the symbol of motherhood might provide opportunities to engage in ethical and aesthetic scrutiny of a central womanist-feminist trajectory in Africana religious practices and some of the foundational concepts upon which it rests.

The increasing move among scholars to distance Africana feminist-womanist theory and theology from dualistic frameworks reinforces the fact that human societies seem incapable of producing panacea solutions for their ailments. In this vein, mothering, or what Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí calls “mothernity” and Ifi Amadiume calls “matricentricity” is an advisable tradition to interrogate because it introduces at once the vexing effort required to apprehend the purchase and perils associated with the loaded concept of “motherhood.” My interest in mothering, then, seeks no companionship in romantic appeals to a harmonious essence at the core of African cultural life. Rather, mothering or the absence of mothering is a fact of human existence and relational life. Though some women and all men are not biological mothers, we all have biological mothers, and many in the human family have experienced the pro-social effects of mothering, if even provided by someone other than our biological mothers.

In Africana cultures, the mother symbol has hermeneutical and epistemological relevance to the feminist-womanist project of peace-making, social change and sustainability. I also work with

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the mother concept and its noble significations because it is a cognate originary symbol that traverses diverse religious and spiritual heritages claiming the allegiance of Africana women. Specifically, it introduces a semantic environment for thematizing an orientational⁴ element in African religious cultures often eclipsed by the undue and misplaced emphasis on "magic" and "witchcraft" as definitive features of African religions.

As a conversation starter, my figurative exploration of the mother symbol draws from African and African diaspora scholars who resurrect from a transatlantic legacy of Africana women's kinship connections and responsibilities, buried virtues of relational life. These virtues begin, according to Nigerian anthropologist Ifi Amadiume, with the matricentric or mothering unit of production in African households and encompass a vision of community in opposition to social and religious customs that promote female dehumanization, suffering, subordination, dependence, negative difference, and confinement. To explore more concretely what matricentric ethics might entail in local contexts, I also offer some reflection on relevant motifs in the religious thought and activism of Africana women in the public domain.

I find Ifi Amadiume's matricentric theory distinct and compelling because of her decided constructive commitment to uncovering what Jeffrey Stout would call "enduring attitudes, concerns, dispositions, and patterns of conduct"⁵ in indigenous Igbo Nnobi culture that guide social health, justice, wellness and thriving. Though she employs a questionable dualistic framework to delineate matriarchy and patriarchy in Nnobi Igbo society, I am more interested in her contributions to what can be called a constructive social ethics informed by the matricentric unit in

Nnobi society and its counterparts in other African societies. According to Amadiume:

...the *mkpuke* structure, a...mother-focused social category...occupied a distinct space in the form of a self-contained compound of mother and children. It had an economic base, since it produced for itself. It was a production and consumption unit of those who ate from one pot or plate. This unit also had an ideological base as it was bound in the spirit of common motherhood in the ideology and ritual of *umunne*—children of one mother—with its strong moral and spiritual force, binding members in love, care, compassion, peace and respect, forbidding incest and bloodshed within the group. In the *umunne* ritual, the focus of worship and spirituality was a successive line of mothers to whom an *okwu*, an altar or shrine, was built inside a woman's kitchen or bedroom.\(^6\)

Amadiume’s framing of matricentricity and the social and sacred positionings of mothers in Nnobi and other African societies is echoed in the ground-breaking research of another Nigerian scholar Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí. In her edited volume, *African Women & Feminism*, Oyèwùmí offers an analysis of the mother symbol through her concept of “mothernity,” which complements Amadiume’s discussion of the matricentric unit as an ethical space of care, love and support for life in relation. Calling mothernity an “African communitarian ideology and ideal,” Oyèwùmí, explores the virtue of “mothernity” through the Yoruba concept of *omọyọ*, which means “my mother’s child or children” when translated into English. According to Oyèwùmí:

The category of *omoya* transcends gender; sometimes it is used to refer to an individual, but what it encapsulates is the collectivity. It functions to locate the individual within a socially recognized grouping and underscores the significance of mother-child ties in delineating and anchoring a child’s place in the family. These relationships are primary and privileged, and it is understood that they should be protected above others. *Omoya* is the primary category in the sense that it is the first and fundamental source of identification for the child in the household.... Symbolically, *omoya* emblematizes unconditional love, togetherness, unity, solidarity and loyalty.  

Extending her discourse to encompass the traditions of African diasporic women in the Americas and the Caribbean, Oyèwùmí also explores motherinity as a wider Africana ideal. First she acknowledges that mothering does not necessarily imply a biological relationship to those being mothered, as patterns of co-mothering have been engaged and celebrated across Africa and the diaspora. She specifically notes Patricia Hill Collins’ documentation of “othermothers” in U.S. African American communities and *macomèrè* traditions in Trinidad, St. Lucia and Haiti which “[encapsulate] a particular kind of relationship amongst women that is founded on trust and an expectation of mutual support—material and otherwise—particularly with regard to the raising of children.” As a woman with no biological children of my own, I felt the power of my motherinity when I read the card that my Haitian godson’s mother presented to me on the occasion of his christening almost five years ago. “Dianne,” she wrote:

> This is one of those times that I am so grateful to have access to a language other than English. ‘Thank you’ is

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insufficient to express how we feel, but so is 'godmother.' The word 'macomère' is used throughout the French Caribbean to mean 'my child's godmother,' 'close female confidante,' or 'the woman who, by virtue of the depth of her friendship, has rights and privileges over my child and is a surrogate mother.' This name/title seems even more appropriate for you because it so clearly expresses the intimate relations which women share; it is firmly gendered; and it honors the importance of friendship in relation to marriage and family life. So, Macomère, thank you!

Matricentric, motherinity, othermother and macomère traditions can be observed across African diaspora institutions from kinship networks to formal religious structures. For example, we have today a greater appreciation for the power and prestige of sanctified church mothers in U.S. African American Pentecostal traditions due to the research of scholars like Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Anthea Butler, Cheryl Saunders and Diedre Crumbley. Collectively, they frame their treatment of these sacred pillars of motherinity with Africana feminist-womanist theories that

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acknowledge a range of upwardly mobile options their activisms have opened up for women and girls, and link the veneration of church mothers and their arenas of authority to African continental heritages. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes states it this way:

These varieties of shared power or of access to authority reflect the range of positions church mothers occupy. The similarities in organization of church mothers to West African social organization range from clearly articulated and established dual-sex political systems to fragments of familyhood, which modify the otherwise rigid lines of authority within episcopal style church hierarchies. These African overtones in social organization exist alongside of and in spite of a dominant cultural tradition of European sex-role organization and church politics.\textsuperscript{10}

Rosetta Ross's ethical study of Black women's activism during the U.S. civil rights movement also calls our attention to how the African American Nation of Islam (NOI) owes its survival to the mothernity strategies of its first Muslim female member, Mrs Clara Mohammad. As the wife of the NOI's founder, Elijah Mohammad, Clara was the 'Mother of the Nation,' not just nominally, but especially in deed. She led the NOI; developed the institution's educational and economic infrastructure; and cultivated an ethos of holistic nurturance for her fledgling community in its infancy period. Her authority and institutional vision were indispensable during an era marked by incessant U.S. government surveillance and imprisonment of its founder and other male members who refused to register for the military draft due to religious and political convictions. Ross actually expands Gilkes' matricentric theory to explore the activism of Muslim mothers like Clara Mohammad, noting how Mohammad's letters and testimony from the 1960s "[depict] her sense of responsibility to try to meet"

\textsuperscript{10}Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, \textit{If It Wasn't for the Women}, 72-73.
her family's material needs "in a manner similar to practices Cheryl Townsend Gilkes describes in Christian 'church and community mothers.'"\textsuperscript{11}

Parallel matricentric traditions and spiritual mothers figure prominently across a variety of Caribbean religious cultures as well. In traditions akin to some African indigenous churches, Spiritual Baptist and Revival Zion Mothers in the Anglophone Caribbean embody motherinity as dreamers and healers who channel divine power in the holistic health services and spiritual mentorship provided to those under their charge. Furthermore, the African heritage religious traditions such as \textit{Kumina} in Jamaica, \textit{Vodou} in Haiti, \textit{Candomblé} in Brazil and \textit{Orisa} in Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States also sustain matricentric spiritual networks that place women in leadership roles as knowledge bearers and knowledge producers for communal edification. Societies of \textit{Iyalorisa} (or "mothers within the Orisa tradition") across Candomblé in Brazil, \textit{Orisa} in Trinidad and Lucumí or Yoruba in Cuba provide motherly care for their spiritual children. The late Iya Melvina Rodney of Trinidad, for example, claimed responsibility for hundreds of spiritual godchildren, whom she initiated into the Orisa religion and who regularly sought her counsel and ritual expertise up until the time of her passing in 2008 at the age of ninety-three.

It is important to understand that in these African-inspired Caribbean religious cultures, the title of mother invokes the figurative significations of motherhood to indicate a position of high rank and responsibility as an initiated or ordained priest and/or unusually gifted custodians of divine revelation. With the bulk of its civil rights movement for religious freedom behind it, since the last decades of the twentieth century, Trinidad's society of \textit{Iyalorisa} has been able institutionalize its matricentric activist traditions in multiple arenas, including the natural world and the

\textsuperscript{11}Rosetta Ross, \textit{Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 159. Also see her reference to Gilkes' matricentric theory vis-à-vis community workers on 162.
public square. Some of the *Orisa* tradition’s most influential and empowering projects were launched by *Iyalorisa*, including the accredited Osun Abiadama School in the capital city, Port of Spain, which enrolls a diverse student body from varied religious and cultural backgrounds.

The Abiadama School was founded with the mission of providing an excellent and progressive academic setting for primary and junior high school education. The school is not restricted to members of the Orisa tradition; however, parents are informed of the curricular emphasis upon African heritage and specifically Orisa theological and philosophical principles.¹² The school is one arm of the wider Abiadama Centre for Lifelong Learning where adult and expanded community programs are held. The vision for such a centre first came into view years earlier when

¹²For example, students are taught the following “essential tenets of the Orisa Nago belief system:”

Olodumare created and controls the universe and all that is contained therein;
The Yoruba believe that there are forces of nature (or parts of God) who deal with the affairs of people on earth, and the governing of the universe in general;
the Yoruba believe that the spirit of humans lives on after death and can reincarnate back into the world of humanity;
The Yoruba believe that ancestral spirits must be remembered and honored, and consulted by the living;
The Yoruba believe in divination;
The Yoruba believe in the use of offerings and blood sacrifices to elevate their prayers to the Orisa and their ancestors;
The Yoruba believe in magic (The transformation of prayers and offerings to action);
The Yoruba believe in magical and medicinal use of herbs;
The Yoruba believe that humanity communes with God through the vehicle of trance-possession;
The Yoruba believe that ritual song and dance are mandatory in the worship of God.

its founder, Iyalorisa Sangowunmi joined her first Yoruba shrine in central Trinidad. She soon experienced disillusionment due to the culture of impoverishment that engulfed many of its members and visitors. Iya Sangowunmi became determined to change the image of the Orisa shrine from a place where people believed they could “creep into in the night if they wanted something done but…would pass it straight in the day.” Her first project was to sponsor evening math, English, and reading comprehension classes for young people in the community between the ages of eleven and nineteen, given that many of the children in the community “couldn’t read and write.” When she observed that most students could not handle the work, she introduced drama and performance into the curriculum to foster self-expression, innovation, and self-discovery. Sangowunmi concluded that it was incumbent upon the shrine to address this need and to provide a service to the community at large beyond the confines of the Orisa yard.  

The second major endeavor Sangowunmi undertook was the establishment of Oya Day, which came about after Oya (a female Orisa associated with wind, the cemetery, and transformation) manifested during a ritual ceremony and asked Sangowunmi directly what she was “going to do for her [Oya].” When Sangowunmi confessed that she was confused by the question because she had just presented Oya with offerings, Oya instructed her to go and think about her question, and not in terms of the customary practice of ebo (offering), but in some other sense. Sangowunmi eventually instituted a day of ritual and cultural celebration in honour of Oya.

Another major project Sangowunmi developed was a seminar series where speakers were invited to give informational lectures on subjects related to African cultures, politics, histories and religions as well as local history of African presence in Trinidad and the wider African diaspora. Under this rubric, she sponsored

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13Iyalode Sangowunmi, aka Patricia McLeod, personal interview with author, May 2, 2001, Woodbrook, Trinidad and Tobago.

14Ibid.
sessions on life management skills covering themes such as, securing economic stability, and cultivating industries that provide satisfaction and self-sufficiency. Her reasoning for developing this latter agenda was to suggest an alternative model for engaging the Orisa. Sangowunmi witnessed far too many persons who approached the Orisa only out of sheer desperation with the hope that they would perform some miracles that would transform their lives. Sangowunmi, however, lives by the principle that “God only does for you what God can do through you.” Moreover, based upon what she saw, she concluded that “many times [God] couldn’t do anything through them because they would just be waiting.” Through these and a host of other initiatives now sponsored by her own shrine, Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil’Osa (IESOM), Sangowunmi has practiced a corrective and applied theology that identifies divine intervention within human efforts to achieve success in all areas of life and to overcome hardship and oppression.15

Sangowunmi has also promoted environmental sustainability among the wider Trinidadian populace through IESOM’s annual Rain Festival. First launched in the year 1999, the Rain Festival “sensitize[s] the entire nation of the importance and sacredness of the rain as it represents new birth, thanksgiving, cleansing, and a preparation...of the annual cultivation of the land and cleansing of the rivers.”16 To address this aim it “bring[s] people together to celebrate and propitiate the deities associated with the rain cycle.” During the weeks prior to the Rain Festival, Sangowunmi holds press releases and distributes informational material to encourage wide participation from various Trinidadian publics. She deliberately designs this literature to educate citizens in alignment with the wider Orisa community’s mission of dispelling the lingering mystery concerning the Orisa religion and erroneous perspectives about its rituals in Trinidad’s collective consciousness. In June 2011, IESOM held its twelfth annual Rain Festival, and

15Ibid.
shaped its religious and cultural program around the theme of "Reconnecting to the Stories of the Land and a People."\textsuperscript{17}

In the domain of public health and wellness, other Iyalorisa are contributing to wide-scale efforts to curtail the spread of HIV and AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago. In a poignant documentary aimed at transforming the nation’s cultural approach to HIV and AIDS, Iyalorisa Aina Olukayode appeals to the female deity Osun as a model for developing a responsible sexual ethic. "...[S]ex and sexuality and sensuousness in the Orisa paradigm is a blessing," she remarks:

It’s a positive thing. It is the way that we procreate; it makes it pleasurable. It is to be respected, it’s sacred; it’s God-given, and it’s to be honored. Osun, the deity that is the embodiment of sensuousness and sensuality—Osun is also discipline...Osun has her own rules, her own regulations. Osun is the embodiment of...equality for women. Osun is not just about her body, it’s not just about your body; it’s about thinking and using your head well. Osun was able to not just use her sensuality, but use her brain to work out how things could be in balance for women as well. Just as how now we have as a society, especially the Afrocentric society, the African community, the community of people of African descent, we have to figure out how to work against this onslaught of HIV...and the way to do that is to show our young people through the example of Osun that your body is sacred, your body is a beautiful vessel. Sex is a sacred, joyous, beautiful thing

\textsuperscript{17}“12\textsuperscript{th} Annual Rain Festival Kicks Off on June 24,” \textit{Trinidad Express},
when it’s done according to the rules and regulations for good living.\textsuperscript{18}

As the title of the film suggests, Iya Aina is “coming home” and “fighting AIDS with culture” by locating solutions to this daunting health crisis within her Yoruba-Orisa religious culture. Iya Aina’s approach to arresting the spread of HIV and AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago provides a Caribbean response to Botswana’s biblical scholar Musa Dube’s “exploration of how [African Indigenous Religions] AIRIs can respond to the HIV & AIDS challenge and become part of the healing process.”\textsuperscript{19}

There are countless African continental analogues to the Caribbean and U.S. African American matricentric traditions in our twenty-first-century world. The documentary film \textit{Africa Rising}\textsuperscript{20} is one example of a powerful complement to \textit{Coming Home...Fighting AIDS with Culture} in that it follows what I would call the feminist-womanist aktivisms of local women and men who deploy culturally sensitive educational and economic programs in their efforts to eradicate female genital cutting practices across some communities in Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal.

The internationally acclaimed advocate of Liberian peace, activist Leymah Gbowee, also resonates with Africana matricentric and mothernity traditions. The 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner asserted her mothernity as the leader and symbol of Liberian

\textsuperscript{18}Aina Olukayode (Orisa Priestess) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaXu2E_roW4, accessed July 5, 2012.

\textsuperscript{19}Musa Dube, “Adinkra! Four Hearts Joined Together, 133.

\textsuperscript{20}Paula Heredia et al., \textit{Africa Rising: The Grassroots Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation} (New York: Women Make Movies, 2009). Although I do not support activists external to cultural contexts where female genital cutting (FGC) is practiced using the language of “mutilation” as a blanket term to classify the range of procedures associated with FGC, \textit{Africa Rising} is an outstanding documentary that depicts African women and men at the forefront of the struggle to educate, empower and transform African communities and families affected by FGC.
women united across diverse ethnic and religious boundaries. She testifies that the movement began literally with a dream she had about organized resistance, which she intended to hand over to an honourable Christian woman whose presence was unmistakable in the local church. Once it became clear that her co-activists had appointed her to lead the “Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Network,” she realized that she had to muster the resources and vision from somewhere to rise to the occasion. At the root of Gbowee’s success in helping to bring Liberia’s civil war to a close were indigenous matricentric strategies powerful enough to effect concrete change in the society at large. The 2003 position paper, which she delivered before the then president, Charles Taylor, epitomizes those principles of motherhood that the Liberian Women’s Peace Network embodied at every stage of protest and persuasion:

We ask the honorable Pro Tem of the senate, being a woman, and being in line with our cause, to kindly present this statement to His Excellency, Dr. Charles Taylor. With this message: that the women of Liberia, including the IDPs, we are tired of war, we are tired of running, we are tired of begging for bulgur wheat, we are tired of our children being raped. We are now taking this stand to secure the future of our children because we believe, as custodians of society, our children will ask us “Mama what was your role during the crisis?” Kindly convey this to the president of Liberia, Thank you.”

When the Peace Network travelled to Ghana (2003) to ensure a productive outcome to agreed upon peace talks between Charles Taylor and Liberian rebel leaders, Gbowee, who had read about the activist strategies deployed by other African women throughout history, resorted to the tactic of stripping naked to avoid arrest and incarceration and to impose her organization’s will upon the men seated around the negotiation table. Gbowee’s strategy worked when confronted by Ghanaian arresting officers in part because she relied on the transcontextual African understanding that, in the words of her comrade Etweda Cooper, “It’s a curse in Africa to see the naked body of your mother, especially if she does it deliberately.”22 Reflecting upon these key turning points in the movement and her wider activism Gbowee told Lynn Sherr during a 2009 interview: “We believe as mothers we are the ones who will change everything.”23 Although it is clear that Gbowee mobilized Christian and Muslim women toward direct action against the civil unrest that shredded Liberia’s fabric of social stability, I would argue that their silent cultural partner in such a momentous struggle was a spiritual grammar and ethic rooted in a local Liberian as well as a shared Pan-African matricentric heritage and transcultural value system.

The power of mothers and the value that females are accorded as a result of their biological motherly potential should not quarantine our hopes for the matricentric potential in all humans. Whether childless women, fathers, childless men or children, I am suggesting that all members of the human family can become socio-ontological mothers! Motherhood, as an socio-ontological


23Ibid.
category, is a mode of being that takes instruction from concrete and material experiences of motherhood (actual mothers) but socio-ontologically is extended to other women, men and children\(^{24}\) in diverse circumstances involving religion and the arts, social organization and governance as well as education and initiation. Motherhood is a title, rank and status in its own right; but it introduces a repertoire of ideals, values and expectations that all human beings can and should be educated to internalize.

Amadiume and Oyèwùmí’s research suggests that African approaches to motherhood emerge from complex semiotic and philosophical world-senses that privilege relational life and the power of creative force in the universe. In the Yoruba context, for example, Oyèwùmí specifies the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of creative power, identifying mothers as artisans who participate in the creation of human beings with the deity *Obatala*. She embraces the research of Yoruba art historian Babatunde Lawal who acknowledges that “some...translate iya, the Yoruba word for mother, as someone from whom another life is fashioned or the body from which we are created.”\(^{25}\) Oyèwùmí goes further in etymologically identifying the root verb *ya*, which means “to draw, to carve, or to fashion,”\(^{26}\) and she analyses Yoruba artistic figures of the mother that reinforce a tradition of placing mothers at the centre of not just procreation but also pre-earthly creation in Yoruba cosmology and creation theology.\(^{27}\) The *socio-ontological mother*, then, is a quality of being that does overlap biological motherhood in some cases but in no way is reducible to biological

\(^{24}\)Children can be taught mothernity ethics from an early age. In the language of Alice Walker, they can be encouraged to act and be “womanish” in the matricentric sense of the term. See Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Inc., 1983), xi-xii.


\(^{26}\)Ibid., 233.

\(^{27}\)Ibid., 234.
motherhood. In continuity with James Cone’s Christian formulation of ontological blackness, socio-ontological motherhood invites all humanity to be in accordance with the principles of motherliness.

Notwithstanding the criticisms that a feminist theorist like Bibi Bakare-Yusuf raises about Oyewumi and Amadiume’s scholarship, I still find merit in the insights of these thinkers. Beyond their deconstructive work, they have provided constructive theoretical and ideological interpretations of African cultures. Above all else, they make the case that indigenous African cultures contain the epistemological premise and philosophical foundation to generate ethical and ideological virtues of motherliness.

For example, Amadiume’s matricentric ethical theory actually posits the Nnobi Igbo mkpuke structure and its counterparts in other regions of Africa as an indigenously grounded philosophical platform for reconstructing African families, societies and political states.

28See James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997 (1970)), 7-9. Also see endnote #5 on 204 where Cone remarks: “The reader should take note of two characteristics of the definition of blackness. First, blackness is a physiological trait. It refers to a particular black-skinned people in America, a victim of white racist brutality. The scars of its members bear witness to the inhumanity committed against them.... no American theology can even tend in the direction of Christian theology without coming to terms with the black-skinned people of America. Secondly, blackness is an ontological symbol for all those who participate in liberation from oppression. This is the universal note in black theology. It believes that all human beings were created for freedom....” Also see James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997 (1975)), 222.


30My use of “ideological” is intentional suggesting both innocuous aspects of ideational expression and the partiality associated with biased and narrow-minded aspects of ideational expression and rhetoric.
My concern here is not whether Africana mothers, families, communities and societies have been able to bring their practices and daily habits into perfect alignment with ideal matricentric traditions. I consider the principles and ideals associated with motherhood no differently than those associated with other well-known traditions that are accorded extensive scholarly treatment despite their imperfect application in practical socio-political contexts across Western societies. In this sense, matricentric traditions are like democratic traditions; they reflect cherished virtues that establish ideal standards for human social behaviour and institutional governance. Most important, such ideals and virtues remain vulnerable to human breaches and disregard and are constantly eroded throughout human interactions. It is no secret that citizens of Western societies like the United States and the United Kingdom, who idealize democratic traditions within their national mythologies, violate those very traditions as much as they claim to uphold them. Yet those charged with honouring, enforcing and theorizing democracy in the West often exhibit tremendous patience with human frailties as well as hope in the human potential to approximate the democratic ideal.

I perceive in the scholarship of Amadiume and Oyewùmí an invitation to join a patient and hopeful project of discerning resources for social redemption in Africa and the African diaspora. At the very least, they present useful frameworks for, first, identifying a pattern of Africana matricentric practices in Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas and other regions of the worldwide African diaspora; and second, theorizing womanist-feminist agendas of peace building, social change and sustainability among the Mothers—the matricentric custodians—of an understudied repertoire within Africana spiritual and activist traditions. This research focus moves explorations of African religions beyond studies of standard Christian, Islamic and indigenous institutional structures and theological categories to encompass analysis of originary symbols and axiological orientations that are embedded within cosmic and creative realities. African thought systems
exhibit profound apprehension of these phenomena. They deserve sustained theorization in African and African diaspora religious and theological studies toward the end of developing new conceptual frontiers and nurturing other fields, including women’s, gender and sexuality studies, political theory and philosophy.
Our subject matter, "Globalization, Politics and Religion in Postcolonial Africa," suggests that coloniality—the pervasive epistemological, economic, cultural and political colonial structures, located within the logic of modernity, imperialism and globalization—permeates nation-state politics; it also permeates religious and cultural practices in postcolonial Africa. The social, cultural, political, economic and religious patterns of living and imagining Africa are profoundly tainted with the coloniality of power. Many studies suggest that the violence and plunder that bedevil postcolonial Africa could in great measure be predicated on the Western modernity/globalization inscribed in the exposed body of the continent. This is not to suggest, however, that Africans are pawns or victims, totally robbed of agency. Forced, violated, but also consenting and devising strategies for reconfiguring their lives, Africans looked after their interest within the limits imposed by colonial domination.

The reality of "colonial difference" connects African historical agency with Eurocentric "global designs." The struggle by Africans to reconfigure their life within this dominant coloniality of power is variously referred to as "gnosis" (Mudimbe) or "border thinking"

1 Gerald Boodoo is Director Centre for African Studies, Duquesne University; Elochukwu Uzukwu holds the Pierre Schouver C.S.Sp. Chair in Mission Duquesne University.
(Mignolo)⁴. In other words, "the space where coloniality of power is enacted," the space where local European histories "were inventing and implementing global designs," is precisely the same space where local African histories, epistemologies or gnosis were adapting, adopting, rejecting, integrating or ignoring such "global designs."⁵ According to Ochonu, while the colonial was culturally "constituting its Other, it was also being constituted by an African Otherness which was meanwhile reinventing and reconstituting itself in its encounter with imperial culture."⁶

This terrain of African agency reveals the gaps or cracks in the modern (global) system; from this terrain Africa is being reinvented or changed, based on African local histories, and no longer reduced to Africa at the service of globalization.

Globalization, described as the modern phenomenon of "widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life," from the cultural to the criminal, from the financial to the spiritual⁷ (consider the "blood minerals" studied by Christophe Boltanski or Pentecostalism studied by Paul Gifford and Ogbu Kalu)⁸, has its imprint on Africa as in the rest of the world. Our stress on coloniality as point of departure to discuss globalization prefers the

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⁵ Ibid. ix
⁷ See David Held et al., eds., Global Transformations. Politics, Economy and Culture (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999). 2
long historical viewpoint, the longue durée of Fernand Braudel; it therefore understands globalization (Western global designs) to encompass centuries rather than decades of intensive and extensive interconnectedness. Consequently, for Africa, the extensity and intensity of those processes that embody “transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions,” that make possible the “transcontinental or interregional flows of networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power,” are located in the 16th century triangular Atlantic trading system—the slave triangle linking Europe, Africa and the Americas. Thus the extensive and intensive colonial-imperial project, including the spiritual project of Christianization, interconnects the local histories of Europe, Africa and the Americas. On the religious plane, in particular with regard to Christianity, that embodies a “civilizational” ideology, and its local transformations in Africa, the diverse patterns of the practice of religion could translate into drivers of change or continuators of failed nation-state social imaginary and politics. The creative African response to these processes and the effort to reimagine, reinvent and reconfigure Africa, are based on the gnosis that another world is possible, a world where the local contributes to change without dominating the other or disconnecting itself from the national and the international. This redounds to the good of the continent and the wider world; this is what we call “worlding” or the worldness of Africa. This explains why Lamin Sanneh

9 Held et al., Global Transformations. Politics, Economy and Culture. 153. Held et al. defined globalization as quoted above on p. 16. The stress on the longue durée is the viewpoint of Mignolo, Mignolo, Local histories/global designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking. Chapter 1; esp. 51-60


11 Mignolo, Local histories/global designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking. See also Gerald Boodoo, “Capitalism, Coloniality,
prefers to talk about "world Christianity" instead of "global Christianity."

Paying close attention to the complexity of analyzing and interpreting the encounter of Africa with Western modernity, we draw from the dynamic energies of the "local" to describe alternative patterns of "worlding" Africa by Africans, as opposed to the "global" "usefulness" of Africa for the West, China or others! African historians, such as Adiele Afigbo and Ali Mazrui, have strongly argued that the creative energies of the indigenous are the viable moulding blocks for reconfiguring and rebuilding modern Africa; African political, social and economic structures and imaginary sustained and developed Africa before the ambiguous encounter with modernity! Similarly Ade Ajayi considers "colonialism: an episode in African history". African creative energies predated the slave trade, and were palpable before the 19th century partition (1884-5 Berlin Conference). Ajayi even claims that the partition of Africa could have been informed by developments within indigenous nationalities and ethnicities; and Africa doggedly maintained its vitality and the fluidity of its structures within the fixed partitioned borders. Afigbo, Mazrui and Ajayi do have a point! However, we insist that one should not underestimate the hegemonic and globalizing project of Western modernity. The overall impact of the colonial-imperial (on geography, demography and culture), and the logic of coloniality are palpable and should not be underplayed. Awareness of this reality informs our approach to the discussion of globalization, and commands our search for an alternative! Attentive to the complexity of the encounter with the colonial-imperial and the diversity of responses in Southern, Central, Eastern and Western


Africa, we think it defensible that the local devices and strategies put in place by Africans to reconfigure their world, elements of the creative dynamism of Africa's political and religious imagination, indicate pathways of holistic change within African societies. These have profound implications for our problematization of globalization.

AFRICA AND GLOBALIZATION: AN AMBIGUOUS ENCOUNTER

To discuss Africa and globalization is perhaps an oxymoron! It is unclear whether Africa has benefitted from globalization. From the historical perspective, the longue durée, we think not, in view of the enormous consequences of the forced migrations (slavery and its aftermath)! This explains why African historians in trying to underline the positive gains (of colonization that came on the heels of slavery) hurry to qualify these as “accidental by-products” of those activities that intended the maximization of the global designs of the colonizer. For Ali Marui the positive benefits accrued “by default, by the iron law of unintended consequences!”13 Even Lamin Sanneh, while applauding “spiritual home rule” for African Christianity through the vernacular Bible, still sounds ambivalent: “whether we credit the missionaries with the positive effects of mother tongue deployment, we must still recognize its double-edged historical impact on indigenous cultures and on the ‘global’ pretensions of Western Christianity. The strengthening of indigenous cultures is the kind of unforeseen fact that makes history interesting. The undisputed unintended consequences of actions are beyond the control of the actors

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themselves.” That is the glance towards the past! It is even less clear whether globalization portends a future of peace and prosperity for the continent! Hence the search for alternatives!

The making of modern Africa is violently inscribed first within the experience of slavery (perhaps the transatlantic slave trade more than the Arab enslavement of the continent that preceded and later morphed into the transatlantic; though both are rooted in mercantilism that assumed and projected the dehumanization of the African). From this perspective, the longue durée, modernity/globalization remains for Africa at best an aporia, and at worst, a disaster. Optimists think that something can be salvaged; pessimists believe globalization is the wrong word. Realists devise the alternative strategy of “worlding”: “Worlding” is understood as projecting African women and men assuming their responsibility, in the real world of the coloniality of power, of reimagining the continent, to set in motion the mechanisms for transforming life in the continent for the better. “Worlding” Africa is not a mere alternative to the Western global designs to dominate; rather it is the serene homespun human-driven reinvention of the African world for the benefit of humanity. Obijiofor Aginam, writing from the perspective of ethno-medicine, calls this project “globalization from below”, based on the belief that “another world is possible.” To declare that “another world is possible” is to challenge “globalization” and to challenge modernity’s orientalization of Africa; it is the site for a new social imaginary, the space of local creativity inserted within the ever widening

cracks or gaps, discernible here and there, to overturn the overall
design of modernity to dominate (a design that has been dominant
in the West since the Enlightenment.)

The Experience of Slavery: Globalization’s devastating
impact on Africa, felt first of all through slavery, the initium of
Africa’s ambiguous encounter with the imperial mercantile West,
was traumatic demographically, economically (ecologically) and
anthropologically. Through slavery, globalization spelled
impoverishment on all three levels: demographic, economic, and
anthropological impoverishment. If conservative estimates put the
figure of captured/sold slaves that arrived destination, the
Americas, at 15m, one can only imagine the demographic and
economic impact of such depopulation: while other continents
tripled (Asia) or doubled (Europe) their population, Africa
stagnated. Economically, able-bodied young women and men torn
away from their homeland could no longer impact positively
growth in the economy (agriculture, pasturing and metallurgy)
social engineering and political leadership. On the contrary they
were transformed into commodities. The commodification of
African humans empowered Europe and America economically
and demographically, but turned Africa into economic pariah and
created demographic stagnation. The economic empowerment of
Europe continued after “abolition” and informed the colonial-
imperial partition of or scramble for Africa.

Anthropologically, the dehumanizing of Africans by slavery,
the inscribing of Africans as less than human, and the European
invention of originary anthropological justification for
dehumanization became naturalized through the colonial imperial
experience and continues today to define the postcolonial African.
On all three levels, demography, economy and anthropology, the
introduction of Africa into the Eurocentric global designs,

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17 Mignolo argues that for America, Latin America, it created dependency
syndrome Mignolo, Local histories/global designs : coloniality, subaltern
knowledges, and border thinking. 54
globalization, is marked by violence. When one turns to contemporary Africa, the mark of violence is indelible!\(^\text{18}\)

One cannot come to some understanding of the complexity of the violence that remains without taking into account structures of coloniality that continue to shape and influence the region. These structures remain, despite the decolonization or “independence” of African nations from colonial powers; they emphasize the power of pervasive epistemological, cultural and political colonial structures, which re-inscribe the violence that maintained colonial rule. The worst case scenario of inscribing violence on the human, economic and demographic levels of African life is the Rwandan genocide. Other examples are the wars of the Congo, Sudan and Central Africa, and of course the wars of West Africa. The story of the violence in these theatres of war and genocide cannot be accurately narrated without the story of slavery and the colonial-imperial experience. As a result, we re-link the impact of globalization with the modern colonial structures out of which it was born and work to de-link Africa from this hermeneutic framework so that it can be “worlded” in a manner that attempts to give it meaning primarily from its local histories and not from its “usefulness” to the project of modernity, the Eurocentric global designs. In doing this we endorse aspects of the viewpoints of Ajayi, Afigbo and Mazrui. This is neither to make a claim for any “pure” history nor to deny the many voluntary and involuntary associations that took place over time as Europe scrambled to colonize Africa, but it is to privilege the epistemological space and production of African interpretations, which are wide and varied. So let’s investigate how we can go about privileging these interpretations especially as they relate to the Christian endeavour in the continent.

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\(^{18}\) See Mamdani, *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda.*
Mahmood Mamdani in *When Victims Become Killers*\(^ {19} \) argues that the narrative of the Rwandan genocide and the violence in postcolonial Africa are “thinkable” when connected to precedents. The dramatic and systematic genocide, “race branding” and extermination of the Herero in South West Africa by German settler-colonists (19\(^ {\text{th}} \) and early 20\(^ {\text{th}} \) century) are not unconnected with the generalized violence experienced today on continental Africa. The genocide of the Kongo by Leopold of Belgium that decimated the Kongo world, from a population of 20-40m to almost a quarter of the original population, 8m, is a precedent. Similarly, Emmanuel Katongole in *The Sacrifice of Africa* argues that the “script” of violence, plunder and even genocide being “performed” in postcolonial Africa was created and performed first in imperial Southwest Africa and the Congo. The “script” remains the same while the dramatis personae changed\(^ {20} \) (e.g. from General Trotha and King Leopold to Mobutu, Bokassa, and Idi Amin). It is important to note, as example, that the German commander in Southwest Africa (Namibia), General Trotha, saw no other way of putting a stop to the Herero anti-German insurgency except through systematic extermination and social Darwinist ethnic cleansing; Herero survivors and the mulattos from Herero women and German men were enclosed in concentration camps, supervised and Christianized by German (Christian) missionaries. The “race branding” of Herero by Germans, for Mamdani, bestowed “political identity” on the Herero as subject people, sub-humans under German imperial rule. Genetic experiments were conducted on the Herero race by geneticist Eugen Fischer, later chancellor of Berlin University, who trained Prof Joseph Mengale that was to

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Katongole, *The sacrifice of Africa: a political theology for Africa*. 
carry out a similar genetic experiment on the racially branded Jews in Nazi concentration camps.\(^{21}\)

Mamdani’s argument that appears persuasive, though partially contested by Moses Ochonu, is that the discourse of globalization should not be dominated by economic and cultural concerns. Certainly the cultural and economic are vital to global transformations. However, to appreciate the organic relationship between globalization/modernity and violence in Africa, one must be attentive to the political project, the labor of inscribing political identity, created by direct and indirect colonial imperial rule and politics, and instrumentalized to dominate and possess the goods and even the persons of the subject peoples (“races”). These identities were assumed with little critical changes by the elites in the postcolonial independent African nation-states. The construction of this political identity, based on racialization, is instrumentalized to dominate: the superior colonizing race “civilizes” the “indigenes” or “ethnicities”. The subalterns, collaborating with colonists (e.g. Indians, Coloreds, Arabs, Tutsis), are politically identified as another race (non-indigenes, with no title to landholding), though inferior to the white race. Ochonu’s contention is that the elite in the colonial period consented (hegemony) rationally to the colonial project for their own political, economic and social interests realizable or “better served by immersion in and invocation of different aspects of colonial ideology.”\(^{22}\) Their agency and reconfiguration of the Eurocentric global designs from their local history for their own interest should not be underplayed.

African nationalists, leaders of the struggle for liberation, “independence”, rejected the racism of the colonizers but accepted the politics of ethnicity in the definition of “citizenship” in the

\(^{21}\) Mamdani, When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda. 10-13.

\(^{22}\) See Ochonu, "Hegemony in African Historiography: Rethinking Aspects of the Colonial Encounter in Africa." 153ff
postcolonial nation-state government. Perhaps only in the Tanzania of Julius Nyerere did citizenship of the one nation trump ethnicity. This exception proves the rule. The adoption of the politics of ethnicity has impact on peace and violence in the continent. Just as colonists organized genocide against the indigenes or “natives”, their subalterns, that shared their power, could do the same. On the other hand the indigenes can visit violence, native genocide, on the non-indigenes: the definition of the non-indigene expands in multi-ethnic nations such as Rwanda to include not only the Tutsi that are politically constructed as another “race” but the other ethnic groups, within the nation-state, that are denied title to landholding. However, the problem with using the colonial template to create identity in Rwanda, separating the Hutu (subjugated indigene) and the Tutsi (colonizing alien), installed, or perhaps exacerbated, a volatile sociopolitical situation all the time open to violence.

But the whole of Africa is plagued with this violence; the porousness of the postcolonial nation-state makes the violence predictable. Apart from Rwanda that is recognized as peculiar (Mamdani), Mamdani blames the failure of the nation-state project

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23 Mamdani, *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. In the introductory chapter Mamdani states clearly the connection between colonialism and genocide, the difference between settler and native’s genocide and the structure of the construction of political identity. In the explosive situation of Rwanda, Mamdani plays with multiple historical hypotheses to answer the question who is Hutu and who is Tutsi (Chapters One and Two), but ultimately concludes that while violence trailed the relationship between those who have power (Tutsi) and the subjugated (politically inscribed as Hutu) and the violence/difference was strongly experienced in pre-colonial Rwanda, the political racialization of identity during the German-Belgian colonial regime fossilized the differences: “If Hutu/Tutsi evoked the subject-power distinction in the pre-colonial Rwandan state, the colonial state gave it an added dimension: by racializing Hutu and Tutsi as identities, it signified the distinction as one between indigenous and alien.” (p. 75) This made the relationship highly volatile.
on the bifurcated urban dwelling educated and elite and rural peasantry under the customary government of traditional chiefs (indirect rule). Ochonu disputes such bifurcation, pointing to the ebb and flow between urban and rural, and the impossibility of Marxist class division to effectively operate between the two centres. Rather it is more of a convoluted situation wherein the agency of Africans (urban and rural) was never completely lost despite the constraints of colonial domination; tactically, Africans were picking and choosing what advances their interest; here, more, there, less, depending on location and the strictures of the domination. It was not only the colonial that was culturally "constituting its Other," rather "an African Otherness ... was meanwhile reinventing and reconstituting itself in its encounter with imperial culture."  

Colonial education was the most successful area of cultural globalization principally under the supervision of Christian missionaries. Some even talk of the colonization of the consciousness of Africans through Christianity. Here, above all, the subtle agency of Africans is revealed: studies on African Independent Churches or African Initiated Churches as well as studies of mainline Christianity affirm dependence and

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24 See Ochonu, "Hegemony in African Historiography: Rethinking Aspects of the Colonial Encounter in Africa." 159; also Boodoo, "Capitalism, Coloniality, Liberation."


independence of the colonial project.\textsuperscript{27} This appears to be where the death dealing violence of globalization is best challenged, proposing an alternative based on local histories.

THE ALTERNATIVE TO NATION-STATE IDEOLOGY AND GLOBALIZATION IN RELIGIOUS IDIOMS

The dominant model for imagining modern Africa has been the nation-state; the result of colonial-imperial hatchet work. African postcolonial rulers continue the nation-state ideology, thereby confirming its usefulness (for them) and its dominance. Katongole is baffled that the rulers fail to have insight into what is “terribly odd about the nation-state institution.” Some of them engage in multi-billion dollar wars, even wars over deserts (Ethiopia and Eritrea) but fail to provide potable water for citizens who wallow in poverty.\textsuperscript{28} Across the continent, there is massive discontent with this model.

The range of proposals of alternative models, for reconfiguring or “worlding” Africa, presents a semblance of cacophony. But the dominant or attractive idiom is religious. In the collective work \textit{Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa} (edited by Howard Smith and Rosalind Hackett), contributors consider, from different African worlds of experience, alternatives for reimagining and consequently reinventing the content.\textsuperscript{29} It is clear that what Katongole abhors as the “sacrifice of Africa”—violence, plunder, patrimonialism and the “politics of the

\textsuperscript{27} See for example Bengt Sundkler, \textit{Bantu prophets in South Africa}, 2d ed. (London, New York,: Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, 1961).

\textsuperscript{28} See Katongole, \textit{The sacrifice of Africa: a political theology for Africa}. 61; 63

belly”—is abhorred by all claimants to the reinvention of the African society. Smith and Hackett in *Displacing the State* capture the reinvention in religious idioms. Satan or the Devil is the dominant symbol for describing the terrain of the operation of the African nation-state and its allies. A cocktail of persons and ideologies make strange bedfellows in the redefinition of Satan-Devil: cults related to ancestral worship, new religious movements, Mormons, and policies of the global economy such as the SAPs of IMF and World Bank. On the contrary, New Religious Movements of nativistic leaning such as the Mungiki of the ethnic Gikuyu in Kenya (following the ideology of the Mau Mau liberation movement of the 1950s) call for a return to ancestral rituals—the path to a reinvention of the Kenyan state where justice will reign (however, the violence connected with Mungiki renders the movement totally ambiguous). New African Pentecostalism (of American, and therefore, global inspiration) that perfected communication through the home video industry (many of Nigerian origin) call for a new order of peace based on “born again” Christian ideology; this involves a clean break with the ancestral past (covenanting with Satan) and also a break with the practices of the Catholic church, the great Babylon.

The usefulness of the Jewish-Christian symbol, Devil-Satan, to describe the evils associated with the postcolonial nation-state fiasco draws attention to the imaginative potential of Christianity, despite its weaknesses, in reconfiguring or worlding Africa. Christianity’s weakness is evident in its co-optation as driver of colonial-imperial ideology of dominance through Christian education or “civilization”. (This in no way underplays the role of education in decolonization and in the local reconfiguration of Christianity.) The worst case scenario of the end or terminus of the co-optation of the Christian church is the Rwandan genocide closely linked to the racialization of political identity, orchestrated by Belgian missionaries and a wrongheaded anthropology and history (the Hamitic opposed to the Bantu theories). On the other hand, Christianity enabled African agency (reading and writing),
thanks to the Bible in African tongues and African hands. This effected a de-linking or disconnecting of the Christian religion from the Eurocentric global designs or imperial project: the Bible, reinterpreted in "apolitical and non-racial", terms or creatively deployed to play an unintended political role, shatters the assumption of Western dominance and positions Africans at equal distance with Europeans in the Kingdom realizable in this world. Lamin Sanneh is on target: "What is illuminating in the indigenous cultural process then, is how the Christian Scriptures, cast as a vernacular oracle, gave the native idiom and the aspirations it enshrined a historic cause, allowing Africans to fashion fresh terms for their own advancement and possibility." Decolonization of the African nation-states and the African church went hand in hand. They embody sites of the creativity of local histories. All in all the powerful effect of the Bible on African creativity, the worlding of Africa, is best illustrated by African initiated Christian churches no matter how little and controversial their initiatives may appear to critics. These churches, more than the mainline missionary churches, programmatically decentred Biblical interpretation from Eurocentrism to re-centre it in the African world. Founders or prophets, overwhelmed by their new vision for reinventing Africa, reinterpreted the Biblical promises as being fulfilled in African lands. The most popular of the founders are William Wade Harris (Liberia), Simon Kimbangu (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Samuel Oschoffa (Benin Republic), Simao Gonçalvès Toko (Angola). They are introduced by Kä Mana as "the galaxy of prophets and founders of churches." Mabiala Kenzo counts their

32 See Kä Mana, *La nouvelle évangélisation en Afrique*, Chrétiens en liberté (Paris; Yaoundé: Karthala ; Clé, 2000). 122ff. See also Elochukwu E. Uzukwu,
creativity as inaugurating postmodernity in Africa\textsuperscript{33}, but we think the better term is the creative worlding of Africa. We insist that Africans from first encounter with the Christian European imperial project always claimed their right to their epistemological space. Kimpa Vita in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} century Kongo laid claim to this, by proclaiming through her movement (the Antonine Movement) that there are Kongoolese saints, that Bethlehem and Nazareth, etc., are part and parcel of the Kongo world.\textsuperscript{34}

The above examples of cracks or gaps in the project of globalization, presented in religious idioms, provide the space for reinventing Africa. These could be complemented by recent very powerful stories of Christian (Catholic) women from Eastern Africa, as narrated by Katongole. In Uganda, a country tortured by the violence of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) led by Alice Lekwana and Joseph Koney, the compelling story of the Concerned Parents Association (mothers of the kidnapped Aboke Girls) displays astonishing resistance to nation-state terrorism and the terrorism of the LRA\textsuperscript{35}. Through living the Christian faith radically, another world is shown to be possible. The Parents stretched the sense of forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer out of this world: led by Angela Atyam (whose daughter was kidnapped), these Christian women forgave the murderous LRA, embraced all kidnapped and endangered children of the world as their own and declared the violence of the Ugandan nation-state as evil, “You cannot


\textsuperscript{35} See Katongole, \textit{The sacrifice of Africa : a political theology for Africa. Chapter 4}. 
overcome violence by violence"\textsuperscript{36}. The second story comes from Burundi, a country characterized by political racialization of identity (Hutu-Tutsi) and dominated by hatred. The \textit{Maison Shalom} of Maggy Barankitse, a creative project anchored on Love, affirms that the Bible, the Christian Eucharist and the Christian faith have potential for reinvention, so that a "sick Catholic Church" and a "sick Burundi state" be healed and violence would not have the final word.\textsuperscript{37}

The imperial project of globalization is ubiquitous, displayed in the nation-state ideology. However the project of worlding, reinventing and reconstituting Africa is discernible in those cracks or gaps of the prostrate body of the African nation-state.

REFERENCES


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 162
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.


EULOGY: "THESE REFUGEES, OUR BROTHERS"
MSGR MUNZIHIRWA,
WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL IN A CONTEXT OF WAR
IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Augustin Ramazani Bishwende

Since the 29th of October, 1996, the date of the assassination of Msgr Munzihirwa at Bukavu by ADFL troops, the date of his entry into the life of God, the Archdiocese of Bukavu has always organized a solemn mass at his grave. And in 2012, the sixteenth anniversary of his death, many people came to pray there. It is surprising to see that even beyond his death he continues to gather his Christians; they come to pray at his chevet as to a martyr in order that the Democratic Republic of the Congo may recover peace and security. It is an amazing and paradoxical fact that the death of Msgr Munzihirwa would have permitted the Archdiocese of Bukavu to come together in difficult periods of great crisis that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has traversed and continues to traverse since 1996. Msgr Munzihirwa has become a living icon of God’s presence in the midst of the Christians of Bukavu and of the Democratic Republic of Congo in general.

Speaking of Msgr Munzihirwa, I remember his visit to the parish where I was a priest. It was in 1994! He had come to see certain executives of the sugar refinery of Kiliba. After his visit, he came to greet us before continuing his route to Uvira. And I

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2 Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, an opposition movement to the regime of President Mobuto under the leadership of Laurent Desire Kabila, the former president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
welcomed him to the parish. The first thing that surprised me was
that he was traveling on foot, without a car. He asked me if I could
bring him to Uvira because he had no means of transport. I said to
him “Msgr, I am ready to bring you to Uvira” (25 kilometers from
Kiliba.) This example shows the type of person I am called to
present to you. Everyone who met Msgr Munzihirwa during his
lifetime can bear witness that he was a poor man. “In no way was
the fact that he was a bishop a way to enrich either himself or his
own family. It was a service. He possessed only two shirts and two
pairs of pants that he washed himself and hung to dry.”

When I was a deacon in 1990, Msgr Christophe Munzihirwa
came to Saint Pius X seminary to preach the annual retreat to us at
the beginning of the 1990-1991 academic year. Every time I
returned to my room after having heard him, I asked myself a
thousand and one questions: “Should I quit the seminary and return
to my parents or not?” He spoke to us in a language that was frank
and sincere. He said that some deacons are beginning to prepare
souvenir cards of their priestly ordination by writing on their card:
Priest of the Lord, Priest of God on Earth, Priest of God the Most
High, Priest in Christ’s Image. “Are you really a priest of the
Lord?” Other deacons are secretly planning parties with their
families by purchasing cows and goats for their priestly ordinations
without, for all that, preparing their hearts to receive Christ and
serve him with love. Are you really worthy, are you really like the
deacon Saint Lawrence who had no fortune and who did not
consider the diaconate as a transition to the priesthood? The
legendary account of his passion shows him refusing to hand over
the material goods and archives of the Church of which he was in
charge. And when they came to seize him, he showed his
executioners that he had no wealth and that the only wealth of the

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Church is the poor. Msgr Munzihirwa spoke like a prophet of modern times and he really was one. That was the basis for his assassination because he expressed himself frankly without mincing words to the new authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who were preparing to replace President Mobutu. In particular, he was not afraid of Paul Kagame who continued to send soldiers to the DRC to destabilize the refugees in their refuge territory. In the context of war and the Rwandan genocide where Kivu province was invaded by refugees who had just poured out over his area, he exhorted his Christians and inhabitants of Bukavu to welcome and protect the stranger in faithfulness to the Gospel. The testimonies reveal that Mzee Munzihirwa exhorted the inhabitants of Bukavu not to desert the town out of fear of the war and his Christians to welcome the poor refugees who had come from Rwanda. He wanted the people to stay home and protect their land against the invaders. “He sent this strong message to his Christians from Kinshasa: ‘The news from Bukavu saddens me and I protest with my entire being against these vile schemes. The refugees are our brothers, and the Gospel tells us that we must treat our brother as we would want to be treated by him in all circumstances.’”

In reflecting on the life of Mzee Munzihirwa, it appears evident to me that the person on earth is marked in particular by three centers of existence: (1) the environment of socio-historical and cultural emergence, (2) the life environment, be it vocational or professional, (3) the beatific vision. That is how Msgr Munzihirwa’s existential narrative has inspired me.

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4 In 258 AD Saint Lawrence was burned alive after having been tortured during the persecutions of the emperor Valerian.
5 Ibidem, footnotes, p. 621.
Christophe Munzihirwa Mwene Ngabo was born in Burhule parish at Lukumbo (Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1926. His primary education took place at the parish and the École Normale before entering the minor seminary of Mugeri where he studied the Greco-Latin humanities. He felt himself called to be of service to the Lord from a young age. After his education at the minor seminary he was sent to the major seminary of Moba (Baudouiville at the time in the diocese of Kalemie). At the close of his education he was ordained a priest on August 17, 1958 for the Bukavu diocese.

Sociologists and anthropologists say that humans are a product of their milieu. Every person is marked by his or her familial and societal educational environment. He or she is influenced by his or her socio-historical and cultural context. The realms of Ngweshe and Walikale are feudal monarchies. The chief is a respected and respectable man, and he occupies an important place in society. Moreover, I remember that during the time of Msgr Mulindwa, the people of Bukavu, at least in the countryside, venerated Msgr Munzihirwa. They called him Nabadahewa, supplier of priests; they saluted him with veneration. What is more, his name Munzihirwa, in the Shi language of the Democratic Republic of Congo, signifies the chief but also Mwene Gabo, son of the people, of the soil, of our home. What must we retain of Msgr Munzihirwa’s life? Being a man of the soil, marked by his socio-historical and cultural heritage, he conducted himself as a true Mushi without for all that keeping certain cultural markers. One could say that his life was a paradox. He was, at one and the same time, attached to his cultural soil, his village of Ngweshe, but he was also a man who was penetrated by the Gospel. He never accepted veneration. He never had anyone kiss his bishop’s ring or kneel at his passing; he always dressed in a simple shirt, without the skullcap that he wore only during Mass. His breach of the specific protocols of feudal cultures
attests that he was a man who was touched and transformed during his life by the risen Christ after the fashion of Paul of Tarsus and other apostles. Following Msgr Munzihirwa’s path, at this singular stage of his socio-historical and cultural rootedness, indicates to us that he can transmit to the Congolese Church and the world a spirituality of humanity and closeness with the Christians that he led toward God. In this spirit, Msgr Munzihirwa wanted to take his faithful beyond a superficial Christianity of spectacle and folklore; he wanted to conduct his faithful beyond a pastoral of reverence and compromise by introducing them to a Christianity of life in accordance with the expressions of Ka Mana.6

**MSGR MUNZIHIRWA IN HIS LIFE ENVIRONMENT: THE CHURCH**

Msgr Christophe Munzihirwa lived as a Christian among other Christians in the Catholic Church, as a priest, as a Jesuit, and as a bishop. He lived from St. Augustine’s perspective, who said “with you I am a Christian, for you I am a bishop.”7 Or from Saint Cyprian’s perspective, Bishop of Carthage during the third century: “From the beginning of my bishopric, I made a rule for myself never to decide, based on my personal opinion, without your counsel, you priests and deacons, and without the approval of my people.”8

While a parish priest and dean in Bukavu diocese, he renounced his functions freely in order to enter the Society of Jesus in 1963. He was attracted to religious life and particularly by

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7 [www.theologiedeleepiscopat.chez-alice.fr/theologie/chapitre01.htm](http://www.theologiedeleepiscopat.chez-alice.fr/theologie/chapitre01.htm)

8 [www.abbaye-saint-benoit.ch/saints/cyprien/lettres/011.htm](http://www.abbaye-saint-benoit.ch/saints/cyprien/lettres/011.htm)
Ignatian spirituality. With the Jesuits, he began the novitiate linked to philosophical and theological education, first at Kimwenza, then at Louvain in Belgium for a degree in Social Sciences (1967-1969) at the Catholic University of Louvain.

After his studies in Louvain, he returned to the Congo where he occupied himself, first and foremost, with the spiritual and intellectual formation of young Jesuits while being the chaplain of the university parish at Kinshasa until the forced enlistment of hundreds of students in the national army. As chaplain, and in solidarity with the young men, he went with them to the army during President Mobuto’s time in office. He was injured during his military training, and had to drain his ankle until the end of his life. From 1973 on, he worked at the Center for the Study of Social Action (CEPAS\(^9\)) in Kinshasa and later became the driving force behind the association of directors and Catholic managers of the country. In 1978, he was appointed Rector of the School of Philosophy, Saint Peter Canisius of Kimwenza (Kinshasa). In 1980, he was named the provincial superior of the Jesuits of Central Africa. At the end of his mandate as provincial, he was named coadjutor of Msgr Pirigisha (1986) and four years later he became bishop of Kasongo (1990). After the death of Msgr Mulindwa, he was appointed the apostolic administrator of Bukavu and he finally became Bukavu’s Archbishop (1994).

The year 1994 was fateful; it corresponds to the Rwandan genocide. Because of this, thousands of refugees flooded into the province of Kivu. Humanitarian organizations were mobilized in order to welcome and help the refugees to settle in Bukavu. It was a difficult situation. Returning from the Special Synod of the Church for Africa, Msgr Munzihirwa directed his pastoral concern toward the refugees. Over a two-year period, Msgr Munzihirwa often went to visit these refugee camps installed in his diocese while asking his-Christians to welcome and help them. The least that one can say is that he lived the drama of thousands of diverse refugees from

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\(^9\) Centre d'études pour l'action sociale (CEPAS)
North and South Kivu up close after the Rwandan genocide of 1994. As pastor of the local diocesan Church of Bukavu, he evolved in the midst of a humanitarian drama and put in place a pastoral of compassion toward refugees that the war had just stripped of everything. Since they had nothing they needed to be helped materially. Others were exhausted by the distance traversed without food or drink; they needed a shelter in order to rest. Still others, completely exhausted and psychologically traumatized, needed medical attention. It was difficult to face up to this crisis; this was much more depressing. Not only were there refugees who were still armed that had to be disarmed, there were others who would doubtless die each day in the refugee camps and would need to be buried. Faced with this drama, Msgr Munzihirwa became pastorally engaged in defending the dignity of the refugees, the dignity of the human person, and the search for peace in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

According to cultural anthropology, the difference between humans and animals is that humans are always taught to bury their dead well. But in the drama of the Rwandan genocide, the dead were thrown by the International Red Cross into common graves. In his pastoral letter addressed to the refugees of his diocese during Advent, Msgr Munzihirwa wrote the following:

We begin this period of Advent with anguish. It is a time of conversion to the one who comes and a time of torment for that which lumps us together. From the time that we welcomed you, your fate has become ours as it were. It is the same Christ who suffers in all of us. Therefore, we cannot agree with the measures that, at your place, violate the rights of the human person and especially the right of the refugee. He or she cannot be repatriated against his or her will, especially when he or she knows that an almost certain death awaits in his or her country . . . we pray so that these measures that menace you will be changed in a process that is more humane and Christian . . . And entering
Augustin Ramazani Bishwende

in the dynamic of Christ, we can . . . wish us all a ‘Merry Christmas,’ the joy of the Son of God who is born little by little in the tear of human history, who knows that he will die on the Cross in order to save this world. It is this profound joy of true hope—the one who hopes against all hope—that I already wish for you and that, in solidarity we will build together while awaiting the day of your return to your country.¹⁰

This pastoral letter is very compact and strong; it implies a triple theological dimension: (1) How to convert to the God of hope in the midst of humanitarian dramas and times of war? As a pastor, Msgr Munzihirwa wants to support the hope of refugees who suffer far away from their home. They find themselves in the worst agonies of the history that has just struck their country, and these agonies plunge them into anguish. As their pastor, he maintains that Christ is the only one capable of reassuring the refugees. Christ has taken their suffering unto himself and he suffers with them. Suffering in Christ, with Christ, and by Christ, the refugees are suddenly consoled because Christ bears their suffering. With this letter, Msgr Munzihirwa shows the refugees that Christ is in solidarity with them in their suffering. Not only is Christ with them in their suffering, but it is also the entire Mystical Body of Christ that suffers. “Ever since we welcomed you, your lot has become ours as well. United with the same Christ in the Mystical Body, we must commiserate with you in solidarity, given the torments that distress you.” (2) How to convert to the God of hope in the midst of the injustices of this world? Not only are you in the agonies of exile, far from your own country, in misery, privation and bereavement, you are also undergoing human injustice. Once again in the midst of human injustice, Christ remains the only righteous one to whom we can appeal. This is the reason why we will pray to Christ for

you, so that He, the righteous one, helps to change those human measures that threaten you into more humane and Christian behaviors. (3) How to celebrate Christmas as human history is being torn apart? In the Christian dynamic, Christ lightens these agonies: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest (Mt 11: 28).” Also, close to Christ there is no more injustice. This is why we can celebrate Christmas. We can welcome into our hearts the Son of God who is born in the gaps of human history in order to die on the Cross like a thief, and to assume the human tragedy and to save all those from that which would obstruct them. In the midst of agonies, injustices, and human gaps, Christ, by his Cross, reverses such morbid distress and mortifies us in a hope that restores life to all who believe in him. Christ is born in human hearts in order to gather them into a mystical solidarity with a view toward struggling collectively against the obstructions of history. It is only in faith and in situating oneself on the side of the eternity of God outside of time and human, political, and historical action, that such a letter can calm, bring joy and comfort to refugees in a state of psychological shock. This pastoral letter permits us to understand Msgr Munzihirwa’s invitation to refugees and Christians to not allow themselves to be trapped in partisan and ideological politics. He exhorted them “to build the future on the pedestal of the hope that Christ brings us. He has defined this hope in terms of the engagement of the human person in his or her own liberation, with the awareness that he or she has a price to pay for each effort. In this same spirit, he showed people a hope that did not evade life’s problems but maintained an existential unity. It transposes every moment of life onto another plane: the construction of eternity from the present onwards.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) MUNZIHIRWA C., Pour un chrétien, quel développement? Zaïre-Afrique, 197, septembre 1985, p. 410-411.
MSGR MUNZIHIRWA IN HIS BEATIFIC VISION WITH GOD

From the *mystique of hospitality* that seems to have irrigated his compassionate pastoral letter *with prophecy*, Msgr Munzihirwa invites the Church in the Congo and the world to follow in his tracks. The mystique of hospitality led Msgr Munzihirwa toward a *rich and profound prophetic life*. It is there that we can understand the entry in his diary from the quotation by Msgr Romero on the Beatitudes: “The pure hearts: those who are incapable of hypocrisy, do what they think, think what they do and think what they say. They can kill me; they cannot kill the truth.”\(^{12}\) Msgr Munzihirwa did not fear death during his life. He lived in the fear of God. He was a man of great faith who no longer thought in human terms, but rather in divine terms. Others were in the time of history but he lived in the eternity of God.

Let us clarify a bit the way he died in order to better understand the way in which he lived. And the way in which he lived clarifies better the way in which he died. What are the circumstances of his death? Let us listen to Msgr Maroy Rusengo Francois-Xavier, current archbishop of Bukavu, who can instruct us.

The evening of October 29, 1996, while he was returning to the Jesuit community of the College Alfajiri after an exhausting day entirely devoted to saving lives and consoling a population distressed, disoriented and abandoned by those who should have assumed their responsibility as political administrators of the City of Bukavu; having arrived at Nyawera square, the car containing the Pastor of the Church of Bukavu, his chauffeur, and a soldier from the Forces Armées Zaïroises\(^{13}\) (FAZ) was stopped by artillery fire. Msgr Christophe

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\(^{12}\) MUNZIHIRWA C. cite par KITUMAINI, *art.cit.*, p. 213.

\(^{13}\) Zairian Armed Forces.
stepped out of the vehicle, a cross in hand, and went toward the soldiers (who were not the Congolese of the FAZ but rather Rwandan soldiers belonging to the ADFL\textsuperscript{14} of the Congolese president Laurent Desire Kabila) for a discussion. These latter placed him against a post while they asked for instructions via radio as to what they were to do with the detained. Then, they ordered him to kneel close to a gate and they killed him with a shot to the nape of the neck. Msgr Munzihirwa was murdered at 6:30 p.m.\textsuperscript{15}

This was a villainous and odious crime against a man of God, but the death of a martyr like that of Msgr Munzihirwa is and will always remain a seed of life and rebirth for the DRC. In analyzing the circumstances of his death, three signs shed better light on his life. (1) Just as Christ went to a deserted place after a tiring day, Msgr Munzihirwa went back to his Jesuit community after a similarly fatiguing day of pastoral care in order to draw strength and spiritual energy. It was in this Jesuit community that he was showered with love of the cross. (2) He left the car with a cross in hand in order to dialogue with his executioners. A cross in hand is a symbol of Christ’s presence, dead and resurrected. Christ is present as the foundation of his existence and his apostolic life, but also as a source of hope in his struggle for justice. (3) He was placed against a stake like every prophet; he was taken aside, outside of the city to die there as a martyr in the manner that Jesus was crucified on the wood of the Cross. He was killed, while kneeling, by a shot to the nape of the neck, while in prayer, like Stephen (Acts 7: 54-60).

For this reason, Msgr Munzihirwa died as a prophet as he had lived and he lived as a prophet as he died. His prophetic spirit offers three characteristics: the love of the Cross, the engagement for justice, and the purity of the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{14} Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire
\textsuperscript{15} www.ocdcongo.net/16eme-anniversaire-de-mgr-munzihirwa.htm
Msgr Munzihirwa lived the love of the cross. His entire life was impregnated with it. To wit, Malulu's account proposes the following in his article: "There are facts that seem trifling at first but that say a lot about his sense of the consequences of the imitatio Christi. One of his collaborators writes: One day he entered my office with a bank note of 5 NZ (New Zaire is what the money from this time was called, of derisory value) in his pocket, although I had a bit more than that on that day. The pocket of his old shirt was transparent. Having noticed that I had seen his money, he told me humorously that he always moved about with his entire fortune."\textsuperscript{16} A certain kind of poverty came to light in his life without, for all that, being imposed on others.

Msgr Munzihirwa was a man engaged on behalf of others, for peace, and especially for justice. Not only did he defend, with tooth and claw unto death the Rwandan refugees, but he was also concerned about, and defended, the poor in the dioceses of Kasongo and Bukavu as well as close to his Jesuit community. His homilies were denunciations of the injustices in the Congo. The Congolese society in which he had lived was not perfect, today's even less so. He wanted to contribute to the changing of minds by denouncing corruption, injustice, and the embezzlements of the politicians. In one of his homilies that I had followed, he showed that the politicians from the DRC are like game hunters in the forest. They think the State treasury is like a forest full of game. Their objective is to hunt without being preoccupied with the reproduction of the game. The politicians take from the State treasury without necessarily knowing how this treasury will be refilled.

Finally, Msgr Munzihirwa was a witness to the purity of the Gospel. He lived the Gospel in its purity by respecting the fundamentals of his regular Jesuit life, especially in that which concerns poverty and chastity. A life of poverty and chastity: I can bear witness to it but the account of his obedience falls to his

\textsuperscript{16} MALULU, art. cit., p. 623.
superiors who are able to say more. The purity of the Gospel is not only shown in connection with religious vows, but also in connection with a life that is conformed and faithful to the word of God, the link between one’s words and one’s actions, in brief, in connection with a life impregnated with apostolic charity. The purity of the Gospel is the fruit of one’s daily prayer. He had already written in his personal journal that “the meditation is the act of searching for and tasting God. From contemplation comes the desire to be with God. The proximity and the communion with God must penetrate life in one’s contact with one’s brothers.”

Max Weber distinguished between two types of prophecies: *ethical prophecies* and *exemplary prophecies*. On the one hand, ethical prophecy announces the will of God to a people and to the world. The prophet intervenes on the part of God; he or she is charged with a message from God. It is a speech that registers both a criticism of society and an invitation to build a social order that is an alternative to the one that exists. One finds this sort of prophecy in the Middle East, in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Consequently, we can assert that Msgr Munzihirwa was an ethical prophet. He is a contemporary icon. His life is truly a message for the Congolese people who live in agony because of the chronic wars that take place in their country. We are traversing a difficult period in the DRC; our families are refugees in their own country. The blood of Msgr Munzihirwa that was spilled remains a seed of life, prosperity, and the future for the DRC. Life will sprout in the DRC; we will acquire the peace and security that Msgr Munzihirwa hoped would come to the DRC. Do not lose hope. Christ fights with us; we will recover peace.

On the other hand, the exemplary prophecy seeks a personal path of overcoming social reality. It will not institute a new society. The prophet becomes a concrete personal example, a witness of

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God who shows the way to reach salvation, to attain God. In this case, the prophet attracts disciples. One finds this type of prophecy in India (Buddha), China (Lao-Tzu), and the Middle East. All in all, the life of beatitude that shows itself in Msgr Munzihirwa’s existence makes him an exemplary prophet. We believe that he lives close to God and that he intercedes for us. But we also follow his tracks in our daily living of love of the Cross, and of committing ourselves to justice in the light of the Gospel.

Translated from the French by Marie Baird, PhD; Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA

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Reviewed by Elias K. Bongmba, Rice University, Houston, TX.

*Religion and HIV and AIDS* brings together the scholarship in the subject in an impressive manner. The editor, Beverley Haddad in an impressive introduction highlights the contribution of religion and religious organizations, but also invites theologians to think critically about the role of religion in health especially on HIV AIDS. Haddad convened the international project, Collaborative for HIV and AIDS, Religion and Theology (CHART) in 2007. This book is the outcome of the critical appraisal of the scholarship on religion and HIV AIDS as an academic area of studies. The scholars discuss the state of studies on religion and HIV AIDS, its accomplishments, challenges, and prospects for the future. The project established a cartography of the literature on HIV and AIDS from a religious and theological perspective, created a bibliography (now on line) and a website that provides resources to researchers and all interested in religion and HIV AIDS. Haddad has argued that HIV AIDS challenges religious organizations, theologians, and scholars of religion to rethink justice. Haddad takes a risk with this project by including a response from practitioners to papers, and this works quite well because what emerges is a conversation and a learning process that highlight what have been accomplished and the task that lies ahead.

In the lead essay, Jill Olivier and Gillian Paterson discuss "religion and medicine in the context of HIV and AIDS: A Landscaping Review." They caution against discussing HIV AIDS largely as a medical account at the expense of other things that surround HIV AIDS. The literature on health work by religious organizations emerged in the 1990s and has grown extensively and
now includes studies that map religious healthcare assets of religious organizations with diverse rationale for their work even though they all stress compassion and care. While some of the literature from scholars of religion, theologians, and religious organization still contain moralization, recent scholarship offer of a holistic view of the HIV AIDS crisis, the practice of medicine, as well as traditional approaches to healing.

Religious organizations in urban and rural areas have worked to prevent the spread of the HIV virus by conducting educational campaigns although their views on sexuality are still judgmental and the use of condoms remains a controversial and polarizing subject, which has closed the door for joint strategies with other communities of discourse on HIV AIDS. Religious organizations provide treatment with antiretroviral drugs as well as home based care with some working within the Christian Health Associations and the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network in Africa. Religious organizations also care and support orphans, assist people cope with the disease as they live with HIV AIDS, and when people die of complications of HIV AIDS, religious communities carry out rituals to comfort their families. Some of the issues that call for critical study is that the literature also points to many religious communities that still stress miracle cure, which at best remains problematic for the biomedical community.

In the practitioner response, Gregg Manning discusses challenges in delivery of medical services and points out that the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance has issued guidelines to religious organizations that call for collaborative work between the public and private sector. Manning suggests that this chapter does not address how religious providers could be part of a mutually accountable partner with other partners in the fight against HIV AIDS. He argues that scholars pay greater attention to ways in which religious communities could challenge others to account for peace, justice, compassion, and responsible power relationships in the fight against HIV AIDS.
In chapter two, Philippe Denis provides an analytical sketch of the history of HIV AIDS and Religion in Africa. He highlights the multi-level response to HIV AIDS by religious institutions in Africa and Faith Based Organizations at the leadership and congregational level. Leaders shape beliefs and attitudes of the people towards HIV AIDS, define moral boundaries, and shape perspectives on sexuality. Local congregations bear much of the burden for HIV AIDS because it is at this level where the focus on behavior change, stigma eradication, disclosure, care, treatment, and support take place. The third level involves the work that is done at the national headquarters of religious institutions that have provided medical treatment and carried out prevention campaigns.

Denis argues that since religious discourses shape public perception and response to HIV AIDS, often this discourse has ignored the socio-historical and economic realities and instead promoted a moralization of the pandemic, with some seeing the pandemic as punishment for sin. Denis next examines HIV transmission by religious affiliation and argues that the literature indicates that the rate of infection is lower in Islamic communities although other studies present a mixed picture on the claim since everyone does not follow strict ethical rules prescribed by the religious leaders. In South Africa the rate of infection was lower among Pentecostals because of rigid teachings against pre-marital sex. Lower risk level was reported among women who practice African Traditional Religions than Protestants or Catholics. Prevention strategies remain a challenge because religious communities reject condoms as a prevention strategy. Religious organizations have accomplished much more in the area of treatment and care and in the last two decades, they have played a major role in the fight against HIV and AIDS, providing anti-retroviral treatment in Christian hospitals across Africa. Religious organizations also have programs to support orphans.

Alison Munro who works with the South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference AIDS office in the practitioner response agrees that religious institutions and leaders play a major role in
society in influencing policy but not much attention has been paid to the role of socio-economic issues in the epidemic. Religious institutions sometimes shape discourse in ways that are negative, sometimes their viewpoints are not always taken seriously, and that itself is a mistake since religious institutions are important partners.

In the third chapter, Oliver discusses the recognition international policy makers have accorded religious organizations as key partners in fighting the pandemic. International policy organizations had ignored religious organizations on health issues probably because of growing secularism, the dominant role of non-governmental organizations in health, and suspicions by some in the health care world that religious leaders moralized healthcare and hindered prevention strategies. Even the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) thought religious leaders were an obstacle to the fight against HIV/AIDS. However, this perception changed by 2000 when the international policy makers recognized religious communities as partners in the fight against HIV AIDS. The WHO, US Agency for International Development, UNICEF, PEPFAR all recognized the role religious organizations play in healthcare and provided financial support to them. The Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFTATM), and the World Bank provided funding to some religious organizations to fight HIV AIDS. The literature gives few reasons for this shift. Some speculate it happened because the secularization theses weakened; they recognized the important role religion plays in health, realized that biomedicine does not have all the answers, and that fighting HIV/AIDS requires a multi-sectoral approach. With health systems in Africa under severe stress, it was also good policy for international organizations to recognize the contribution of religious organizations to the health care because they fill in the gaps and support a collapsing healthcare system.

Some international organizations have supported the mapping of tangible and intangible religious health assets that provided new knowledge about the work of religious organizations. Religious institutions were encouraged to collaborate with the state to plan
and address HIV and AIDS. Olivier calls for the development of new tools to sharpen mapping, assess the work of religious communities, and study the notion of healing and the problematic belief in miracles in some religious communities because it is a concern for some in the biomedical community and the states. Further research should explore a non-instrumental approach to healthcare assets adopted by religious leaders when dealing with economic constraints already facing healthcare systems. The way forward should include continued assessment of how assets relate to HIV and AIDS policy.

In the practitioner response, Bongi Zengele points out that the emphasis placed on individual prevention methods by the international organizations undermines Africa’s communal ethos. The complicated economic and hidden agenda in the relationship between North and South needs critical attention. In South Africa, the urban areas have benefited from information and resources more than the rural areas, and this has an adverse impact on the fight against the disease. It is important that religious communities do not interfere with anti-retroviral drugs because they think that HIV AIDS can be cured through faith.

In chapter four, Martha Frederiks analyses statements religious organizations have made on HIV AIDS. The literature demonstrates that religious communities call for compassion and observe moral teachings on sexuality, and be faithful in marriage life. Some religious leaders have also spoken out against stigmatization, inequality in wealth, and the social and cultural climate that have increased vulnerability, and carried out advocacy for medications. The written statements come mainly from large religious bodies, faith based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and religious communities. All of them discuss care, compassion, and support for living with HIV AIDS. Some of these statements lack a sense of urgency and there is no serious reflection on how religious teachings on sexuality and gender affect the spread of HIV AIDS even though Asian groups recognize that
religious groups have been slow to act and allowed stigmatization to grow.

Statements from Latin America speak in the tradition of liberation theology and emphasize poverty and economic inequality. The Orthodox Churches emphasize moral responsibility, arguing that the epidemic spreads in asocial and amoral contexts like promiscuous sexuality, drug use, and neglect by medical staff, rape, and adultery. Western Churches call for solidarity with African people in the fight against HIV AIDS.

Francophone African countries were slow in issuing statements on HIV AIDS. Some statements from Islamic leaders claim HIV AIDS results from disobedience to the laws of God. Muslims in Côte D'Ivoire have encouraged positive people to refrain from fasting. The Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) have not made any major pronouncements on HIV AIDS but other international ecumenical organizations based in Africa have issued statements on HIV AIDS. The WCC warned in 2006 that HIV AIDS will be around for a while and for that reason, urgent action was necessary to stop the spread of the disease. Pope John Paul II called on the church to love people living with the disease. In 1988 he failed to dismiss the view that HIV AIDS is a punishment from God for homosexuality. The Catholic Church in Uganda highlighted socio-economic disparities and claimed that HIV AIDS was a fight against three enemies, poverty, ignorance, and disease; themes echoed by Catholic Bishops of Zambia, the Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar at a conference in Dakar Senegal. The Organization of African Independent Churches has challenged churches to change those cultural practices that fuel HIV AIDS and address sexuality in the church. The All African Conference of Churches and the Anglican Communion in Africa have called for "education, training, prevention, care, counseling, and support, combat of stigma, treatment, and advocacy." (p. 120)

Frederiks concludes that statements have emphasized morality, the idea that HIV AIDS is a war, and offered hope to the people. However, moralizing that fight ignores broad socio-economic
issues and political neglect that drive the spread of HIV AIDS. Statements that refer to a war, implore people to prioritize the fight against HIV AIDS and to mobilize all resources. Militaristic language gives the false impression that HIV AIDS can be defeated soon if we fight earnestly against it. Statements that stress hope promote prevention, call for drugs and more funding to strengthen the fight against the disease.

In the practitioner response, Paula Clifford points out that statements from the religious communities reflect the rate of prevalence in a country, and wonders who gains from these pronouncements if the suffering of the other is seen as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Some of the statements introduce separateness, and hide the church’s exclusive focus on sexuality. There is a disparity between the statements made by organizations for whom HIV AIDS is only one of the things they do and those from organizations that work primarily on HIV AIDS. Clifford points to the irony that at times local activity is ahead of the official statements from the church.

In part two of the book, the authors discuss how scholars have engaged theological ideas in the fight against HIV AIDS. In chapter 5, Gerald West argues that sacred texts (Bible and Qur’an) in the context of HIV AIDS invite readers to a “revelatory” experience, arguing that theologies of retribution abound in all religions and are driven by an ideo-theological orientation. When HIV AIDS emerged, Christians did not read the Bible in a life-affirming manner because some people thought that HIV infection was a retribution from God for sin and sacred texts (Bible and Qur’an) were used in ways that hindered the fight against HIV AIDS. Interpretive traditions have underscored taboos, and banned fornication. However, other scholars called for redemptive reading of sacred texts to address the pandemic. Such readings emphasize the work of God as a source of hope, examine and use texts to confront stigma, stress human responsibility taught in sacred texts and rabbinic teachings, which point to a divine healer. Thus, religious communities engaged in prevention of HIV AIDS should
promote the practice of safe sex, show compassion to the sick, regardless of the origin of the disease.

Scholars argue that some texts call on people to treat others with honor and dignity. Caitlin Yoshiko Buysse argues that injustice is contrary to God’s will for humanity because the Qur’an emphasizes economic equity. Laura McTighe argues that themes like taxia' which refers to the unity of divinity, creation, and humanity; tappa (a life of compassion lived in collaboration with the divine being), al-nas (a just and ethical order on earth); and mustacliqfun (standing with those who have been marginalized) all invite humanity to engage in acts of liberation.

West points to two readings of sacred texts. First, HIV positive individuals are turning to sacred texts as a source of hope. Jim Mitulski reads the book of Ezekiel as a text that gives hope, Ken Stone indicates that the laments of the Psalms invite complaint about suffering and a spirit of resistance to suffering. The Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research in Pietermaritzburg, collaborated with Siyaphila (we are alive/well/positive) movement in reading of texts where Jesus stood with those who faced stigma in his day. Second, scholars have also read texts in liberative ways. Cheryl Anderson reads the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:127 to look for healing in a situation where there was no cure as it is the case with HIV AIDS today. From Ghana, Dorothy B.E.A. Akoto, also suggests that Ezekiel 37:1-14 invites the community to “nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us’.”(p. 146) Several scholars (Ezra Chitando, Musa Dube, Patrick Adeso, Gitay, Madipoane Masenya) all read texts of the Hebrew Bible as a source of hope, lament, protest, and resistance as manifested in the response of Job to his situation. Some Islamic scholars approach HIV AIDS in light of Sharia law, and argue that the sacred text cautions against doing harm. The Lut story invites generosity, hospitality, protection, and justice for the vulnerable not a critique of homosexuality as some emphasize. Buddhist scholars have read
karma not as a fate that confines or limits one’s response to a situation like HIV but as a generative concept that gives back dignity and restores force to human experience. West concludes that sacred texts have the capacity to “stigmatize, discriminate and bring death,” but also urge people to “embrace, affirm, and bring life.” (p. 159)

In the practitioner response, Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon affirms liberative readings in context. Focusing on Hinduism, she points out that in parts of the Hindu world, leaders have been encouraged to speak openly about HIV AIDS and recognize that religious beliefs motivate people to persevere as they face tough times. The work of Nalunnakkal has called for an ethic of care that is just, and one that invites people to a table fellowship for all people.

In chapter 6, Steve de Gruchy maps the terrain of systematic theological literature on HIV AIDS and explores theological reflection on the praxis of the church in light of HIV AIDS by discussing key issues, theological themes, theological approaches, and reflects on theological themes ignored in the literature. Beliefs, teachings, and doctrines influence the way people think and have played a huge role in HIV/AIDS; theological training today must include studies of HIV AIDS. Theologians have explored themes like divinity, creation, the sacred text, sin, suffering, the ecclesial community, healing, justice and lamentation. African Women Theologians have also studied the impact of HIV AIDS on African women. Theologians have reflected on stigma and exclusion, disease and healing from a holistic perspective using the concept bophelo (life). Sexuality, homosexuality, and heterosexuality have been explored sometimes with a moralistic tone that has hindered prevention campaigns. HIV AIDS has challenged theologians to focus on suffering, the place of God, healing, hope in light of the resurrection, the meaning of life and death and called for a theology that affirms life and promotes justice on behalf of those living with the disease, as well as upholding the dignity of all, especially the dignity of women.
New theological models are necessary to address suffering, hope, life, justice, and the ecclesial community, in context that takes African culture seriously, promotes local embodied theologies rooted in the discordance that people experience. De Gruchy closes by discussing seven gaps in the literature on theology and HIV AIDS that must be addressed. These include rigorous methodological approaches, transdisciplinary theological thinking, interreligious dialogue, systematic approach to theology, reflection on sin, salvation, and liberation, the nature of the ecclesial community. In the practitioner response, Jan Bjarne Sodal adds that theological reflection must continue to address and shed light on creation and redemption, the complexity of life, focus on gender, human sexuality, and broken relationships.

In chapter seven Domaka Lucinda Manda discusses the literature on comparative ethics, which has progressed from punishment to life affirming values through themes like “relationality, inclusivity, love, care, and compassion.” Early literature emphasize sexual morality and some religious leaders claimed that HIV AIDS was a warning from God against sexual excesses and those leaders proclaimed a theology of damnation. Scholars later shifted from moralizing to a sexual ethic that emphasized safe sex, “reciprocity, respect, love, fidelity, trust, equality between the sexes.”(p. 205) New Perspectives explored the use of condoms, responsible sexual behaviour, the hierarchical position of religion in discourses of sexuality, and given the nature of violence that marks sexual practices, called for an ethic of resistance. Ethicist also emphasized the idea of ubuntu, but scholars like Fulata Moyo rejected it because ubuntu is a hierarchical ethic which emphasizes respect for elders. Other scholars preferred to address relational ethics in terms of solidarity. Manda calls for a theology (ethic) of justice because justice compliments themes like care and compassion.

In the practitioner response Farid Esack recognizes Islamic tradition of care and compassion but argues that an ethic of HIV AIDS must be articulated in light of “globalization, war, economic
exploitation, invasion and occupation.” It is important to move beyond negativity and pity and affirm the humanity of the HIV positive person. Citing the work of Positive Muslims, an organization he has worked with, he argues that people need to go beyond terms like compassion and “own the pain of another.”

In chapter eight Ute Hedrich discusses missiology and HIV AIDS pointing out that early publications in Missionalia, invited open discussion of the pandemic, called for curricular developments that would teach ethics, health, healing, gender, and practical theological perspectives on HIV AIDS. Catholic theologians called for a critical reorganization of power relations and for the establishments of communities of mutuality. The World Council of Churches and other ecclesial bodies sponsored conferences and published proceedings in the International Review of Missions. The African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP) underscored the role played by religious institutions in health care. Several church councils have examined relief efforts and they describe development aid as actions of solidarity, even at a time when giving has declined. Hedrich discusses the work of several mission organizations around the world who have worked to fight HIV/AIDS.

In the practitioner response Benson Okyere-Manu highlights the work of evangelical groups on HIV AIDS such as Medical Assistance Program (MAP) whose early AIDS curriculum served as a model for the World Council of Churches; Serving in Mission (SIM) one of the first major mission organization to address HIV AIDS by organizing conferences; Samaritan Purse which came with a prescription of hope and continues to strengthen global Christian response to HIV AIDS and also pledged “to mobilize private, church, corporate and government resources; and to develop a unified plan to respond to HIV and AIDS.” The Micah Network that at some point had 300 evangelical mission groups, Christian relief, development, and agencies fighting for justice is working to articulate a theology of HIV AIDS.
The essays in part three discuss the literature on socio-cultural issues in HIV AIDS. In chapter nine, Ezra Chitando, discusses African Traditional Religions and HIV AIDS, arguing that the scholarly literature blames HIV AIDS on traditional beliefs, patriarchy, and institutions like polygyny, levirate marriages, widow cleansing, female genital cutting, early child marriages, and sexual hospitality. The preoccupation with fertility at all cost indicates that “toxic masculinities, mythic accounts that support male power and pleasure remain a problem.” Traditional healers could contribute to the fight against HIV AIDS, but local views that having sex with virgin cures HIV AIDS should be rejected. Virginity testing, and cure claims by traditional healers, should be examined critically. Some scholars have called for a critical appropriation of African world views on health because they can contribute to the fight against HIV AIDS. The idea of ubuntu should be explored with a critical view of masculinities. Ubuntu could serve as a basis for showing compassion to children orphaned by HIV AIDS. This epidemic has opened the door to a new conversation about life, death, male circumcision; a solid critique of ideology in African religions would offer people indigenous resources for people to use in addressing the healthcare crisis.

Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela in the practitioner response reiterates that indigenous religions offer an understanding of life, wholeness and healing. However, the negative practices that have been attributed to the culture must be addressed. The practice of dry sex must be addressed because it puts women at risks. The practice or ukuthwala, which means to be carried away as a marriage practice, is also problematic for women. The ancestors are not the source of the disease as some claim; and women are not always victims, as some would have us think.

In chapter ten, Nyakabi Kamau probes African cultures, gender, and HIV AIDS. Kamau arguing that studies indicate the rates of prevalence are high where women are vulnerable to cultural practices imposed by gender-based roles that hold women back from information on HIV AIDS and methods of protection.
Stereotypes of women deny that women can have sexual pleasure but underscore the perception that women should be virgins when they marry and be sexually naïve in bed. The reality is that women lack power to negotiate sexual relations and therefore cannot ask men to use condoms. Women are adversely affected by poverty and many cannot access ARVs.

Kamau traces the stigma attached to sexuality to Christianity and colonialism because colonists and missionaries criticized and rejected sexual foreplay that did not result in consummation. Criticism of African cultures drove initiations underground and placed the girl child at risk. Practices like the elongation of the labia mania in Buganda, *efundula* in Namibia require critical studies and debates. Some religious communities have instituted sex education but it is too early to say if it is effective. Kamau argues that sexuality should be a source of mutual pleasure. Faithfulness should apply to both sexes because women are at risk today because their partners have other lovers. Sexual hospitality may have ended, but illicit sexual relations continue. Widow cleansing and wife inheritance pose serious threat to women. Religious communities have a compelling interest to discuss sexuality openly and divest it from religious meanings that promote stigma and denial of the sexuality of women. Kamau’s research with professional women at the university reveals that even at that level women are not immune from the gender, social, cultural, religious biases attached to sexuality in the context of HIV AIDS.

In the practitioner response, Ezra Chitando describes culture as a resource, which could be used properly to serve men and women. Culture is dynamic and people should be open to new challenges and changes. Chitando also notes that bringing together marriage in biblical and African cultural context is deadly because both traditions stress the submission of women even to rape. It is time for transformation and a theology of transformation is needed to address these issues in a world of HIV AIDS.

Adriann van Klinken discusses, in chapter eleven, scholarly work on masculinities in Africa with a view on gender justice in
HIV AIDS. Masculinity as a social construction that privileges male sex has led to risky sexual behaviour in men who make most of the decisions on sexuality. Traditional and religious views that promote male headship in relationships perpetuate negative masculinity. Both Muslims and Christians expect their wives to be available and thus contribute to sexual violence. HIV prevention strategies emphasizing sexual abstinence, marital fidelity, and condom use are not successful because men see them as a threat to their roles as men. Although there is no uniform masculinity in Africa, it is possible to use religious resources to effect contextual changes. According to Fulata Moyo, gender inequality can be reversed through a theology grounded in the doctrine of creation, the liberating work of Jesus, and the notion of agape love rather than Ubuntu. Dibeela has suggested that Jesus should be seen as a model of humility for men.

Van Klinken argues that sermons should promote justice, a new outreach to men with new view of manhood. Men could learn through creative Bible reading that would also empower women. Liturgical handbooks should be reworked to provide resources that address male power. Gender in the writings of Isabel Phiri, Musa Dube, Farid Essack is a new theological horizon that must be explored in the context of HIV AIDS. Studies of masculinities should avoid generalizations, recognize diversity, and promote radical equality for men and women, solidarity, mutuality, and companionship. Male headship should be understood as responsibility on the part of men.

In the practitioner response, Lilian Siwila argues that cultural dimension of gender and masculinities are important in Africa and call for a cultural hermeneutics and a culturally sensitive approach to sacred texts that could open doors to address socialization models that have entrenched negative masculinities. This requires dialogue and collaborative efforts.

Genevieve James addresses, in chapter twelve, the plight of children who are eighteen years and younger whom she describes as invisible, in HIV AIDS discourses. The literature advocates
rights for children, provide statistics on infection among children and children orphaned by HIV AIDS. Violence that drives HIV AIDS is perpetrated by abuse from all sectors of society including schoolteachers, the state of poverty, as well as religious abuse where discrimination is sanctioned as in the Devadasi system. Religious communities respond favourably to the call to assist children with HIV AIDS but their activities need further coordination. Theological themes frequently used in HIV AIDS often invoke the value of children within the covenant of the family, promote hope, call on people to provide emotional support for children, develop a vision for children’s health, and work to help children delay sexual debut. Other scholars call for the church to work towards long-term care. Congregations have developed resources to strengthen young people respond to HIV AIDS and these include music, memory boxes to help youths remember and cope with the loss of relatives. The use of sacred texts by youths to address HIV AIDS, and agency of youths are areas under researched and there is need to study this area further.

In the practitioner response, Bongi Zengele invites further studies arguing that false assumptions such as the view that families take care of children are not always true because many children still face neglect, violence, and many end up being street children. Zengele calls for advocacy and a critical examination of easy moralization and instead develop a transformation approach in the context of the lived experience of children and youths.

Greg Manning’s essay Religion and HIV prevention surveying the contestations begins part four. Manning, in chapter thirteen, focuses on the seven principles of prevention articulated by UNAIDS. First, HIV prevention needs to be adapted to local needs taking into considerations the relevant issues on epidemiology, economy, and socio-cultural issues. CHART Bibliography mentions prevention over 80 times indicating that scholars of religion take prevention seriously. Different theological traditions address prevention in the context of education, collaboration across sectors, social responsibilities and morality. Islamic scholars have
also called for a contextual approach to prevention and intervention. In the Christian tradition, scholars like Musa Dube have adopted an ecumenical approach and proposed the development of a theological curriculum that includes HIV AIDS. Culturally, male circumcision has received support as a prevention method. Social researchers have explored public knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour in comparative perspectives, calling for sensitive multi-sectoral interventions. On economics, Michael Keely has addressed these issues in a global economic exploitative context and called for the practice of justice as an alternative to global programs promoted by organizations like UNAIDS that have not adequately addressed poverty, inequality, and injustice.

CHART Bibliography lists indicate that the first prevention strategy is theological insights that address the epidemic in areas where it is concentrated; for example, in Africa, African American communities, among drug users and sex workers. Theologians have debated homosexuality in general even though the evidence is clear that HIV AIDS is not a homosexual disease. But in the light of continued vicious discrimination against homosexuals, some scholars approach the debate in light of sacred texts, while others focus on justice and equality. The second prevention principle is that such efforts should be grounded on human rights. These rights have been promoted by religious groups including the World Council of Churches and individual scholars from Islamic and Christian theological viewpoints. Rights include equality, justice, as well as gender equality. The third prevention principle emphasizes evidence-informed and evidence-based analysis that points to areas that should be expanded. The concern for truth and scientific perspective are two sides of the coin that remain crucial in prevention strategies. The literature also discuss the debates on condom use, studies of sexuality and HIV AIDS, the debate on the impact of abstinence strategies in the wake of the ABC approach and the reduction in the rate of prevalence in Uganda, the place and role of the President’s Emergency Fund for HIV AIDS and Malaria
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(PEPFAR). Manning calls for balance in research and scholars of religion should demonstrate accountability in their research.

The fourth principle calls for a prevention program that is comprehensive in scope and uses policy and programmatic interventions that are effective. To accomplish this scholars have called for multi-sectoral prevention programs, ecumenical theological dialogue, strengthening institutional capacity, cultivation of partnerships on controversial issues like promotion of condoms, needle exchange, and coordination of prevention strategies among gay men. The fifth principle states that prevention is an on-going long-term project and because of this view, theologians have called for a curriculum that trains church leaders about HIV AIDS. The sixth principle requires that prevention be carried on a scale that would “make a critical difference.” Actors should collaborate with Faith Based Organizations, governmental and non-governmental agencies. The seventh principle of prevention calls for community participation in programs aimed at having critical impact. Prevention needs to include all sectors of the society. Gay men in the US have worked out this approach with Muslim leaders, the WCC, Catholic scholarship, studies by women on women and theological reflection. Manning concludes that these principles need to be applied simultaneously because HIV prevention must be connecting people, the community, and God without discrimination.

In the practitioner response Johaness Petrus Mokgesthi-Heath argues that the simplistic view that if we could only test people and isolate people with the virus HIV and AIDS would be taken care of is wrong. Manning’s chapter also indicates that a medical approach to prevention alone will not work. Mokgesthi-Heath outlines a useful approach to prevention developed by ANERELA called SAVe which stands for safer practice (personal and medical practices including safe sex), Available medical interventions and the promotion of Voluntary counselling and testing, and Empowerment.
In chapter 14, Gillian Paterson discusses stigma in HIV AIDS. Stigma includes self-stigma and stigma caused by religion. Both should be addressed theologically and ethically. Mapping stigma must be broad, interdisciplinary, start with those living with HIV AIDS, recognize multiple stories of stigma, and examine themes that appear frequently in the literature. Paterson argues that individual stories from Gideon Byamungisha, Noerine Kaleeba, Godwin Cameroon, who live with HIV AIDS are powerful and should be studied and analysed carefully. Examining stigma calls for a contextual hermeneutics. Although literature from medicine, sociology, anthropology, psychology and theories of institutions have contributed to our understanding of stigma, mapping it through the notion of pollution as articulated by Mary Douglas provide insights into gender, sexuality, sin, and body taboo. Recent Christian, philosophical, and theological discourses challenge stigmatization and scapegoating in HIV AIDS discourses. Stigma is also linked to sex demonized in the Christian context where sexuality has been bipolarized and pathologized. The human body, especially the woman’s body has been the target of stigma. Addressing stigma calls for an imitation of Jesus who healed and integrated the sick into the community. Finally, Paterson argues that economic and social marginalization fuels stigma. Further research is needed to provide an interdisciplinary understanding of stigma and create a basis for an appreciable theological perspective on stigma.

In the practitioner response, Gideon Byamugisha laments the reality of stigma and states: “many community members, political leaders, policy framers, and legislators do not hide their feelings that preferably HIV positive people should be withdrawn from society by resort to tough laws that criminalizes both HIV infection and transmission.”(p. 366)

In chapter fifteen Jill Olivier and Paula Clifford outline care and support in the context of HIV and AIDS by religious communities; a subject made complex by what can be done, what is being done, and the sheer fact that care is offered at institutions,
homes, and family level, and the relationship care offered at these venues has to primary and secondary healthcare. They point to the great potential for care at the community level where there is an ethos of care and compassion although certain theological positions promote stigma and exclusion. Care givers include healthcare professionals, healthcare institutions, religious leaders who provide pastoral care, volunteers (paid and unpaid; a group that calls for further studies to understand the motivation), the religious views and the role financial incentives plays or could play in volunteerism. Support groups in communities also provide care in different forms. Healthcare networks and local congregations also give care. Caregivers in these contexts include medical staff and trained lay workers in the congregations.

Care is gendered because women provide most of the care. Care givers themselves often need care; and they often succumb to stress and depression due to the pressure placed on them to care for others. Care giving includes primary activities such as giving support to orphans and vulnerable children and home based care. Caregivers take a holistic approach; providing emotional, spiritual, physical, palliative care, and support for people coping with death and bereavement. Religious communities also provide emotional support to family members who have difficulties; they provide intangible care and tangible support. Such communal care giving has also been documented in Islamic communities and is attributed to Islamic teaching on mercy and compassion. While care has been documented, there are still problems. For example studies done in Eastern and Southern Africa demonstrate that the churches do not provide they are capable of providing because some lack resources. There is also great concern that religious communities focus on care at the expense of prevention activities. Finally, religious communities seem to do it alone and not collaborate with other stakeholders. A broad innovation to care should embrace individual as well as established institutional approaches to care.

The practitioner response by Edwina Ward highlights volunteer care in Africa, especially care given by older women who
rely on their own resources and need support. Many caregivers lack training, skills, and often experience burn out. Citing a recent study, Ward suggests that the future of care giving in Africa will depend on a successful relationship between African states and religious communities. While care giving in religious communities and professional contexts has a long history, more research is needed on the spirituality of care. Ward argues: “the area of spiritual care and the need for understanding of religious and cultural rituals is underplayed in the area of care and support.”(p. 393)

Chapter sixteen of this volume contains stories of hope written by people living with HIV AIDS. Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela tells the story of her diagnosis, the despair, trauma of disclosing her status, decision to have children and the time of delivery itself, and living on ARV and the side effect, and her decision to educate others on safe sex. HIV positive people experience injustice and indifference in the church. In the second story, Faghmeda Miller talks of getting married and discovering that her husband infected her. After a period of despair, Miller decided to be a spokesperson for Muslims living with HIV. She started a support group to provide counselling and has completed a manuscript on HIV positive women that was not published at the time she told her story. She also completed her pilgrimage to Mecca. The other touching story is that of Johaness Petrus Mokgethi-Health, a clergy and his partner Paul and their struggle with HIV from diagnosis to coming out to family, taking ARVS, and eventually joining forces with the Gideon Foundation and ANERELA, the support network of clergy living with HIV AIDS. This opened up opportunities for him to deal with his situation, but also minister in a global context and educate people about HIV AIDS. These stories reflect not only personal struggles and courage to be honest, human, but also the determination to live positive lives and dedicate their time to educate and serve other people.
Comment and Discussion

*Religion and HIV and AIDS* is a rich and compelling text. One of its unique contributions is that scholars provide critical analysis of the literature on HIV AIDS and practitioners are invited to respond to these critical analysis of the literature based on their engagement with HIV AIDS. The editor and authors demonstrate that even when the work of scholars of religion are ignored in the name of evidence-based research, theologians are increasingly looking beyond their own disciplines and taking a critical look at the work done by religious organizations and are willing to discuss the *aporias* of their work and the stewardship of religious organizations in HIV and AIDS. In addition to a very well thought out introduction, the editor, Haddad, identifies several areas for future studies such as inter-faith collaboration in the analysis of particular and contextual practices, more dialogue with people living with HIV and AIDS, a better understanding of the intangible assets which religious communities bring to the table, the need for greater and deeper theological reflection, and the imperative to pay attention to the collaborative relationship between religious and other actors in health and HIV AIDS work. This book is a fresh reminder to scholars who study HIV AIDS from a theological perspective that they are part of a vast trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies and should constantly seek the ideas of other scholars in “epidemiology, biostatistics, health services, environmental, social and behavioral health and occupational health” to build on and strengthen the scholarship explored by the authors of the CHART book and the CHART Bibliography that has been created.

One area that is touched on by nearly all the authors and is found in CHART bibliography that still calls for attention is the relationship between the economy and religious and theological perspectives on HIV AIDS. This is a crucial area of concern to all scholars of religion and theologians because understanding the economy, could open the door to a richer analysis of the HIV AIDS
and global health situation that goes beyond the concerns about funding research on HIV AIDS. Understanding the economy could broaden perspectives on different aspects of its impact but also help scholars of religion understand key tools of econometrics to analyse and measure economic policy and performance especially when it comes to healthcare in African countries. It would be a mistake to claim that scholars of religion and theologians have ignored the economy altogether. They have discussed it in various ways including the many perspectives and critique of poverty, gender inequality, the lack of resources, the abuse of resources and money contributed for HIV projects, or the world of big donors, non-governmental, and faith based organizations, or special projects like PEPFAR and funding mechanisms available through the World Bank and the World Health Organization.

Building on the insights articulated in Religion and HIV, and drawing from the online CHART bibliography, scholars of religion and theologians ought to revisit the debate on healthcare economy for several reasons. First, while it is impossible to account for the economy of healthcare in a comprehensive manner, careful analysis could provide clues on how much has been devoted to fighting HIV AIDS during the last thirty-one years. There are serious concerns about what has happened to the resources that have been directed to HIV AIDS in some countries where rates of prevalence remains high. Second, a critical analysis of that literature as well as the technical literature by experts on the economy, could also help us understand what has worked well (meaning the things that yielded good results based on what has been invested); although I must concede that it might still be early to determine the success of the resources that have been devoted to research.

Third, if the concerns of religious communities that have a huge stake in healthcare in the context of Africa are grounded on the idea of justice, whether that justice is understood from a socio economic or theological perspective, more research is needed to see what has worked and what has failed so that scholars can be able to assess if indeed justice is a priority on current health programs and
policies in the African context. Fourth, a critical study and analysis of the economic situation is an imperative to raise the question about the engagement of religious community in the development and articulation of healthcare policies that reflect the constitutional obligations of the state to provide justice for all its people. The role religious communities could play here would be that of advocacy on behalf of those who live on the margins of society. Such advocacy implies a good working knowledge of economic policies and global economic trends. In the context of Africa, this is important because African economies have started to grow. It is therefore important that those who have a stake in health care inquire about public investment in health care in different countries. While it is still the case that fighting HIV AIDS and other epidemics requires the support of the international community, each African government at its own level can increase its allocation towards the fight against HIV AIDS and set up local economic strategies that would be sustainable and not depend entirely on donors.

Fifth, religious communities could play an important role here by making sure that gender equality is at the heart and centre of any economic policy initiative in African countries. If gender equality could be reached by having the right constitutional framework, many African countries would have achieved such equality. What is required here is for a systematic education at all levels that would slowly but surely transform perception, cultural ideals about men and women, religious perspectives on gender, and move towards egalitarian models which, beginning with the girl child, recognizes women as equals who must be empowered to participate fully in economic activities of their respective countries. I think that religious communities can play a constructive role here by providing the leadership and insights needed to change both the prevailing theological and political culture that continues to put women in the economic back seat. Perhaps the one warning one could inject here is that in championing economic freedom and empowerment, religious communities must be weary of religious
approaches to the economy that focus on miracles and turn instead to rational public policy initiatives which takes seriously the state’s role in creating without dominating a financial system and an economic climate where all members of the political community can participate irrespective of their gender.

Finally, Religion and HIV AIDS is an important one-stop place to begin a rigorous compte rendu of the research published by scholars of religion and theologians on HIV AIDS. It is an invitation for detailed and sophisticated probing of the health issues facing Africa in order for religious communities to be better informed about their work and the place and responsibility in public policy initiatives. I am reminded of the remark made by Frank Dimmock that religious leaders and their communities (and here one could include scholars of religion and theologians) ought to join the dialogue or risk being on the menu.¹ Joining the conversation would call for a vigilance that continues to engage work done in global health and HIV AIDS by scholars in all fields including biomedical and the natural sciences.


The general theme of Christian-Muslim relationships is a pressing theological issue both theoretically and practically. Unfortunately, the topic is like a greased watermelon i.e., very slippery and extremely difficult to wrap ones arms around and hold onto. Too often, Christianity and Islam are categorized as univocal realities. In reality, they are multifaceted, dynamic and pluralistic realities. The many types, forms, attitudes and contexts of Christianity and Islam are astounding and give rise to the challenge of trying to understand each separate and in relationship.

*Can Muslims And Christians Resolve Their Religious And Social Conflicts?* is a collated work of essays which endeavours to realistically ask whether or not Muslims and Christians can resolve their religious and social conflicts and move from dialogue to collaborative actions. Iwuchukwu and Stiltner are courageous in embracing the task of collecting and editing the book’s essays and staying on target.

The text has four major parts. The first part, in three essays, examines Christian-Muslim relations with an African focus. M. Iwuchukwu’s essay studies conflicts in Northern Nigeria. He argues that portraying the Northern Nigerian conflicts as primarily religious is an exaggeration and over simplification. The conflicts reach far back into history and are fuelled by ethnic, political and economic/financial interests. He argues for a needed change in mentality about who are natives and non-natives, a need for economic changes and a need for political empowerment. He also supplies us with useful graphs that assist in valuing the cost of conflict.

J. Kenny lived in Nigeria for more than 40 years was a Dominican priest professor. He illustrates that many of the conflicts
in Nigeria are misunderstood. In practice, many Christians and Muslims have a positive understanding of each other and their respective traditions. He is optimistic that Christians and Muslims can live in peace, cooperation and friendship. The key on both the Christian side and the Muslim side is authenticity to their true religious convictions and traditions. The third essay by Cyril Orji addresses the relationship between Christians and Muslims from a wider horizon of the entire African continent. He argues that one of the great challenges facing Africa is identity formation. Ethnicity and religion are not in themselves the root cause of conflicts across Africa according the Orji. Rather, it is the manipulation of religion and ethnicity for financial and political power which gives rise to most conflicts. If Africa can cast off the spiritual malaise imposed by colonization and work towards national identity, religious conflicts should be more easily addressed.

The two essays of part two take up Muslim-Christian relations in the American context. Sheridan argues that an examination of Muslim immigration history in three waves reflects with a surprising parallelism the immigration history of Christians in the United States. Moreover, both religious traditions face an American cultural context which is increasingly secular and necessarily presents a challenge to both traditions. Herein might be a common context and challenge where these two religious traditions can better understand their history and collaborate in addressing an important practical issue. Khlood Falk Salman illustrates how a public health approach to violence can educate people to understand and appreciate diversity throughout society. By extension, religious violence can also be addressed in the public health sector.

Part three of the book demonstrates how dialogue is intrinsic to the Christian tradition. Mali utilizes the John’s gospels’ story of the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus as a model of how Christians can dialogue with other religious traditions in our present time. His investigation of this correctly shows that Jesus overcame different challenges in his communication with the Samaritan woman. Most importantly Jesus moved beyond the
conventional mentality of his time. Christianity today must also engage in a genuine conversation by moving out of its pre-Vatican II views of non-Christian religious traditions. Uzukwu reports on how the ethos and charism of the congregation of the Holy Ghost was able to engage the cultures of both East and West Africa. Paramount in this effort was the principles of dialogue and good neighbourliness. Both of these elements underscore the centrality of the kingdom of God and its proclamation in the Christian tradition. Stiltner indicates how an ethical perspective, which focuses on love of God and love of neighbour, can lay a foundation for future interfaith discussion and praxis. He argues that both Benedict’s “God is Love” and Prince Ghazi’s “A Common Word” are rooted in this vision.

The final section of this text focuses on Christian Muslim dialogue from a Muslim perspective. Hermensen argues that beyond conversation and didactic dialogues, performative dialogues are the most prevalent model embraced by Muslim’s on College campuses. He notes the values and limits of this model to the Muslim community. Saritoprak’s essay completes the book project. He adeptly demonstrates Christian and Muslims in dialogue is not completely novel in the US. It enjoys historical precedents across US history. He calls for a dialogue that is future focused, embraces common themes and challenges, and includes experiential components.

Overall, the text succeeds in disclosing several dimensions of the Christian Muslim dialogue from the varying horizons and viewpoints. At the same time, it is hard to detect how each of the particular essays is related to the others—except in a most general fashion. In this respect, the book resembles more of a sampling of perspectives, than a concentrated effort at integration and development of one theme. It can serve as a first introduction, which will encourage an interest in further exploring this profoundly important topic. While the text has a bibliography based on works cited by the authors in their individual essays, it might have been more helpful to provide a select bibliography specifically on the topic of Christianity and Islam in dialogue.
Nonetheless, the text provides a collage of interesting insights from particular perspectives.

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*Can Muslims and Christians Resolve their Religious and Social Conflicts?* is a collection of “some articles that originated as talks at a conference on Muslim-Christian relation and is aimed at addressing how Muslims and Christians living in pluralistic societies, especially Africa and the United States, can promote values of toleration and co-operation” (p. xii). The first hand experiences of the wide array of the contributing authors in the book inject a distinctive richness in thoughts and freshness of suggestions in appropriately responding to the focus of the book. The book is written in four parts, contextually covering the relationships of Muslims and Christians in Africa and the United States of America.

This review focuses on the first part of the book which concentrates on the African context of Muslim-Christian religious conflicts experiences. While the chapters by Marinus Iwuchukwu and Joseph Kenny specifically focus on Nigeria, the chapter by Cyril Orji runs an analytical thread through a bottom line factor in ‘Muslim-Christian conflicts in Africa.’

In chapter one, “Revisiting the Perennial Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria, 1990 – 2010: Broadening the Focus of Muslim-Christian Dialogue”, Iwuchukwu considers the root causes of religious violence in northern Nigeria as more of a “combination of economic, political, and religious factors;” the religious component attracts “international and indeed global attention and sympathy” (p. 4). Thus, in diagnosing and prescribing lasting model for conflict management in Northern Nigeria, a historical background as well as an understanding of the fundamentalism
often associated with Islam in Northern Nigeria, is very important. Possible areas to consider in this regard includes the Uthman dan Fodio’s jihad; “besides being a conservative Sunni Islamic revolution, [it] had a strong Wahhabi and/or Salafiyyah... philosophical and theological influences.” (p.9) While the chapter did trace the root of religious fundamentalism and violence in Northern Nigeria to Uthman dan Fodio’s jihad, it does concede that the caliphate as at then “did not press its subjects to become Muslims.” (p. 8) Iwuchukwu rightly suggests that the causes of violence between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria are not always religious but about value systems (p. 35). Consequently, exploring solutions in “circles of religious and high level political leaders” (35) may not help beyond “experiencing more intense violence than before.” (p. 35) What could help in resolving religious and social conflicts between Muslims and Christians include: disclosure of comprehensive data on the cost of every religiously motivated conflict, appropriate policies and laws, and involvement of all patriotic Nigerians living and working in Northern Nigeria. The forms of dialogue preferred for this engagement, according to Iwuchukwu, are the dialogue of action and the dialogue of life. One wonders, however, if the dialogue of religious experience and of theological discourse wouldn’t have a major role to play given the fundamentalist ideologies that apparently underscore most of the conflicts in northern Nigeria that are characteristically religious.

The strength of this chapter lies partly in providing statistical data to stress the human and economic cost of religious violence in northern Nigeria and, further, in attempting a prognosis as well as making recommendations towards managing the incessant religious conflicts in that part of the country. The effort is important because there have apparently been “no comprehensive records of such economic and human losses suffered resulting from such religious conflict with details on the monetary value of the losses and the economic impact on different cities of the nation.” (p. 13) “This lack of comprehensive financial data is a symptom of the Nigerian
government's inability and/or unwillingness to address these crises effectively.” (p. 17)

Chapter two, “The Problems and Promises of Muslim-Christian Politics,” is authored by Joseph Kenny, born and raised in the US, acquired a Nigerian citizenship and proudly identified himself as such. He is a catholic priest and an Arabic and Islamic studies scholar. Kenny answered the question Can Muslim and Christians Resolve Their Religious and Social Conflicts? in the affirmative, noting that “not all the conflict(s) have a religious dimension.” (p. 39) While acknowledging that some causes are religious, he finds other causes in struggles over land, the pursuit of political interests, “the Caliphate Conspiracy theory,” “Taliban ideology” and the preaching that builds on the idea that “an infidel (kāfir) cannot rule over Muslims.” (51) Armed with Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, Dignitatis Humane and sections from Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae, Kenny affirms the Catholic Church’s basis for religious pluralism and freedom of worship. He acknowledges that Muslims also want peace, and that even when the ordinary Muslims opt for the Shari’a, they “want nothing more than to confirm their actions to God’s will.” To the many ordinary Nigerian Christians who are suspicious of the Muslims “because of the violence they see,” Kenny’s observation could be helpful: “the Wahhabi-inspired Izala movement—which has strong support among northern Muslims—not only promotes secular education, but also works within the Nigerian law, and rejects violence.” (p. 44)

One must be quick to note that whatever little hope the information offered above might have ignited on the Izala movement, it is damped by a realization that “Shari’a, as millions of Izala members and others in the northern states understand it, demands that a Christian may not rule them, and a Muslim who converts to another religion should be executed.” (p. 52) There is an apparent contradiction in Kenny’s perception of the Izala “working within the Nigerian law” (p. 44) yet denying adherents of religious freedom. In conclusion and according to Kenny, “Muslims and Christians in Nigeria live in peace, [but] [c]rises do
loom.” (p. 57) The solution to the situation is religious dialogue where the Christian takes seriously the religious ideal identified above and as many Muslims are already doing, “retaining the fundamentals of Islam, [while being] more tolerant and open to new interpretations of the Qur’an.” [p. 54]

Cyril Orji, in chapter three (“Muslim-Christian Conflicts in Africa: The Quest for Responsible Action”), focuses attention on “the perennial Muslim-Christian conflicts” in Africa. He adopted an analytical method in examining the “problem of identity formation” with an eye on developing “strategies for responsible action” that addresses Muslim-Christian conflicts (p. 59). Ultimately, he proposed interreligious dialogue as the key to realizing peace in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

Orji conceives “identity in a postmodern context” where identity is “not fixed or unchangeable” but a “reciprocal fluxion.” (p. 72) The central point in his argument is, “identity formation or self-constitution is an ever shifting process and cannot be neatly categorized or boxed into an either/or strictures.” (p. 82) Details in Orji’s analysis prove that while an “individual’s social identity is difficult to change by changing his/her religion” (p. 76), “identities can adapt to changing circumstances and be reconceived in the light of new ideas.” (p. 73) In this connection one wonders if there can be an authentic correlation of the Islamic and Christian call to ‘mission’ with a genuine religious identity formation while avoiding inter religious conflict?

In relation to resolving conflicts between Muslims and Christians, Orji adopts Amarty Sen’s Spiritual decolonization in African identity formation and self-constitution. Spiritual decolonization means abandoning, among other things, all simplistic and narrow classifications for all-embracing and inclusive ones. A suggestion on a specific mode of application of Sen’s model to resolving Muslim-Christian conflict would have justified its adaptation and present an improvement on Sen’s efforts. Furthermore, what action plan could ensure a necessary distinctiveness of identity as a Muslim/Christian in an effort
towards “togetherness that acknowledges the complex contradictory forces of society” (p. 84)?

On the iconic moment model for putting an end to seemingly endless Muslim-Christian brutalities in the continent, there is an obvious presumption of the presence of a central authority in both religions. The absence of such authority renders the implementation of the model almost impossible. “Islam has no doctrinal authority, no pope or councils” to determine what is the correct understanding of Islam (p. 53). Similarly, it is preposterous to assume a central Christian authority that could come “hard on Christians who partake in religious violence” as the model proposes (p. 85).

Can Muslims and Christians Resolve their Religious and Social Conflicts? The three authors in the first three chapters respond in the affirmative. Specifically, Kenny buttresses this response with an affirmation, “we see it in practice every day.” A common problem addressed by the authors is how “to secure this peace, which is facing serious threats.” (p. 45). The three authors, who themselves have a first-hand experience of particular instances of Muslim-Christian conflicts, agreed that such conflicts do have a religious dimension but that is not often the case. Hence, if there should be a far reaching solution to the incessant social and religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians, other factors than the spontaneous religious reasons often inferred must be considered. The chapters are prolifically written and quite relevant to academic and interreligious dialogue purposes.

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African theologians have continued to labour tirelessly to make sense of the Christian faith in their African homeland. This has resulted in a number of theological currents with which they have aligned themselves: liberation, inculturation, feminist, etc... It has also given rise to the on-going debate about the privileged entry point into the God-talk in Africa. Is it the Word of God? The Death of God on the Cross? The Crucified-Risen God? etc. Uzukwu’s *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness* is an important and timely contribution to this project of creative appropriation of the Christian faith. The book assumes significance against the background of his critique of these theologies, and of the privileged entry points urged by some theologians. These, according to Uzukwu, suffer from a common systemic weakness: “dependence on Western methodological assumptions” and Western metaphysics as is evident in their “one-dimensional focus on reality.” (p. 37) In addition, they are not sufficiently attentive to the history and the ancestral context in which West African Christians are rooted, to the dynamics of the spirit-dominated West African map of the universe, and to the history of the various Christian communities in West Africa, i.e., AICs, and Charismatic movements (p. 5).

Uzukwu undertook to refocus the God-talk in his West African world by “positioning the Holy Spirit on the driving seat of theology” and, hopefully, to offer to the rest of the Catholic world what any worthwhile theology cannot do without. His main thesis is that West African Christians are “primarily preoccupied with the Holy Spirit of God, revealed in the Crucified-Risen Jesus Christ, as the enabler of intensive communion,” and that this “Spirit that completely takes over the life of the Christian for holistic growth and healing of the community and individual …naturally becomes the entry point to explore the Triune God.” (p. 217)
book to defining and defending his methodology and methodological assumptions. He understands these in terms of “always taking a second look at everything”, or “vigilant memory.” (p. 8) In addition, he employed the statement: “Whenever something stands, something else will stand beside it” as “an underlying ontological principle that provides a sound instrument for accessing the West African universe” and “for exploring the appropriation of Christianity in West Africa.” (p. 19) This is the idea that whatever exists must be plural, that twin-ness is the defining feature of reality.

The second and major part of the book began with a critical revaluation of African Traditional Religions against the background of a careful reading of the map of the West African universe. This revaluation informed the claim that the West African religious universe, like the whole of reality, is multiple, flexible, dynamic, and relational (p. 69). In this universe, a supreme God, deities, ancestors, spirit-forces, and humans work together for the good of the human community (pp. 81,104). The supremacy of this God is not threatened by the multiplicity of divine beings, and does not diminish their agency because it is a dynamic, relational, and diffused supremacy (p. 103). Because this God is not a jealous God, there were no religious wars in West Africa before the coming of Islam and Christianity. The West African peoples’ love of multiplicity disposed them to freely extend hospitality to any deity that can help individuals and the community realize their objective in life.

Uzukwu was writing as a catholic theologian. It is, therefore, understandable that he devoted the next two chapters to exploring the Judeo-Christian religious tradition for possible relationships of reciprocal illumination between this tradition and ATR. He drew insights from the complex history of the emergence of the Hebrew Yahweh, and from Origen’s religious anthropology, especially his account of “the plural dimensions or denominations of Christ and the Holy Spirit” to show that “the West African is not utterly dissimilar from the Jewish-Christian experience of God.” (p. 105) His argument to this effect dovetailed beautifully with his informed
and insightful account of how AICs and the Charismatic movements tapped into the West African universe where God is experienced and worshipped as Spirit, and how they ended up with a Spirit-centered theory and practice of Christianity. AICs in particular transformed "the deities, that in the West African universe represent God-Spirit’s benevolent shadow or presence into qualities of the One Holy Spirit of God." (48, 176) Critical theological reflection on this resulted in privileging the Holy Spirit as the entry point into the God-talk.

The conclusions which Uzukwu’s multi-layered arguments reached harbour basically similar insights. He argued persuasively to the effect that West African Christians, rooted in their ancestral history and culture, experience and worship God as Spirit; that God, deities, spirit forces, ancestors and humans work together for the optimum realization of the destiny of the individual and the community; and that because West African Christianity is Spirit-driven, the God-Spirit (Holy Spirit) should be on the driving seat of theology (p. 218). This is to say that "any theology that takes its eye off the directing and abiding Holy Spirit is endangering its definition as Christian theology." (p. 217)

By all accounts, the book is a thoughtfully executed ambitious project. Its argument has been carefully crafted with materials harvested from fields as diverse as ATR, Biblical and Patristic studies, West African history, philosophical anthropology, social and political studies, African literature, etc. This book has the beauty of a work of art and is destined to reward any reading, no matter how casual. Among other things, it opens up a space for rethinking available theologies of war, and for a worthwhile engagement in inter-religious dialogue in a conflict-ridden world, etc. Its claims are as insightful as they are thought-provoking. Some have revolutionary implications for theology and theological conclusions. A good example is the claim that every conclusion to any discussion should be left open-ended (p. 11). This way of thinking belongs to that dialectical logic which preserves the truth content of what is negated in the process. In the context of this book, it ensured that the ancestral is not abandoned on the
scrapheap of history. Thanks to it, Uzukwu, very much to his credit, demonstrated that it is possible to preserve the ancestral heritage, not just as ancestral but as Christian. On the other hand, however, this way of thinking relativizes everything including privileged entry points, and the ancient and sacred verities of religions. Ultimately, it paves the way to the end of normative epistemology. For obvious reasons, this is not the road along which loyal sons and daughters of the Church will like travel.

I have reasons to believe that, consistent with his privileged principle of always taking a second look at everything, Uzukwu will take a second look at this book—at its major claims and conclusions. Perhaps, this will be at a distant future time, as a nonagenarian. I am sure he will wonder then why he ever claimed that he was proposing the catholic way of doing theology instead of a way—perhaps, a better way It is conceivable that he will also see the need to shed more light on the concept of inclusive, relational and dynamic supremacy/hierarchy. No matter how inclusive and dynamic, supremacy is still supremacy. The supreme God is still the one effectively in-charge. If this God does not diminish or interfere with the agency of the deities, it is most probably because these deities operate within the boundaries set for them. One is reminded of the God of the biblical Job “who pent up the sea behind closed doors” and “marked the bounds it was not to cross.” Finally and, of course, on a lighter note, Uzukwu will surely wonder why he used the expression, Whenever something stands, something stands beside it”, so many times—as a constant refrain. For emphasis? To engrave it in the minds of his readers? Hopefully, it will dawn on him then that the majority of his readers were too mature for a “nursery rhyme”.

In the last analysis, for very many years to come, this book will remain an invaluable asset especially for all interested in keeping theological discourse alive, vibrant and relevant particularly in the West African sub-region.

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