Stating the Problem—Repositioning God on the Driving Seat of African Theology:

African theology has come a long way. Second and third generation sub-Saharan African Christians may not be as preoccupied with issues of identity that dominated African theology in the 1950s. They live the postcolonial reality. It is a long way from the seminal *Des Prêtres noirs s’interrogent* (Black Priests Wonder) of 1956. Leading young African theologians today are concerned more about the wholesome appropriation of the historical self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ than questions of identity. They perceive the appropriation of this self-communication and self-gift of God in Jesus Christ as the necessary channel to fully humanize and integrally liberate all Africans and all humans! Therefore a self-defensive or apologetic cultural account/affirmation of one’s humanity provoked by experiences such as slavery, racism, dehumanization, lynching, colonization, globalization, and hosts of other evils that trail Africa’s unhappy memory should no longer constitute the starting point of knowing and practicing the faith in the God revealed by Jesus Christ. Theological reflection on the faith should be guided by the insight of Lutheran theologian Karl Barth. He insisted, against Schleiermacher and other protagonists of liberal theology, that theology must be concerned with its object, “the Word of God” addressed to humans. Only God tells humans who God is. Appropriating this Word creates, renews or transforms humans, and facilitates the emergence of the community called Church. Therefore, contemporary African theologians should set aside self-
defensive aggressive apologetics that was the stock-in-trade of pioneer African theologians.

On the other hand, this emerging option should in no way be construed as belittling the historical importance of context or the relevance of giving an account of the humanity of Africans denied by others. At times, in the past, for African theologians, this account amounted to hurling back on colonial anthropology and missionary rhetoric responses crafted in terms similar to those used in abusing the humanity of Africans: “How can the untutored African conceive God ... How can this be? ... Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing” (Emil Ludwig). Mbiti responded, “Western missionaries did not introduce God to Africa – rather, it was God who brought them to Africa, as carriers of news about Jesus Christ.” Is such defensive or apologetic approach a betrayal of Christian theology, as some young African theologians claim? Is this a case of taking the eye off the theological task? Indeed, is Okot p’Bitek’s characterization of African theologians, John Mbiti in particular, as “hellenizers” of African Traditional Religion (ATR), defensible? Is Ifi Amadiume’s claim that the Nigerian (Igbo) theologians’ naming of God, reduced to “the single truth of a supreme male God” for promoting an ideological continuity between ATR and Christianity, accurate? Have theologians totally abandoned African “traditional pluralism” (Amadiume)? Are pioneers really uncritical because they describe God in ATR and Christianity as “Supreme Being” (adopting the language of anthropologists or theorists of religion), or are they simply using ready to hand models to discuss God experienced in African communities? Is their “resistance polemics”, i.e. self-defensive apologetics, developed in the heat of conflict justifiable?

1 Amadiume calls “resistance polemics” Nzagwalu, Igbo for “answering back”: with the “devastating power of the ‘mouth’ or the hard-hitting accuracy of the ‘pen’”. She finds this useful in critical polemics. It is similar to what in African literature is called Bolekaja, Yoruba for “come down, let’s fight”, associated with touts at the motor park. Ifi Amadiume, Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture (London & New York: Zed Books, 1997). 61-64. See
and understandable from their historical perspective? The above orienting questions help us to evaluate the radical challenge new generation African theologians pose to theology in Africa.

In exploring the attempt to reposition God on the driving seat of African theology one notes that ATR and its culture are transmitters of identity. The faith community and theologians are aware of this. The late Kwame Bediako, an evangelical theologian, defended the positive role of apologetics: the “integrity of conversion” requires “a unity of self in which one’s past is genuinely integrated into present commitment”. Also Catholic philosopher-theologian, Eboussi-Boulaga, says the same thing: “A living community’s past cannot be contradistinguished from its present as ‘true’ or ‘false’. What has given one’s ancestors reasons for living and dying cannot simply be repudiated as absurd and senseless by one who finds oneself in human continuity with them”. These two theologians are not soft on inculturation and indigenization rhetoric; rather they sharply take them to task. Are they also hellenizers of Christianity? I do not think that they are diverted from the theological task because they raise questions of self-identity or apologetics.


Introducing Ukwuije, Ramazani and Kungua:

The three young African theologians-philosophers I am going to open a conversation with understand the task or business of theology as centred on its object. Theology is concerned with theological issues and not with defensive apologetics, nor with sociology or anthropology. Nevertheless, the pre-comprehension of their theology is the African context. Following Karl Barth, they all insist that theology’s object is the Word of God addressed by God to humans in the historical revelation of the Crucified Jesus Christ! All three theologians are Catholic, trained in French universities and wrote in French. The fundamental evangelical inspiration and even starting point of their theology testify to the ecumenical perspective of new generation African theologians.

Bede Ukwuije studied at the Catholic University of Paris (Institut Catholique de Paris) and published his thesis with the title *Trinité et Inculturation*. Instead of an anthropological or apologetic starting point, Ukwuije proposes a theological approach to the theology of God; God that is historically revealed in Jesus Christ and that identifies God’s self with the Crucified Jesus. He discovers in evangelical theologian, Ebehard Jüngel, a rich methodology for inculturation. The way Jüngel confronted secularization and atheism in the West, to account for the faith, is theological rather than philosophical-apologetic. Jüngel does not belittle philosophy (influence by Hegel), rather philosophy functions as instrument in the God-talk. God-talk is fundamentally determined by and faithful to the experience of the Crucified (incarnate) Son of God; God that is One and Three. Anthropology, the doctrine of the human person, flows from this: faith in the Crucified God justifies, gives identity to the human person. Ukwuije considers this the viable pathway to transform Africans by helping them correctly say God in Jesus Christ. He sees the project

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of theology in his African constituency as converting Africans to the God revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, rather than trying to persuade Africans to become Christian by elaborating a discourse of the continuity between the God of ATR and the God of Jesus Christ.

Augustin Ramazani Bishwende studied theology at the University of Strasbourg. He published his thesis in two volumes: *Pour une Ecclésiologie Trinitaire dans la Postmodernité et la Mondialisation* He argues that the crisis in the modern world that is related to the crisis of the Western church can only be effectively addressed theologically with a Trinitarian image of the church: a church that embodies the transforming imprint of the One God in Three Persons. God’s own life as God (immanent) and God as revealed in the Crucified and Risen Jesus (economic) create the Church-event with radical consequences. The relational and communal dimension of God’s self as communicated through Jesus Christ engenders communion, sharing, dialogue, and respect for cultures in the postmodern world that is determined by globalization. Vatican II opened the possibility of renewal for the Church to enable the church mediate a turnaround of the world of globalization. From Vatican II the Church embraced a Trinitarian ecclesiology that differs from the institutional, monarchical, and societal Church model that shaped and dominated Church life in the world after the Council of Trent: this institutional model peaked in excessive centralization and intolerance of Vatican I. Ramazani’s passion is to explore historical developments and propose a new "reception" of Vatican II to radically apply in church and world the relational and communal Trinitarian image of the Church that is non-hierarchal. This Church model determined by the Triune God revealed in the Crucified-Risen Jesus Christ.

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displays radical communion and relationship that is non-hierarchical. It displays a church where in the Holy Spirit and nourished by Eucharistic communion universal and particular/local are coextensive.

Finally, Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua studied philosophy at the University of Paris IV – Sorbonne, and theology at the University Marc Bloch, Strasbourg. His focus is to develop a holistic image of the God Crucified in Jesus Christ for the integral liberation of Africans. He readily appropriates the positive energies of African liberation theology and political theory represented especially by Engelbert Mveng, Jean-Marc Ela, Kä Mana, and Archille Mbembe. In analysing the Christian revelation of the One God in the Crucified and Risen Jesus, he espouses the viewpoint of his fellow national, Congolese theologian Oscar Bimwenyi-Kweshi, by affirming identity, though with radical difference, between God in ATR and God revealed in Jesus Christ. He rejects a naïve approach to African identity, critically analyses the causes of the malaise of Africans and African countries, and indexes their internal and external causes (he elaborates a critical narrative, suffused with Congolese rhetorical verve in which he denounced in no uncertain terms, the corrupt Mobutu era in Zaire and the present dictatorial regimes in Africa like the dictatorship of Biya in Cameroon). Western philosophers and communication theorists that radically critiqued one-dimensional Western modernity (especially Martin Heidegger, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas) inspired Kungua’s critique of globalisation’s impact on Africa. But he embeds his analysis of Trinitarian liberation on the evangelical political theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Catholic political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. These gave him the language to explore the self communication of God in the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ for integral liberation of humans and Africans. They provide him with the tools of rhetorically challenging globalisation through the dangerous remembering of the Crucified and the critical narrative of the vanquished. Finally, he also draws from the wealth of Jewish mysticism to anchor his
theology of holistic liberation or inculturation-liberation within his African constituency. The recourse to mysticism enables him address critically and positively the mystical and therapeutic contribution of African initiated churches and charismatic prayer movements of the mainline missionary churches.

Ukwuije and Kungua have each published a digest of their books in Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology. Ramazani is being introduced, for the first time, to readers of the Bulletin through this review. However, they all share the same concern—the priority of the One Triune God revealed through the Crucified and Risen Jesus as focus of theology. Ukwuije and Kungua clearly show that Africa is their constituency. On the other hand, Ramazani, Congolese by origin, uses France and the Western Church as point of departure and arrival to discuss Trinitarian ecclesiology. The ease with which the three argue from and recognise the vitality of evangelical theology, catholic theology, and, to a lesser degree, Orthodox theology, speak to the emerging concern of the new generation African theologians – the ecumenical imperative of Christian life and theology. My evaluation is from three perspectives: the limits of apologetics, the priority of the object of theology, and the need to revisit the constituency of the theologian.

**Distancing Theology from Apologetics:**

The apologetic approach, as starting point of theology, is clearly rejected by Ukwuije and Ramazani, and to a lesser degree by Kungua. It is my view that what they reject is negative apologetics. The question-raising and context-specific function of apologetics is inescapable in their theology, and in any theology! “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Ramazani’s two volumes have the design of moving away from negative polemical and defensive apologetics that generate an insulated church; a church that lays high premium on visibility—as true incarnation of Christ in the world, it is the visible Body of
Christ and a perfect society under the Vicar of Christ, the Pope. Despite the effort of Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) to root the Church radically within the Christ and the God that is Three in One, Ramazani correctly notes that the limited historical preoccupation with the societal model of a church, with a very strong accent on visibility, bottled Bellarmine within the scholastic apologetic, defensive and condemnatory procedure. The terminus of the impact of Robert Bellarmine’s model of the Church, focused on the Christ – incarnating the Christ in the world – is the Vatican I institutional, hierarchical, and monarchical Church. Vatican II and post-Vatican II ecclesiology were unsuccessful in the effort to transcend the societal or institutional image of the Church. In his two volumes Ramazani proposes to deconstruct models and reinvent the church through a new “reception” of Vatican II. This new reception is rooted in the recovery of the patristic, ecumenical and biblical image of the church that is Trinitarian. To realise his objective Ramazani espouses a positive historical-critical reading of Scripture and Christian (Patristic) sources pursued by theologians such as Moehler, Newman and Congar. Their approach, he notes, is constructive apologetics that meditates on the mystery of God and elaborates a theology of the church founded on the object of theology (I: 102-103). Karl Barth defines this object as the Word of God addressed to humans for their conversion; the church-event results from the reaction to the Word proclaimed. Ramazani’s approach is historical. He stresses that as Robert Bellarmine represents the Church model that he finds unhelpful (volume I), Yves Congar is the theologian of the emergent Church that debuts at Vatican II. The illustration of emergent Trinitarian ecclesiology, based on relationship and communion, is the adoption of Inculturation, dialogue and ‘contexturation’ inform the Church of the future rooted in the Trinity. By ‘contexturation’ Ramazani understands a Trinitarian approach that radically transforms the structures of the Church to make it more resilient to change the globalised world. Vatican II enabled cultural transformation in the church but totally ignored the transformation of structures. (I: 93-
95) Ramazani’s focus is on ecclesiology. But his search for the theological foundations led him to discuss at length historical developments of Trinitarian theology. Ukwuije and Kungua on their part not only discuss the foundations of the developments in Trinitarian theology. They also explored the radical consequences, for life in the Church and the world, of a recapture and renewal of theology based on the Trinity. Methodologically all three assume that theology must never take its eye off its object.

In light of the focus on the object of theology, we explore the very difficult questions Ukwuije asks about how to and how not to name God in Christianity practiced in Africa and the world. His consummate passion is to persuade contemporary African theologians to change focus. Theology in Africa has no more business with continuity between ATR and Christianity; the “supreme being” rhetoric should be denied airtime because it takes the eye off the task of theology (God and Christ). Pioneer African theologians adopted the language or terms of their teachers and detractors to name God. They engaged in this without critical distance and without the imperative attentiveness to the dogmatic responsibility of all theology: the death of Jesus the Son of God as the Death of God on the Cross. This totally novel image of God escaped pioneer African theologians. They were dependent on the 19th century Catholic natural theology and liberal protestant theology; they affirmed identity between the ATR God, called the “Supreme Being” (a concept developed by deist philosophers and co-opted by anthropologists), and the God of Jesus Christ. For Ukwuije this is totally unacceptable. Accepting the “supreme being” as ATR God and establishing identity between the ATR God and the God of Jesus Christ are neither good for Christian theology nor attentive to the uniqueness of ATR. Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo, for example, bought into the apologetic rhetoric for reasons of identity.

Ukwuije’s focus is a new method in theology. One agrees with him that Mbiti and Idowu practiced defensive apologetics. But it is important to state that it is apologetics with justifiable arguments, despite the many pitfalls. Their methodology,
dependent on the social sciences, needed updating; it was unable to free them from the pessimism or feeling of loss which characterized African literature of their time (Chinua Achebe whose methodology Ukwuije approves is master of this pessimism as aesthetic). I think their contribution can be received as a necessary introduction, a prolegomenon or pre-comprehension to the Christian theology of God. Their greatest weakness, again not uncommon among researchers of the time, is inattention to ethnographic detail that projects plurality in deity rather than one Supreme Deity. Their interest in affirming continuity between the God of ATR and the monotheistic Western Christian God revealed in Jesus Christ is an attempt to Christianize a pre-Christian religious heritage and language. Ukwuije of course does not ignore the contribution of the pioneers. In his dialogue with them, he shows a pattern of critical "reception" or radical distancing that characterises new generation African theologians.

Ukwuije's procedure is defensible and falls within Chinua Achebe's mantra of always searching for "a second viewpoint". However, I think the demands he makes on theologians like Bénézet Bujo, Bmwenyi-Kweshi and Eboussi-Boulaga are exaggerated. By this critical remark I also distance myself from the exaggerations of radical evangelical theology. He commends Bujo for abandoning the language of continuity; for insisting that God, experienced in Africa, has become better known as Triune thanks to the Crucified and Risen Christ; for carefully noting that the experience of the Christ shatters and transforms the ancestral African experience. However, Ukwuije claims that Bujo's theology is still boxed within an irredeemable un-theological corner because Bujo's apologetic or self-defensive approach prevents him from clearly rejecting ATR monotheistic "supreme being", an African "supreme being" that appears to be prerequisite to demonstrate the novelty of the Christian trinity (p. 173). First, there is little doubt that Ukwuije has clearly shown the historical origin of the term "Supreme Being" (from deists, later co-opted by evolutionist anthropologists). But one must note that African theologians who
use the term (Mbiti and Idowu in particular) moved it away from purely philosophical reasoning (which Africans were alleged to be incapable of) to the ethnographic terrain where historically identifiable and living deities, Chukwu, Olodumare, Nzambe, and so on, are called “supreme being”. Pace Alexis Kagamé, who would object, on grounds of linguistic analysis, that naming Nzambe of the Bantu “supreme being” is heretical; compromising the singularity of Nzambe—never (analogically) to be considered a “being” among other "beings". Second, Samuel Kibicho, Kenyan theologian and great defender of autonomy and redemptive power of ATR, draws attention to the “simple monotheism” found among Eastern and Central African peoples who do not have the highly developed nature deities that are very common in West Africa. There is a way one can legitimately talk about monotheism, while at the same time paying full attention to ethnographic detail. Finally, Bible translation into African languages not only appropriated African “concepts of God” (Mbiti) but also stamped with its authority the value of African worldview in the reception of the God radically revealed in the Crucified and Risen Jesus. There is a way one can justifiably talk about continuity between ATR and its culture and Christianity, and being sensitive to the history of the Bible in Africa. I think it perilous to the project of local theology to deny the creative potential embedded in the African memory broth into the reception and appropriation of God’s self-communication in the Crucified and Risen Jesus. The Fathers of the Church, from Justin Martyr to Saint Augustine, did exactly that. Adolphe Gesché applauds this Patristic wisdom as the genius of Catholicism that evangelicalism totally rejects. The history of Christian thought displayed the preservation of the

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"pagan heritage". In the West, the "pagan heritage" ("the paganism of their ancestral tradition) "remained the Christian heritage so as not to be lost to humanity."  

In the above critical remarks I take on Ukwuije because of the important points he is proposing on method in theology. Ukwuije is not only a brilliant narrator and commentator. He is also a critical reviewer of relevant literature; he goes to the heart of the matter, and clearly shows no compromises with anyone who departs from the thesis that is his consuming passion: the dogmatic responsibility of all theology – this ensures the intimate link between God and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God himself. He admires the insight of Bimwenyi-Kweshi (perhaps the best known proponent of foundations in African theology). Bimwenyi’s severance from the metaphysical assumptions of pioneer African theologians, thanks to Heidegger and the philosophy of language, made him dump the "supreme being" rhetoric. Ukwuije applauds. However, Bimwenyi’s insistence on the openness of the African human to accessing God, his clear option for continuity between ATR and Christian revelation disqualifies his theology; he lost focus on God and the Christ of God. Ukwuije clearly prefers radical displacement, an evangelical inclination that he feels is best expressed the theology of Jüngel. Again Ukwuije admires Eboussi-Boulaga who never minced his words over the fetishism of both traditional theology, traditional Christian dogmatic definitions and African theology of inculturation—ancestral Christology and the notion of Supreme Being. Eboussi shares the pluralist option of literary icons, Achebe and Soyinka. Yet Eboussi’s christic model presents Christ as exemplar, as cosmic hero; his insistence that theology can only be negative, as God is unknowable and accessible only in metaphors, rightly made Ukwuije suspicious of his epistemological assumptions. Eboussi cannot relate his claims to the practice of a faith community that confesses the Crucified

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God in Jesus Christ; such communities do not consider the Trinity as metaphor. This naturally leads Ukwuije to Jüngel, and through Jüngel to explore the epistemological assumptions not only of African theology but of all theology. I admire Ukwuije, but I like to maintain my distance; I do not think that the dogmatic responsibility of theology is irremediably compromised by acknowledging God revealed in Jesus Christ at work in ATR and the culture it transmits.8

Kungua is less evangelical and therefore would not always be happy in company of Ukwuije. Kungua applauds Eboussi’s radical analysis of the human (African) crisis and his iconoclastic and prophetic stance with regard to Western and African theologians-philosophers. He applauds Eboussi’s search for the christic principle, before-beyond Christian dogmas, to embed radical holistic liberation. He also applauds Bimwenyi’s analysis and his epistemological assumptions. If anything he repeats, sings the praise of these, and carries forward in more radical rhetoric the application of the consequences of their philosophy and theology to the liberation of oppressed Africans and all oppressed. Ukwuije, while carefully but critically analysing these authors, takes leave of them because they are not sufficiently evangelical: they make philosophical assumptions or ATR and its culture the takeoff point or equal point of departure for theology; these according to Ukwuije either run the risk or are clearly ignorant of the dogmatic responsibility of theology—whose starting point is the Cross of Jesus that God totally identifies with and that is the beginning of a new image of humans. Though not as evangelical as Ukwuije, Kungua would back theology that embody the radical prophetic destruction of the Baals (Elijah cycle) of ATR. He would agree with Ukwuije that Christian theology in Africa must clearly show that it is not simply the prolongation of ATR. Theology will always train its eye on its object to ensure radical and holistic liberation in our globalised world.

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Theology focused on its Object:

Our three authors underline their dependence on evangelical theology whose insistence on the absolute uniqueness and incomparability of the Word of God addressed to humans is well known. All three consider Karl Barth as starting point, but take their different directions in view of the consummate passion of their theology: Ukwuije develops this by exploring the theology of Jüngel, Kungua navigates through Moltmann and Metz. Ramazani’s work contains the most detailed systematic and historical narrative of developments in the theology of God that is foundational to the new Trinitarian theology of the Church. He skates carefully the historical moments of the development of the theological positions that led to Vatican II and beyond: beyond Bellarmine, beyond church that is visible in its hierarchical communion, developing the image of People of God related to Israel and arriving at church as Body of Christ rooted in the Spirit and the Trinity. Only a Trinitarian focus will be faithful to the Bible and will be able to draw all the People of God into the one sheepfold. It disarms the suspicion of the Orthodox Church and the Protestants and move ecumenism forward. The church-event is embedded in the Trinity; theology begins with God’s unique self-communication that is Trinitarian. He begins with Barth who founds theology on the word of God, but does not develop a theology of the Holy Spirit. The dimension of the Holy Spirit—dear to Orthodox theology—will constitute part of his moulding blocks for suggesting a Eucharistic ecclesiology founded on the revelation of God that is One and Three.

Ramazani brilliantly tries to tie together the best of Western catholic and evangelical resources that informed the emergence of Trinitarian theology and Trinitarian ecclesiology. The problem of his work is overkill: overdose of literature review, perhaps not to omit anything, perhaps to satisfy the demands of the academy! One would have wished he limited the literature review to volume 1 and get on with the job of designing Trinitarian ecclesiology beyond
Vatican II. Nonetheless he has good grasp of the literature. In the 1st 100 pages of volume 1 he explores the Word of God as starting point of theology following Karl Barth. Then he adopts Karl Rahner’s language and analysis of God’s self-communication, the substance of which is the trinity! Rahner’s powerful axiom, “the immanent trinity is the economic trinity and vice versa”, echoes like a mantra throughout the work. However, Rahner’s focus on the incarnation of the Logos and does not say enough of the Cross, the impact of the Trinity for us, and the radical challenge of Trinitarian theology to the globalised world that Ramazani is committed to.

Therefore, Ramazani moves to the left of Rahner to adopt the centrality of the Cross in the Christian experience of the trinity. His theologian on the left is Jürgen Moltmann for whom the Cross is the critical point of the experience of the Trinity for us: God is revealed on the Cross of Jesus as the Crucified and Risen God for us. Therefore, the immanent and economic Trinity is revealed for us on the Cross. God as God, from all eternity, is implicated in human history. This side of Moltmann’s theology, the image of the Crucified God, is also central to Kungua’s work. The humanity of God that Eberhard Jüngel develops, and that Ukwuije embraces as providing the methodological starting point for a renewed African theology of inculturation, approves of Moltmann. But Ramazani is not done with the choices presented by Western theology. In the historical narrative of the developments of Trinitarian theology in the West, he notes the dissatisfaction of Hans Urs von Balthasar with both Rahner and Moltmann. Rahner’s logos theology does not account for the centrality of the Cross and tends towards modalism; while Moltmann’s insight that on the Cross the immanent and economic Trinity become manifest, and that the Trinity from all eternity is involved in human history smacks of pantheism. Is there no distance between God and human history? Consequently, Ramazani moves to the right of Moltmann and espouses Balthasar’s position in order to separate the immanent trinity (God as God is) from the economic Trinity. God is Love. God’s internal self-emptying as Love caused and is foundational for the self-emptying on the Cross. God as God is not determined by the
historical action of God for us that peaked in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. In the careful adaptation and reworking of Rahner and Moltmann, Balthasar provides for Ramazani a new working Trinitarian principle: the soteriological Trinity is the expression of the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the fundament of the soteriological Trinity.

It is noteworthy that though Ukwuije and Kungua mention Balthasar, none of them adopt his new Trinitarian principle as working axiom as Ramazani. From the vantage point of the corrective introduced by Balthasar, Ramazani, picks the strings of his numerous sources to argue for a new ecumenical reception of Vatican II that entrenches the radical notion of the church as communion (koinonia), imaged and energized by intra-Trinitarian communion (that Greeks call perichoresis) that is non-hierarchical.

The Relevance of Constituency in African theology:

For the three new generation African theologians, the constituency of theology is understood in different ways. Ukwuije clearly represents the emerging radical evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa: the dogmatic responsibility of theology is non-negotiable anywhere, any time. But Ukwuije’s constituency is still Africa, and that is why he lays emphasis on inculturation, but it is inculturation on a new key. One cannot accuse Ukwuije of rejecting local theology as another Nigerian theologian, Byan Kato, did many years ago.

Ramzani on the other hand represents “forward church”. It is surprising however that in the two volumes he avoids discussing Africa, and prefers to focus on the crisis of the Western modernity, globalisation, and the Church especially of France. The strength of his argument, based on ecumenical resources, taking care of the suspicions and fears of the Orthodox and Protestant churches, is that his proposed church model can be applied to any part of the world church. His presentation of the debate over local-universal
that pitted Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper on opposing theological camps illustrates how the church should move forward. It is clear that he favours the position of Kasper: against Ratzinger Pentecost did not ontologically and chronologically establish universal church anterior to the local (II: 60-76, 217-230, 241-257). The church gathered around the apostles in Jerusalem is simultaneously universal-particular. Drawing from Orthodox Eucharistic ecclesiology, Ramazani could therefore conclude, convincingly, that the church structurally transformed by Trinitarian communion, “forward church”, the church of the future is defined as Eucharistic assembly of the baptised in the Holy Spirit, gathered around its bishop to praise the Trinity. This church is local-universal simultaneously and is made competent to transform the globalised world having had its structures radically patterned on the Trinitarian communion.

Kungua, more than his two colleagues, puts constituency on a high pedestal. His passion is the reinvention of Christianity in Africa based on a radical Christology—the revelation of God Crucified on the Cross of Jesus. It is from this perspective that the memory of the weak of the word and the narrative of the oppressed become dangerous memory and healing narrative. Kungua plunged into Jewish mysticism to evoke and analyse the image of God revealed in the Elijah cycle of narratives. The revelation of God in the audible “sound of sheer silence” instead of vision argues for a mystical encounter. This is the interpretation Jewish Kabbalah gives to Elijah’s experience at Horeb: 1Kg 19; as an experience that healed the prophet of despair and fear, it confirms his war against Baals as Yahweh’s war. Kungua sees this as dramatized in Jesus who continued healing and exorcising evil spirits; and in the charismatic churches popular in African Christianity who live in praise and practice exorcism. Kungua cautions that their exaggerations should be noted, but that this should not lead to outright rejection.

African theology has indeed come a long way. It is refreshing to read these three new generation African theologians. The pity is that they are not accessible in English. Reading them convinced me
that the age-old debate on God in African religion and theology, the questions about the relevance of ATR and its cultures to Christian life and theology are not only relevant, but they have been raised to a new key. Africans on the continent and in the diaspora are part and parcel of the globalised world; they practice Christianity that has moved its centre to the southern hemisphere. Our authors show that the local can be brought into constructive dialogue with the global for the transformation of the African. But they all insist (and who will disagree?) that it is the God revealed as Triune in the Crucified and Risen Jesus who addresses the therapeutic word that redefines the African, in the event that is the Spirit-filled Church, for the transformation of the world.