Principles for Developing Inculturated Theology in the Diverse African Context: Steps beyond Traditional Heritages

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PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING INCULTURATED THEOLOGY IN THE DIVERSE AFRICAN CONTEXT: STEPS BEYOND TRADITIONAL HERITAGES

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ABSTRACT

PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING INCULTURATED THEOLOGY IN THE DIVERSE AFRICAN CONTEXT: STEPS BEYOND TRADITIONAL HERITAGES

By
Sr. Jane Catherine Hagaba
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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Marie Baird:

This dissertation critically examines the foundational significance of Christ for contextual theologies in the African Catholic Church. It begins with a presentation of Benezet Bujo’s approach and contextual methodology. As a critical study, this dissertation is premised on the principle that the object of Christianity is the transformation of peoples and their societies. Therefore, the study examines the ways in which African societies founded on an immutable principle of blood kinship can open to the Christian faith and to the globalizing world today. The dissertation grapples with this issue to unravel the weaknesses and limitations of African theologies of inculturation. The paper argues on the basis of empirical evidence and Vatican Council II teaching, and in view of a sound inculturation, that the primary root of the present cultural and human crisis on the African Continent is rooted in the diverse anthropologies and ontologies.
The paper, in turn, appeals to theological anthropology in contemporary Catholic theological thought to discern the essential working principles and practical guidelines for contextual theological methodology. A major principle in this quest for a sound methodology is the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth for humanity in diversely constituted cultural settings. Having recognized Christology as a *theological* and *anthropological* principle, the dissertation brings out the Christian significance of the (traditional) Western social system for diverse cultures in Africa.
This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Silvestre Kambwere and Mary Therese Sieunda

and

Dr. James P. Hanigan and Dr. Louisa Coraluppi,
with love and gratitude
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The actual writing of a dissertation is the responsibility of one person. It is equally true to say that the same is a product of many people. This dissertation qualifies in both regards, because the whole process of writing, up to its completion, would not have been possible without timely contributions, moral support and encouragement of many people. I would like to register my deepest gratitude to Sr. Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Ph.D. my Superior General at the time, and my religious community for recognizing my theological gifts and for giving me the opportunity to develop them. To the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God, Pittsburgh, USA, I extend my sincere gratitude for their abundant financial and sisterly support, and for enabling me to acclimatize to a totally new environment. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Thomas Julian, my oncologist doctor, who did a tremendous work of giving me all the necessary treatment for breast cancer. Without that providential intervention, this project would not have reached this point.

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar teaching affirms the “‘validity’ of global and diverse cultural experiences.”¹ This outlook has presently produced the positive effect of using African cultures as necessary immediate contexts in which to reflect on the meaning of Christ for Africa. An inappropriate trend, however, continues to mark developments in theological thought under the umbrella of African theology. The primary agenda of the majority of African theologians is to provide a positive interpretation of African cultures while challenging the negative colonial as well as the missionaries’ attitudes toward African cultures. That said, the legitimate intent to provide valid interpretation of African cultures consists mainly in idealizing the traditional African cultures. There are three end results of this theological scenario. First, African theologians tend to lose sight of the bigger question concerning the “meaning of Christ” for Africa in the many matrixes of cultural idealization. Second, there is a prevalent lack of critical contextual theologies to facilitate genuine understanding of the traditional cultures vis-à-vis the contemporary African reality. Finally, contextual theologians have, to date, not been able to put forward a theological method that is at once conducive to the diverse African cultural context, and one that is consistent with the Vatican Council II theology of the church and its mission. Given these general but important factors, this study has the task, as one of its working objectives, to locate its starting point for theological reflection on the African reality. Representative voices within Africa, such as Benezet Bujo, John Pobee and others offer this study a relevant starting point.

John Pobee’s theological assumptions get to the heart of what is fundamentally wrong with contextual theologies and inculturation in the African ecclesial milieu. He,
for instance, argues that “in the biblical faith, Christology was expressed in very functional terms…in terms of his activity.” He goes on to add that the “tendency to discuss Christology in terms of…metaphysical speculation” is a Western tendency, a theological posture that is “terribly [ineffective] in Africa.” Whether Pobee realizes it or not; he is indicating, and rightly so, that the element of “faith seeking (further) understanding,” i.e., by means of reason, does not lie within the ambit of the traditional African cultural and religious experiences. And in complete contrast with Post-Conciliar theology such as that found in the encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, Pobee is also clearly indicating that the fundamental question of “being” vis-à-vis the “being of beings” does not constitute the subject matter for contextual theologies and inculturation. Thus far Pobee is consistent with the general failure in African theology to recognize ontology as a necessary subject matter for contextualization and inculturation. Hence, as contribution to, and in utter contrast with existing theologies in Africa, this study strives to show that Africa advances multiple anthropologies and ontologies that give rise to a variety of human natures. This is the basic cause of all sorts of conflicts on the African Continent.

So, the current task for this study is to show that Christ is the only meaningful and lasting solution to the African human and cultural dilemma, because he offers a unified concept of a human being and of human nature, to say nothing of a universal structure of redemption. In sum, these statements comprise the central subject matter of this dissertation.

The present topic of study, *Principles for Developing Inculturated Theology in the Diverse African Context: Steps beyond Traditional Heritages* sums up the end goal of this study. In its basic substance, the topic speaks to the rationale of grounding contextual
theologies in Christology proper as opposed to ancestral Christology or world views. Given the basic character of Christology, the fundamental opposition this study perceives between Christology and ancestrology presupposes a thesis that recognizes the basic and anthropological ontological assumptions underlying the traditional and diverse African religions. Such a thesis in turn requires a clear grasp of the African cultural reality today. Hence, the thesis of this dissertation developed out of the realization that African cultures are in a period of critical transition from a traditional way of life to a somewhat indeterminable cultural reality and as such, present a very complex challenge to the church’s evangelizing mission. The colonial impact signaled a cultural transition from exclusively traditional cultures that revolved around tribal self-determination to national cultures encompassing different ethnic groups. This colonial political venture left a lasting mark on African cultures without transforming the diverse African traditional consciousness. Though relevant to the economic and political dynamics of the present world, a national culture was introduced in Africa arbitrarily to the extent that African traditional mindsets have never truly adapted well to the Western social system. As a result, there are two socio-political trajectories in the African continental cultures. There are Western-based national socio-economic and political dynamics, and the traditional cultural dynamics, all affected by a larger globalization. These competing dynamics have never been synchronized, and there is no indication that they are in the process of being harmonized.

Furthermore, the political enthusiasm and euphoria that marked Africa’s post colonial road to independence seem to be relegated to the remote past. Though happy to be rid of the colonial presence, few today could relate to the optimism of post colonial
Africa. Most Africans have only witnessed political and economic strategies emerge and disappear without a single trace, and foreign assistance obtained without long range results. Consequently, contemporary Africa reels with endemic economic underdevelopment and poverty, hunger and disease, rampant political unrest, population explosions partly fanned by a refugee problem, rapid environmental degradation, swift cultural changes, and the breakdown of the traditional cultural moral fiber. Diverse cultural expressions further complicate the matter, because variations in culture allow for varied experiences and often conflicting cultural responses to common national issues.

In the light of this background, this dissertation maintains that

- Africa is in a human and cultural crisis that is rooted in the enduring complex experience of cultural diversity that is at once tribal and national.
- A genuine and lasting response to the current human crisis and the rejuvenation of cultural life that is truly African and truly responsive to existing global dynamics that affect Africa in myriad ways depends on how the Catholic Church of Africa and African governments deal with the issue of manifold diversity.
- With the onslaught of the hegemony of the European colonizers, traditional cultural diversity was expressed in the artificially created national cultures. The result has become the norm in Africa today with its myriad problems.

Therefore, the thesis of this study is: *The current cultural African context (with the local and global realities intertwined) and its many forms of conflict must be addressed in any African theology of inculturation today. This is essential if local African theologies are to be developed in ways that extend beyond the romantic fixation on ancestral experience at the expense of addressing the complexities of contemporary Africa. An inculturated African theology must address the signs of the time as they exist and bring the Gospel to bear on them (cf. GS, no. 4).* This thesis does not advocate the complete abandonment of
the African ancestors and their religiosity and values, but rather proposes that their true substance be understood before African cultures can truly become valid sources for mission theologies.

It is, therefore, the primary objective of this study as a whole to re-affirm that Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, as the foundation of theology constitutes a basic principle for a contextual theology that is at once Christian and Catholic. The nature of the incarnation implies that inculturation cannot take place without regard for cultural anthropologies. In light of anthropological considerations, therefore, the study concerns itself with matters of basic principle. These dictate a “structural analysis” as the main method of study. Following the same method, the five chapters generally strive to show that ancestor-based Christological propositions are not grounded in the sound understanding of the basic philosophical and theological principles called forth by inculturation. Hence and essential to the primary objective is the recognition that diverse traditional cultural experiences in Africa impact the perception and interpretation of the existential reality. The result is the existing diverse cultural philosophies of a person, of human nature and of existence. In such a diversely constituted ontological context, it becomes imperative to understand the primary principle and the philosophies that hold everything together-both generally and specifically. For only then can a contextual theology proceed with a clear understanding of the primacy of Jesus Christ in Catholic theology as a whole. The above central subject and subject matter are broken down into specific working objectives comprising five chapters.

The specific and working objective of Chapter 1 is to portray the “basic direction and internal consistency” of what is commonly known as African theology (in the
singular). The chapter raises many questions relevant to the thesis, the central being whether a theology that is founded on the ancestors would lead the church’s mission to the same end as one that is grounded in Jesus Christ. The above objective is accomplished by means of critical analysis of a representative contextual theological proposal by Benezet Bujo.² He offers a relevant context for comprehending the “majority voice” in African theology. All theological works cited in this chapter are in turn evaluated against the Africa Synod (1994), relative to John Paul II’s encyclical known as Ecclesia in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000.

Situated in the context of the current globalizing scene and in response to Chapter I, the aim of Chapter II is to bring out the “formative principles” of the traditional but diverse African world views. This is essential to a sound understanding of African anthropologies and ontologies. A detailed analysis of the “general and the particular” African ontologies serve the purpose of opening sound avenues for contextual theologies to consider how “faith and reason” are structured in the African world views. It is on the account of the aforementioned structure that this study maintains that, founding a contextual theology on ancestral Christology would not yield the result intended by Catholic mission theology. Chapter II employs the concept of culture as a tool of social analysis to realize its specific and general objectives. Of significance to both objectives is the African theological view of culture vis-à-vis the one put forward by the Second Vatican Council. The substance of Chapters I and II is essential for a good grasp of the Christological and anthropological concerns in Chapter III.

In response to central concerns in Chapters I and II, Chapter III strives to show that Christology is at once a theological and anthropological principle, and on the basis
of which the study brings out the essential relationship between African traditional cultures and Western culture per se. This chapter is the heart of the entire dissertation, because the formulation of working principles for an inculturated theology in Africa, presented in Chapter IV & V, are grounded in the understanding that the Christ event speaks in philosophical (or anthropological) and theological terms. On the basis of the same terms, Chapter V proposes the theological concept of “gathering” as a fitting image of the self-understanding of African Catholic Church. It is important that all the elements presented in this study (and many more to be discerned else where) are in place before contextualization can begin, but precede inculturation.

In conclusion, Chapter V and as a continuation of Chapter IV maintains that the Catholic Church can only “gather” the peoples of Africa in their historical diversity if contextual theologies are grounded in Christology as the foundation of Christian theology and mission. The principle for gathering all that is good in human experience is articulated in Chapter III, and on account of its substantive content, the study as a whole arrives at the following conclusion. Ancestors offer a starting point for theological reflection insofar as they indicate the basic structure on which cultures and diverse philosophies are crafted. Beyond that, ancestors or the values they propagate, however valid their cause, do not redeem us by themselves.

CHAPTER I: THE CONCEPT OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY

Introduction: A Critical Analysis of Ancestral Theological Perspective

Incarnating Christianity is important in every culture, but all the more so in a continent such as Africa in which Christianity was implanted by European missionaries,
who had no prior or immediate knowledge of African cultures. That subsequent evangelization was generally patterned on the previous experience of the missionaries was not exceptional to the rule. The missionary activities in Africa were thus subject to the cultural consciousness of the Europeans’ world view. Heightened awareness during the Second Vatican Council that the Roman Catholic Church was a global church, prompted attention to the closely related questions of contextualization and inculturation. At the same time, the official Catholic teaching in missiology simply spells out the basic doctrine, upon which inculturation and contextualization draw rather than the manner in which contextualization and inculturation are to proceed. Such practical matters have to be left to the respective discernment processes in specific regions of the world. Even then, these require nuanced interpretations to ensure general clarity and harmonious interpretation. In the estimation of this author, interpretation in this area has not achieved desirable general clarity to guide the implementation of particular contextual theologies. This point will be clarified in the course of this study. Nonetheless, this introduction attempts to highlight the major points that ought to concern contextual theologies in general and Africa in particular.

Concerns with contextual theology in Africa arise through necessity. Contextualization generally seeks to answer the basic questions of *who is Christ per se* in conjunction with the attendant question of *who Christ is for the particular African cultural and ecclesial milieus*. This task must be accomplished in the wider context of evangelization. That is to say, the task of evangelization in contemporary Catholic theology is a tandem process involving mutual interplay between contextualization and inculturation processes. The success of incarnating a Christian world view among world
cultures is contingent on appropriate contextualization in much the same way that the latter is dependent on effective inculturation. While it is impossible to treat one without implying the other, Chapter I focuses on the theological technicalities of contextualization with respect to Africa vis-à-vis the wider church. Hence, the ensuing analysis gives special attention to the theological underpinnings apparently called into question by the various perspectives in African theology. This chapter, as a result, must examine the African theological vision for “situating” the Gospel so that Christian faith can take deep root and thrive in Africa. In setting this goal, there are a number of factors.

This study, first and foremost, perceives three general but major principles that any contextual theology must attend to. A brief outline of these will also provide a compass to the technical concerns in this chapter and study as a whole. First, in contextualization, the need to articulate the cultural reality of the respective local culture(s) precedes everything else. Central to this is an understanding of local cultures. These not only include the beliefs and practices of the people, but also whether the local culture is homogeneous or diversely constituted. The elements of “culture” and “diversity” shape the second principle, which consists in the determination and the functionality of an appropriate method of contextualization. Contemporary Catholic missiology has designated what is now known as inculturation as the method for evangelizing cultures. As the fundamental principle in contextualization, inculturation is dependent on the appropriate understanding of the local needs of the church, the situation, and actual needs of the people. Hence, incarnating Christian faith in a culture through evangelization are the primary goals of contextualization.
The third principle involves the selection of the theological foundations suited to the situation and the perceived goal. One ought to keep in mind that there are variations in this formulation determined by the specific end in view. Nonetheless, the key question concerns the constitutive principal foundation for a Christian theology. The central argument of this chapter, which is also an advancement of the contemporary Catholic missionary vision, is the fact that, theological foundations are determinative of whether or not a local theology will promote dialogue between Christianity and the local cultures. This is critical for an enlightened understanding of what contextualization is about. It means that contextualization is a process of ongoing discernment in view of opening minds and hearts to the Gospel so that a life-long journey of dialoguing with the eternal truth of God’s self-communication, through the Second Person of the Trinity can take place. When contemporary African theology is examined in light of these three general principles, it is found lacking in these same aspects.

Since its inception, African theologians have been focused on articulating the African reality as a precondition for inculturation. But in doing so, these efforts consistently exhibit the following questionable trends. Despite the obvious evidence of cultural diversity in Africa, theological reflections insist on speaking about Africa as though it were a homogeneous cultural entity. This has had the effect of confounding the possibility of a viable unified approach that could speak to commonality and diversity in the African local Catholic Church. Favoring a universalistic and dogmatic approach in view of upholding a monolithic local theology, African theology thrives on exploiting the problem of Western European cultural domination as the most critical problem facing Africa. Little efforts, if any, have been devoted to the task of exploring limitations within
the African cultural heritages that might be providing a fertile ground for ongoing negative external influences. A glossy view of African cultures also leads to flirting with the prospect of shifting theological foundations from Christ and the Gospel to African grandparents (ancestors) and their religious legacies. This persistent tendency raises serious questions regarding the ability of a contemporary African theological perspective to affect the demands called for by inculturation.

To bring these questionable issues in African theology to the forefront, this chapter, therefore, focuses on the selected work by Benezet Bujo: *African Theology in its Social Context*. As a point of contrast, this work illustrates what this study deems as the fundamental flaws in African theology. And in argument for African theological reform chapter I attempts to situate this critique in the African Synodal teaching (1994), and in *John Paul II’s Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa*. In their doctrinal and missionary foundations, these documents provide the theological point of departure for theological reflection in Africa today. Without this important turn, inculturation in Africa will remain a mere academic venture, fragmented, if not stuck in the mud of non-productivity and evangelical ineffectiveness.

Schematically, section I, part A, presents an overview of the main features of African theology and its general orientation. The immediate and narrow aim of Section I is to provide a general understanding of African theology, and the theological-historical background that has shaped its general intellectual outlook. The subsequent critical appraisals of the ancestral approach, exemplified in the writing of Bujo, provided in section I, part B, may well be grasped against this general background. Chapter I as a whole draws upon some authors who have treated pertinent issues in some detail.
African theologian, M.L. Daneel, deserve special mention. Daneel’s work is particularly pivotal, because it offers a comprehensive and critical study of African theology in its multifarious perspectives prior to the Synod with the commitment to be unbiased. On the whole, the research found in Daneel’s work is extensive and his evaluations are convincing.

SECTION I

A. AN OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY

Understanding the historical premises of African theology is an important step to gaining insight into its driving force and its perceived goal: liberation from Western cultural domination. Therefore, the purpose of the following account is to demonstrate the close link between Bujo’s proposal and African theology as a whole. This step in turn provides the needed theological context for critiquing African theology.

The Concept of Africa in Relation to African Theology

Ngindu Mushete identifies three major theological currents in the quest for evangelizing Africa; namely, mission theology, Black theology and African theology. His work clarifies the African theological concept of “Africa” and how it applies to African theology. Mushete’s analysis is simply outlined in paraphrased form as follows. The “theology of mission” basically refers to a dominant approach favored by missionaries prior to the Second Vatican Council, and is still being used to a certain extent. Its primary focus is to save the souls of those generally regarded as pagans. In the present, as in the past, its agents tend toward a total disregard for the issues of culture and as such, they favor a universalistic approach to evangelization.
Black theology, on the other hand, delineates the Black South African context with its own specific interest, goals and methodology, and grows out of the experience of apartheid. This is essentially a liberation theology, inspired more by the experiences of the African-Americans than the teaching by the Second Vatican Council. The central motif of Black theology is political and economic liberation without a perceived need to incorporate the notion of culture. Third, but not least, African theology, represents a specific outlook stemming from a pre-independence revolutionary milieu and the recent teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Technically, African theology is the domain of Sub-Saharan Christianity, and focuses on inculturation as its mode of operation. Although Sub-Saharan Christianity specifically embraces “African theology,” the term generally designates theologies that have Africa as their context and object. African theology, therefore, consists of varieties of perspectives and methods that converge and intertwine forming a convoluted network of meaning known as African theology. With its major goal of making Christianity relevant to Black Africa, African theology is complex due to the vastness of its field of interests, the variety of its concerns and approaches.

Though focused on the Black cultures, this study in the end embraces Africa as a whole. This in no way implies the intent to exhaust issues affecting Africa. This particular focus is more technical and develops from the following rationale. African Catholicism understands itself as one local Church. While conscious of underlying pastoral differences in the local churches, for instance, the African Synod spoke as one voice thus underscoring the ‘oneness’ in the self-understanding of the Catholic Church in Africa (cf. EA, no. 17). The question remains, however, as to whether this self-
understanding warrants an all-embracing contextual theology at this point in time. Also when viewed from an evangelical standpoint, Catholic teaching on inculturation draws attention to culture as a theological constant in contemporary mission theology. Yet, culture does not hold the same meaning and significance in different parts of Africa. This presents enormous challenges for contextualization processes as a necessary step in inculturation. All these are issues of global magnitude, which do not come as a given. Hence, it is precisely due to challenges such as these that this study must speak in terms of Africa as a whole in order to raise issues concerning the methodological and theological effectiveness of an all-embracing notion of African theology. But because the majority of African theologians are convinced of the suitability of an all-encompassing approach, we must now look at how the idea of a contextual theology is envisioned. The background that has shaped the notion of African theology is the best point to begin at.

**A Historical-Theological Locale of African Theology**

Contemporary Catholic missiology is encountering challenges posed by past human histories and traditions in different local situations of the universal church. In the case of Africa, the teaching on the relationship between faith and culture initially coincided with the period when the continent was struggling to free itself from the shackles of colonial rule. The late 1950s and early 1960s fomented political movements whose immediate goal was to rid the continent of all forms of oppression. Prominent and influential among these is Pan-Africanism, with the “ultimate objective of bringing total liberation to the African” and “to give all people of African descent a sense of identity, self-determination and emancipation.”

Pan-Africanism and other movements that
developed in this period aroused deep aspirations, and most especially the optimism to restore a genuine African identity. The Pan-African rationales were the colonizers, who did not merely assault the political integrity of African societies. Their racially charged imperialism left no doubt in the minds of Africans that they had become less of a people through colonizing activities. Consequently, theologians and agents of political independence have, since the late 1950s, associated the restoration and the normalization of traditional consciousness with the removal of oppressive forces. This also partly explains why African theology tends to conceive and to express the notion of restoration in very idealistic and simplistic political terms. Nonetheless, it is in these yearnings for freedom and identity where we can locate the fledgling of a panoramic and an all-inclusive theological notion of “African” theology. That is, due to widespread colonialism on the continent, the term “African” took on a theological and functional significance. To grasp further the political implications of the Pan-African ideas, we must provide an historical overview of the missionary and colonial past. This can help to situate the sentiments and idealism that permeated revolutionary ideologies from the beginning, as well as show how this later inspired an “all-encompassing” African theology.

Emmanuel Martey observes correctly that “African Christians…learned how [European] colonialism drained African societies of their essence, trampled African culture\(^{11}\) underfoot, undermined African institutions, confiscated its land, smashed its religions, destroyed its magnificent artistic creation and wiped out extraordinary possibilities.”\(^{12}\) Cecil Rhodes and David Livingstone, whose colonizing activities impacted South and East Africa, lend insight into the colonial attitudes that energized
unlimited plundering of Africa. Rhodes declared that “Only one race [the White race] was destined to help in God’s work of justice, liberty, and peace.” David Livingstone expressed the same view more intensely:

We come among them as members of a superior race and servants of a government that desires to elevate more degraded portions of the human family. We are the adherents of the benign, holy religion and by mere consistent conduct and wise patient efforts become the enjoiners of peace to a hitherto destructed and downtrodden race.

Significantly, these attitudes are essentially cultural and verbalize the meaning and concept of a human being to which the African colonizers subscribed. One does not need great imagination to realize what persons can do to one another when distorted visions of what is good come wrapped in the attire of religious beliefs or an idealized view of culture. In these unholy utterances one finds the unfortunate link between the spread of Christianity and colonialism, and the roots of ongoing Black consciousness, missionary vision, and the probable character of African theology. For with time, the Christian Church under the auspices of western European missionaries came to be seen as “an instrument of imperialist oppression.”

In his extensive treatise on African theology, M. L Daneel reflects this outcome by admitting that “When black African theologians define and delineate the task of a relevant theologia Africana, they invariably do so in terms of a reaction against imported theology” [his emphases]. Generally accepted, therefore, is the distrust of theologies developed from a non-African context, now deemed incapable of offering a solution to Africa’s problems. The need “to do it [ourselves],” fired up an indiscriminate hermeneutic of suspicion, directed at “Western-oriented theologians who profess, to theologise…on behalf of the Church in Africa.” This intellectual stance is also a means
of undercutting what native theologians view as a “subtle paternalism which, despite excellent intentions, emerges in the work of Western missiologists.”

There is, however, no unanimity in this outlook, because some African writers do not exhibit such exclusivist tendencies.

On the whole, articulating a contextual problem for the African local Church is one of the characteristic marks of African theology. The historical premises, as outlined, are determinative in this particular regard. The African human reality is often perceived through reactionary lenses that mainly focus on the past experiences of traditional life and colonial or missionary activities. This inclination is also indicative of the preferred theological premises and dominant methods. For example, a common factor among the various strands in African theology is the need to account for the African past and incorporate it into theological thought aimed at inculturation. The result is a reactionary stance, which coupled with a predominantly historical approach, presumes to endow African theology with the necessary philosophical resources to stave off “the directive pressure, norms and aims of Western theology.”

But these historical premises are not without methodological implications for African theology and its end in view. Martey believes, and accurately so, that the colonial historical background “has provided a relevant context for African theologians ‘to formulate theological constructs on Africanization’ and liberation.” This propensity becomes more evident when we correlate “the programmatic” [motifs] of Pan-African organizations with the general orientation of African theology.
Points of Correlation: Pan-Africanism and the Historical-Theological Premises of African Theology

The historical-philosophical background outlined here has also shaped common operative principles and objectives that cut across the various theological strands in African theology. The historical-theological premises of African theology derive their significance from missionary and colonial activities. A common experience of oppression that gave political activists a sense of collective consciousness also inspired their sense of a common identity and the need for collective action. Martey’s account of the chief concerns of Pan-Africanism sheds light on the association pointed out here. The “unification of all black people, commitment to the empowerment of black people and the liberation of all black people” comprise the historical-philosophical structural basis of action toward political and cultural emancipation prior to African independence. Martey’s observation generally reveals a close relationship between colonial tendencies and the reactionary stance in African theology. Like political activists, native theologians have since viewed themselves as (Black) Africans originating from a common culture that is subjected to long and a widespread suffering stemming from colonial oppression and misguided evangelization. Hence, to summon the vital human and moral resources for liberating Africa from religio-cultural domination, the empowerment of Black Africans is a priority in the African theological vision. One of the earliest champions of cultural emancipation of Africa illustrates Martey’s arguments well. Amilcar Cabral maintained that:

the domination of a people can be maintained only by the permanent and organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned…to take arms to dominate a people is, above all, to take up arms to destroy…their cultural life. For as long as part of that people can have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation.
As a result, Amilcar Cabral “stressed liberation as an act of culture”\textsuperscript{27} thus testifying to the historical conceptual pillars by means of which the agents of Pan-Africanism sought to restore African identity and cultures.

Significantly, the same political elements of liberation, unification, and empowerment also correspond to three main historical premises of African theology. To a greater extent, these have impacted the concept of the African context and the theological expression of its cultural realities. Concerns for “identity” and “culture” continue to occupy centre stage in the theological and the pastoral concerns of the local African Church. The “goal of African theology [is to communicate] the Christian message in a way that liberates Africa from religious and cultural domination.”\textsuperscript{28} As M. L. Daneel also points out, African theology aims at “liberating the Gospel from the Western wrappings…[so that] the truth which Jesus of Nazareth reveals about God may encounter the spiritual, cultural and intellectual worlds of the African personality.”\textsuperscript{29} In retrospect, the sacred personal space formerly occupied by missionaries and colonizers, in the style of Cecil Rhodes and David Livingstone, is by correspondence, to be reclaimed through religious and cultural liberation.

The theological premises of African theology are not without practical implications for inculturation, granted the basic assumptions behind African theology. African theologians operating under “African theological umbrella” envision liberation, empowerment and unification of Black Africa. In their view, theological unity has, supposedly, been attained through the choice and use of a global category known as “African theology” and the focus on Western domination as the primary problem. However, the basic presumptions behind this global category are replete with theological
and methodological problems. To mention but one basic problem, the universalistic character of African theology presupposes Africa as a homogeneous cultural context, rooted in a common experience of oppression, always originating from outside. These intellectual and methodological horizons ignore the significance of cultural diversity for contextualization. While there is some evidence of recognition of the need to relate the present cultural evolution in Africa to traditional cultures, these efforts are still at the level of conceptualization. An unanswered and persistent question is whether Africa’s “problems” and their “solutions” conceived consistently and primarily along the terms envisioned by African theology are relevant to inculturation. Can an all-embracing African theology claim genuine contextual relevance in step with cultural diversity? As a step toward getting to the very root of the problem that cultural diversity poses for contextualization, this reflection must now turn to the representative and ardent proponent of African theology in an ancestral theological mode: Benezet Bujo. The primary focus is on one of his writings entitled: “African Theology in Its Social Context.”

B. “AFRICAN THEOLOGY IN ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT”

Preliminary Questions

In the previous analysis, reference was made to varieties of perspectives and methods in the configuration of African theology. A depth analysis of each one is not within the scope of this project. Yet, this fact raises legitimate questions regarding the practical effectiveness of this study. What benefit can this study accrue by focusing on one approach among so many varied voices? What are the practical implications of making generalized assertions based on one approach?
We have seen that African theology regards Western cultural dominion as the most serious problems threatening Africa’s cultural destiny. The possibility of traditional African cultures equally posing sinister problems is not at the forefront of most reflections. This lacuna is also one of the most striking features in the entire African theological edifice as represented in Bujo’s theological synthesis. A total disregard for limitations in African cultures is discernible in his whole-sale use of ancestry as an organizing principle for a contextual theology. From the standpoint of this study, ancestry is at once a value and a problem in contemporary Africa. These and other factors make Bujo’s proposal the most appropriate perspective from which to explore the ancestral traditions and their functional potential. This task can be well grasped against a background understanding of ancestry.

The concept of ancestry as it applies to Africa generally refers to the common yet varied experiences of tracing the life of individuals and tribal communities to particular persons in the past known as “biological ancestors.” The ancestors are designated so, because they are, supposedly, the originating family unity to which communities trace their biological roots. In this sense the ancestors are the primordial human beings to whom tribal community can trace the gift of life. Also from a religious standpoint, ancestors derive their title and authority from having played a prominent role worthy of ongoing emulation by their progenies. Because of its symbolic religious significance, rooted in the traditional understanding of God-human relationships, ancestry is not simply “one” of the common denominators in the traditional cultural heritages. It is a decisive principle underlying the totality of any African world view and the communal lives that it engenders. Ancestry is the traditional moral principle which establishes a
sense of, and the right to belong to a traditional community called a tribe. Consequently, ancestry is the defining factor of what it means to be both a human being and an African. As one would expect, therefore, ancestry is highly “recognized” and “valued”, because all Black Africans imbibe ancestral consciousness in varying degrees of scope and intensity.

For very technical purposes, it suffices to point out in passing that, because of its affinity with the African religious experiences and cultural consciousness, the ancestral approach to inculturation carries the “possibility” for greater reception by African Christians than most approaches. After all, Africans know and value ancestry, and they exist by perpetuating values rooted in the ancestral heritages. In the religio-cultural-ancestry framework, for instance, one encounters enduring values of “family,” “brotherhood and sisterhood,” “respect for life,” “communal solidarity” and many others. The reality of these universal values in African societies is the basis for Bujo’s arguments for an ancestor-based approach to contextual theology and inculturation.

Seen from a critical standpoint, however, the ancestral approach carries the risk of uncritical assimilation of ideas and values rooted in this common experience. In stating this one must observe that the “value” of ancestry per se is not what is in question here. The stated risk refers to the consequence of a cultural value, such as ancestry, becoming so emphasized that it acquires an unchallengeable or normative status. A possibility of uncritical assimilation of ideas often comes with an “embrace” reinforced by close familiarity with cultural values. To this extent, cultural subjects imbibe and promote such values, at the same time conforming to their interpretative and socializing power. When values acquire this status, they reinforce the “standardizing” or regularizing
function of culture as a whole. In this case, familiarity can also be understood with reference to the idea of “a cultural blind spot.” This is a basic intellectual and moral stance made possible by collective experiences that impel societies and individuals to interpret reality in a particular way. As a result, a particular cultural leaning does, to a greater extent, shield a society from perceiving and understanding reality in terms of a larger and complex whole. In the case of Africa where traditional mindsets are still at large, ancestry is socially legitimized to the extent that ancestral consciousness is like the air an African breathes in and out! This brings us back to the importance of Benezet Bujo’s proposal as a point of contrast for an alternative approach to contextual theologies in Africa.

Most theological writings have not explored the importance of ancestry in contemporary Africa’s existence. Hence, by virtue of recognizing the concept of ancestry, Bujo demonstrates a good measure of awareness of its importance in the Black African experiences. Ancestry is the one most important premise in his discernment for the best means of incarnating Christianity in Africa. His efforts exceed others, who have delved into this central feature of Africa’s communal life. But for the particular purposes of this study, the why and how of his discernment is what a critical reading of his proposal is primarily concerned with below. This focus will be limited to his perceived contextual problem, objectives, principles, and methodology. All these will be examined on his own terms. His own words are directly and extensively cited to allow his own meaning to speak for itself. We begin by examining his perceived agenda.
Bujo’s Programmatic Statements

African Theology in its Social Context conveys Bujo’s attempt to construct a relevant local theology for Africa. His own particular agenda should be understood from this vantage point. Bujo was impelled to write by what he perceived in African theology as a failure to

\[\text{move} \text{ beyond the negritude movement.}\]\(^{32}\) As a dominant trend, negritude gives the “impression that [the] real aim [of African theologians] is to show the world how religious Africans are, and how the basic elements of their traditional religion can be used as the ‘raw material’ for the construction of an African theology. But no effort is made to work up this ‘raw material’ into a genuine, even if tentative, theological synthesis.”\(^{33}\)

Consequently, he launched his project in response to a rising “[demand to rethink] this conventional approach to African theology.”\(^{34}\) Rethinking African theology consists not only in the need for “a theology that can really lead to an incarnated Christianity in Africa, [but also one that is in accordance with] the wishes of the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar.”\(^{35}\) He further argues significantly that the existing approaches manifest a “lack of any theological synthesis…many if not most, African theologians do not proceed contextually. They ignore the actual, post colonial situation, [and fail as a result to construct a new liberation theology for Africa today].”\(^{36}\) But granted his particular stance, these programmatic statements are ironical as we shall see shortly. Nonetheless, these assertions earned him laudatory appraisal from a well reputed Catholic theologian, Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S. In the foreword to the discourse in question, Schreiter said:

Blending together concerns for traditional African values within the horizon of contemporary social issues in Africa, this book represents the synthetic quality of his theological project. Neither a traditionalist trying to preserve African rural culture in the mindless fashion nor a reformist calling for a move away from African roots, he holds in balance the past and the present, the cultural and the social, and the urban and the rural, in
order to develop a theology that speaks to Africans and explains Africa to those outside.\textsuperscript{37}

The theological and methodological validity of these claims remain to be seen in the course of this study. Of immediate relevance is the configuration made by central elements in the programmatic statements.

Bujo specifies that \textit{African Theology in Its Social Context} is more “an initiation to African theology in order to suggest a few basic ideas that might later provide matter for deeper reflection.”\textsuperscript{38} By this he indicates the nature and content of his agenda, and the function it serves in the wider scheme of African theology. We have seen his point that theology must be contextual so that it can be attuned to the demands of incarnating Christianity in Africa. He, in addition, affirms “reaction” as an essential feature of contextual African theology. Attentiveness to this last point is a necessary condition for coming to a better appreciation of the substance of his proposal. The four elements of reaction, content, method and objectives, and their interrelationships not only form the basic structure of his agenda, they are also vital to comprehending his synthesis. In the same way, though the programmatic statements have the ‘negritude movement as their origin,’ the real function of negritude, on close examination, is to furnish a context for addressing a much greater problem of Western cultural domination. Thus, the weaknesses he points out in contemporary African theology are important concerns, insofar as they offer him a starting point to focus on one major concern: the integrity of Black Africa and its cultures.
The Contextual Problem: Western Domination in Africa

According to Bujo, incarnating Christianity in Africa must be achieved by means of contextualization, and rightly so. He also maintains that this ought to come about by means of a theological synthesis. He gives expression to this vision by focusing on the recurring problem of Western domination. This problem enables the organization of subject matter and the sequence of his arguments around a common agenda in African theology. In this entire scheme, one should also keep in mind the role of the dynamic of reaction in shaping his theories and methods. Most native African theologians reflect a varied measure of concern for the on-going conflict between Western and African cultures. This concern is frequently accompanied by sentiments of sadness or anger that run deep within the different ranks of Black African theologies. An example is captured graphically by a contemporary African priest, whose sentiments Bujo cites.

[In 1885 at Berlin our Continent was partitioned. Without consulting anyone they had pity on our misery….Every time I come across this date, I feel the same contempt still. That man despises you so be it. The worst it is that they taught me this date. They made us memorize it…Before our passive faces they displayed the results obtained: The pacification of Africa; the benefits of civilization in Africa; the courage of explorers; disinterested philanthropy. And no one, [a]bsolutely no one pointed out this injury, this shame which followed us everywhere, [t]hat a man, your equal, should meddle in your affairs without consulting you at all. It is a flagrant lack which any well-bred ear resents].

Historical events such as these constitute the basic problem that inspires Bujo’s interpretation and the eventual synthesis of the ancestral traditions with Christology. Referring to the conflict in view, Bujo states that “the problem of culture cannot be ignored. The Black African must rediscover his roots so that the ancestral tradition may enrich post-colonial people and make them adopt a critical attitude toward modern
society.” These historical events also form a thread of continuity with contemporary African theological concerns, and situate his particular agenda in the latter’s overall framework: to liberate Africa from religious and cultural domination.

Accordingly, Bujo begins by admitting that “[w]hen we consider current debates on the subject, we cannot go wrong if we reconstruct the preparatory stages which shaped the actual theology of Africa.” This sensitivity to the African-Western cultural conflict shapes his theological schema and the sequence of his argument. His reflection begins with the ATRs’ views, followed by accounts of the colonial and missionary activities, a review of the African theological response to those activities, and concludes with his own synthesis. This schema is not simply a matter of literary convenience; the arrangement reinforces the significance of the stated conflict, and justifies his proposal. Also the impetus for the reactionary twist in his work derives from this background. He states: “In the first place, we must discuss how African religion is the very heart of the traditional society and how colonization and missionary activity together often upset the delicate balance between the basic elements of the old clans and tribes. Only then can we understand the reaction of African theologians and authors.” Ultimately, this reactionary twist is decisive for his choice of context. For while his expressed concern is the contemporary African cultural situation, his vision of what is “African” and “cultural” draws upon Africa’s pre-colonial culture. It is thus important to establish, why the ancestors and the life meaning they advocate are essential to his synthesis by examining the nature and terms of the ancestral method. However, because of the basic nature and the complex network of meanings associated with theological methodology in general,
and his synthesis in particular, the task of critiquing Bujo is situated in the fundamental and wider theme of theological foundations.

SECTION II

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Second Vatican Council laid the ground for recognizing culture as one of the major sources for contextual theology. At the same time the Council maintained that Christ is the foundation of Christian theology (GS, no. 58. cf. nos. 22 & 45). In view of contextual methodologies, the link between Christology and culture remains a difficult and elusive task. Yet this difficulty makes it imperative that we understand the theological foundations for the Proto-Ancestor Christology as a condition for coming to a better grasp of Bujo’s synthesis and the content that explains it. The first step in this somewhat long process is to outline Bujo’s ancestral theological schema.

A Theological Schema

Since the ancestor-based approach seeks to point out a path toward a relevant and viable contextual theology, Bujo must reckon with a basic challenge in contemporary theology of mission. How does contextualization make Scripture, tradition and the culture of the local Church sources for a local theology? In response, Bujo states his thesis unequivocally that “[the theology of ancestors [is] the starting point for a new Christology].”44 This basic statement unfolds along two essential elements: the method and its theological foundations. First, Bujo asserts that “The person of Jesus Christ and the community of the Church are the two fundamentals of the Christians faith.”45 Second, he specifies that these are to be “[examined] in light of Africa’s ancestor-tradition.”46 These two interrelated ideas are decisive in Bujo’s conception of a
contextual methodology. That is, if the first statement specifies selected theological foundations, the second spells out the method in view. But first, what does Bujo intend by these assertions?

The Rationale for the Proto-Ancestor Christological Foundations

First of all, whereas the general approach is ancestor-based, Bujo develops this by use of various systems of thought and modes of theologizing. Though he does not refer explicitly to *praeparatio evangelico* analogy and correlation, these methodological perspectives are discernible in his entire discourse. These converge and diverge in the many ways as he attempts to relate cultural religious experience to Christ’s experience. Noticeable in his argument is a very thin line between correlation and analogy. At the same time, correlation and *praeparatio evangelico* function in tandem to consolidate the relationship he establishes between Africa’s religious traditions and Christianity.

Bujo begins his reflections with a general theological account of ATRs’ experiences and their views of God. His immediate goal is to bring out the universal significance of Africa’s belief in the oneness of God. He moves logically from this foundational point to show how traditional faith could illumine the understanding of the African view of God-human relationship. He then goes on to conclude and accurately so, that “[t]he novelty of Christianity for Africans did not consist in its proclamation of one God, but rather in the more complete and definitive proclamation of that one God, whom Africa already knew, and who also is the God of Jesus Christ. It showed more clearly than the African tradition was able to, and how this God wishes to be and can be, in fact, better known.” By this statement Bujo does not only affirm the universality of grace that always accompanies created reality, he also seeks to demonstrate its implications for
a local theology. In his own words, “To establish the reign of God in Africa means to start from the most basic elements of black culture in order to revitalize modern life.”

Thus far, his position does not sound immediately contradictory. After all, the church’s teaching since the Second Vatican Council has reclaimed and made this process normative for contemporary missiology. Be that as it may, his argument, in principle, consistently signals a departure from the basic orientation of contemporary Catholic missiology, in which there is a dialectical tension between the universal and the particular dimensions of what it means to be a church. Nor does his basic position lead to an evangelical process similar to the one proposed by Justin S. Ukpong, for instance.

Following in the spirit of *Ad gentes Divinitus*, n. 22), Ukpong explains how Jesus employed the Jewish language, symbols, and world view in his proclamation of the Good News. Jesus was thus able to transform his contemporary society from within. Ukpong wants to construct a Biblical model and then relate it to the African situation. He consequently suggests that inculturation should begin with basic elements in the African traditional *culture* and move progressively to the essence of Christian faith. In essence, Ukpong’s treatise applies basic principles of Vatican Council II, which appear in numerous forms. Conversely, many of Bujo’s claims seem to echo a similar position. Even though Bujo does not cite *Nostra Aetate*, nos.1-4, his arguments, up to this point, resonate with that teaching. This is why his approach could, on the surface, be easily construed to be in the same vein with Ukpong’s position, and so on. Contrary to the fact, the differences lie in the proposition that the theology of ancestors become the starting point for a *new Christology*. This position is very critical and as such, one must understand what Bujo is saying and how he is saying it.
Bujo is proposing that ancestry becomes the framework for understanding who Christ is per se, and who Christ is for Africa. In other words, while the Judaic tradition is the relevant background for the New Testament Christology and what Christ stands for, the ancestor tradition becomes the new foundation and the frame of reference for understanding the totality of Christ for the diverse African context. Because of the importance of the Proto-Ancestor Christology for Bujo’s theological schema we must dwell, for a moment, on the hermeneutics stemming from this new Christology. The purpose is to get to the theological mechanics that lead to the Proto-Ancestor Christology.

Ancestral Hermeneutics for Translating the Gospel into Cultural Categories

The preceding highlights express convictions in accordance with Bujo’s overall view and agenda. The immediate purpose of this section is to indicate a major shift from the hermeneutic principles that are grounded in New Testament Christology to the ones framed by the ancestor tradition. This shift, on the part of Bujo, is not necessarily arbitrary. Incarnation as the principle for inculturation also gives expression to the traditions of the ancestors. Therefore, it is at this level of meaning that one can grasp what Bujo means above by “[interpreting] the person of Jesus Christ and community of the church in light of Africa’s ancestor-tradition.”

In the context of incarnation Christology, the interplay between “correlation” and praeparatio evangelico establishes a direct link between the Christ and African ancestors. The highest point in the many correlations he draws between the Christ and ancestors is marked by the conviction that “In his earthly life, Jesus manifested precisely all those qualities and virtues which Africans like to attribute to their ancestors in daily life. We can, therefore, understand the importance of a Christology ‘from below’ for the African
context. Theology can only speak of God in human terms drawn from human experience.”56 This argument points clearly to his theory and method.57

Reference to the root meaning of the term “Prot(o)” and its usage by Bujo is a necessary step in understanding the Proto-Ancestor Christology. The meaning of prot(o) should not be understood in isolation, but in relation to *praeparatio evangelico* as its proper philosophical-theological frame of reference in Bujo’s schema. In one of his many references to the incarnation he states that “[J]esus, present Word made flesh, is the privileged and unique place of the total revelation of human kind.”58 Since the incarnation of the Word is the theological backdrop for his synthesis, the root idea of Prot(o) aptly alludes to the John’s transcendent Christology of the incarnation. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God” (Jn. 1:4c).59 This prime aspect of John’s Christology strives to underscore the preexistence of Christ in relation to the incarnation. Even if the Johannine exposition may have been called for by a polemical situation, the Christological insights surfaced, nevertheless. A word of clarification is in order here.

The Oxford dictionary defines prot(o) as something “original;” one from which “others develop” or [follow from it].60 It also cites the “protozoa” (meaning animal-like forerunners of true animals) as a typical example. Following these illustrations, “proto” denotes a primary principle that regulates the essential character of all nascent-principles, as in the case of protozoa. Prot(o) then basically means whatever emerges from the primary principle does not change its essential or core substance. The “secondary principles” function in much the same way as the “primary one.” The same internal logic is perceptible in the correlation set between the person of Jesus Christ and the ancestor-
personalities. In order for the ancestors to assume a theological foundational status, Bujo equates Christ’s qualities with those of the ancestors. Christ’s qualities must be seen as properly belonging to the preexistent Word, first and foremost, before the Word became incarnate. This way, Christ’s humanity and divinity validate the African ancestral humanity and everything they stood for. The conclusion must be, therefore, as follows: the Word that took flesh in the womb of the collective experience of Israel is the same Word that prompted and inspired the ancestors’ search for God in the African cultures. Seen this way, the incarnation ceases to be a concrete experience that took place at a particular time in a particular context and becomes a universal experience. From the perspective of the [coming to life of Revelation in Christ], Jesus is Proto-Ancestor for the Africans. Jesus, the Christ, identified himself with humankind, so that he constitutes their explanation. From now on Jesus makes his own all the striving of the ancestors after righteousness and all their history in such a way that these have now become a meeting place with the God of salvation.  

This is one of the highest points in the Proto-Ancestor-Christological schema, and the end to which his entire project tends. It summarizes his total vision for a contextual theology. That is, from the mutual relationship between the formal beliefs in God and the accrued meanings of life present in the African traditions, one can now understand why the ancestral method consists in the synthesis between the “ancestors” and the Jesus Christ.

Because Bujo’s thought patterns, with regard to incarnation, are consistent with the *praeparatio evangelico* mode of thought, this trend properly places him in accord with theologians who find in *praeparatio evangelico* the most important frame of reference for contextual theology. M. L Daneel’s testimony is convincing:

This view [*praeparatio evangelico*] represents a liberation from Western missionary theological over-accentuation of the ‘pagan’ nature of the
traditional religion. After all, from the *praeparatio evangelico* perspective, the Christian message is the fulfillment rather than a rejection of the pre-Christian African religious experience.\(^6^2\)

This too is the theological historical backdrop for Bujo’s synthesis, in view of which he maintains that, “It is still pertinent today to ask ourselves who Jesus is and what impact he has on the African who does not need to change culture to be called a child of God.”\(^6^3\) Hence, having established the rationale for the Proto-Ancestor Christology, he must now bring this anthropocentric vision to its logical end.

The next step for Bujo is to demonstrate the concrete meaning of Proto-Ancestor. This step requires that one understands basic “technical ideas” involved as Bujo’s transitions from the “concept” (Proto-ancestor) to the “concrete” realities; i.e., the African existence and life of the Church. Then as now, correlation functions to establish the bond between the ancestral legacies with the Judeo-Christian tradition. Very significantly, the task of correlating the ancestral and the Jesus experiences begins at the same point where the Judeo-Christians traditions locate the decisive and originating specific events in God’s self-revelation in Israel; i.e., in the final and mutually interdependent events of the Passover traditions. He says:

> The particular words, actions and rituals associated with the ancestors, and with the elders in general, have deep meaning in the life of African people. They constitute a rule of conduct for the living, and they must be continually repeated. The present and future depend on this repetition and representation of that speech, actions and rituals; it is in truth a matter of life and death. The past is enshrined in the tradition of the Fathers, but is a past which still lives on and is the guarantee of the present salvation. The repetition of the past in a kind of memorial calendar is no mere pious, ineffectual remembrance but a necessary return to the source of life which is essential if men and women are to be able to take a decisive step forward.\(^6^4\)
That the ancestral experiences are portrayed as a parallel to the Judeo-Christian Passover events is unmistakable. The Passover traditions, among other things, commemorate a decisive moment when Israel of old crossed the threshold of death, when the community consciously chose to depart from Egypt and become a people of God. Although Israel did not die in the literal sense, the community died spiritually to the “soothing” and “deceptive effects” of a dehumanizing life in Egypt, and to a life vision that country offered the Israelites. Israel had a lot of meat and vegetables to eat in Egypt but they lacked fundamental dignity as a people. Hence, without foreknowledge of the future, Israel chose to trust God on account of Moses’ word. The Exodus proved a long and arduous but fruitful spiritual journey. And with that decisive passage, a new history of world order began. Similarly, the events surrounding Jesus’ last moment have parallel significance to the Exodus. Jesus held on to his confidence in the Father’s love and will to save humanity. With this faith-filled vision, Jesus decided, like Israel of old, to embrace the will of God and cross the threshold of death. Since then, these Passovers have become the historical and religious points of reference for Judaism and Christianity. They constitute Final Testaments to which future generations of Jews and Christians look back to understand, where they came from, where they are, and where they are going. As we have seen, these dialectics in the Judeo-Christian traditions have their substantive and soteriological “equivalent” in the ancestral traditions, according to Bujo.

When we say that we want to use the concept of ancestor as the basis of Christology, we are referring to God fearing ancestors…Only in the case of such ancestors can we speak of experiences and examples as truly a ‘last will and testament’ left behind for the benefit of their descendants. In this context, it is to be noted that the last words of a dying person…are of particular significance. These words are words of life, setting a seal on the experiences and example of one…The final event in the life of a dying person is normative for those he or she is leaving behind.
There is no doubt, therefore, that the “choice of terms” is deliberately intended to set a bond between the African and the Judeo-Christians tradition, specifically the Passover events. The Deuteronomic tradition records moments when Israel posed to consider: “These are the commandments, the statutes and decrees, which the Lord, your God, has ordered that you be taught to observe….Hear then O Israel, and be careful to observe them, that you may grow and prosper.” St. Mark later reports that “While they were eating, [Jesus] took bread…and said, ‘Take it; this is my body’…Then he took a cup…‘This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many’ (Mk. 14: 22-25. cf. Deut 6: 1ff.). In summary, these parallels illustrate how Bujo establishes the rationale for the ancestral Christology. Striking as these similarities between the two traditions might be, a basic question is deserving of mention. Granted that a Christian theology has implications for the life of the church and the world around it, what is the terrestrial goal of ancestral theology? To answer this question and to understand the purpose of Bujo’s vision, we must also strive to understand what ancestral Christology intends to achieve. To this the analysis now turns.

**The Terrestrial Goal of the Proto-Ancestor Christology**

It ought to be clear by now that a ‘synthesis’ is the means of achieving a relevant theology for Africa. In the Ancestral Christological schema, a synthesis is synonymous with the concept of “Catholic methodology.” As a theological tool, it is “the means by which uneasy co-existence between the two faiths, Christianity and African religions could be overcome.” As one would expect, the ancestral theology does not only “offer Africans a Christianity which they understand,” it will also invigorate Africa to deal effectively with its most fundamental problems, especially “neo-colonialism.” Bujo
framed his synthesis with insights drawn from an earlier African writer, Joseph Ki-Zerbo whose work he cites.

Writing under the influence of Pan-Africanism (1962), Ki-Zerbo had attempted to do what all native theologians have been and are still trying to achieve in various ways: “to rehabilitate the values of African culture.” Now as then, rehabilitation is frequently conceived along two dialectical factors of cultural identity and natural dynamism. Native theologians believe that the restoration of Africa’s “natural dynamism…and identity [is] a condition for opening up Africa to the ‘universal’ dialogue with men and women from all corners of the human family.” This aspiration summarizes the theological agenda of African theologians presented in this chapter. Bujo’s conception of the ‘real’ problem of Africa is clearly informed, to a greater extent, by this ideal. In essence, his project aims at defending African humanity in all its past and contemporariness.

Ki-Zerbo, according to Bujo, patterned his visions on similar aspirations and later suggested “three basic guidelines” for managing Africa’s problems and needs. His first guideline consists in identifying “the main features of the social organization and conception of the traditional African society.” “[T]he traditional African concept of authority, in which ancestors are included” is the key underlying principle. Consequently, Ki-Zerbo proposed that the ancestral tradition enshrined in the traditional structure of authority be the “[starting point] in the discernment for a ‘new African society which would combine African tradition with elements from modern Western society.” The second guideline also consists in identifying “the principal elements of the present crisis” in Africa. The third sought to determine “what prospects and what transcendent structure will emerge to create the new African society for her to obtain a
higher sociological level?" Ki-Zerbo found the lead in the first guideline: “the traditional African concept of authority” which as “an African basis” must provide the dynamism for needed “transformation.”

However, Ki-Zerbo’s approach to Africa’s transformation has theological and methodological implications, according to this study. His conception of the solution to Africa’s problems consists in the process of discernment that begins with the established structures in the pre-colonial traditional society before considering the actual situation in contemporary Africa. This is precisely determinism. Rather than derive a method for social transformation from the concrete experiences of contemporary Africa, Ki-Zerbo preferred a discernment process based on traditional norms. It is a process that resonates with the Black Africa’s cultural psyche, because traditionally Africa solves problems by looking backward in time not forward toward the unknown future. Our ancestors did it, so must we do. This is the law of the land! This way Ki-Zerbo subjects an intrinsic transformative dynamism in contemporary situation to the dynamics of established traditional structures. Moreover, the functional significance of these structures has been appropriated not only by Western cultural imperialism and its positive influences, but also by the changed human and social conditions in Africa, and the world in general. These realities cannot be reversed by simply re-instating basic elements in Africa’s past; it demands much more complex effort beyond Ki-Zerbo’s vision. Furthermore, Ki-Zerbo’s basic logic has negative implications for a contextual theology. The purpose of this last point is not to question the legitimacy of drawing upon positive traditional African experiences. The primary concern here is a technical one: how can contextual theology relate the past, present and future so that Christianity could say something
meaningful for Africa today? When this question is examined against the background of “theological foundations,” Ki-Zerbo’s vision has affinity with Bujo’s own, which brings us to the purpose of this section.

The philosophical background furnished by Ki-Zerbo’s guidelines offers a relevant transition to Bujo’s Proto-Ancestor Christology. Bujo embraces Ki-Zerbo’s insights whole heartedly and in turn declares that “There is then no dream of recreating a Paradise Lost in modern Africa. Africans want to bring the world of their ancestors to new life in their world, for only thus can they find true life for themselves and for their children.”78 This is the key to understanding the true purpose of the Proto-Ancestor Christology. Bujo further gives Ki-Zerbo’s guidelines a nuanced affirmation. Referring to the social dynamics in pre-colonial traditional society, he says, “Their tolerant and virtually classless society should help modern Africans to avoid the class struggle which has been characteristic of Western society: equality and fraternity should come naturally to Africans.”79 The presumption here is that the Western socio-economic and its political systems are responsible for the despotic tendencies and moral poverty in African political leaders and the masses, and the current mystifying cultural impasse in Africa.

In summary, the fullness of Bujo’s basic assumptions comes to the fore through the idea of Proto-ancestor and the theology it proposes. This section has endeavored, above all, to show that the transformative dynamism necessary for Africa’s religious development and maturation does not immediately lie with the Gospel or Christ for that matter, as Bujo’s Proto-Ancestor Christology is often construed. The transformative dynamism resides with the tradition of ancestors. This line of approach inevitably begs many questions on the centrality of Christ for *Catholic theology and its mission*. It
because of who Christ is for the Church, mission and the world that the following critique is designed.

SECTION III

A CRITICAL RESPONSE

It was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the evangelical dynamic, meaning and content of a contextual theology that is genuinely Christian is contingent on what is set as the theological foundations. The following critical analysis proceeds from some basic concerns about the assertions made by Bujo regarding the Christological and, henceforth, the ultimate value of the traditional African religious heritage in general, and ancestry in particular. In the final analysis, the above presentation of Bujo’s proposal was an attempt to highlight the constitutive principles in Christology to which Proto-Ancestor Christology occupies a center stage. Basic to the present critique is the essential principle and belief that Christian faith exists in dialogue with human traditions. Likewise, dialogue has so far been discussed, not in terms of working definitions but in terms of a primary principle (who is Christ) to show that the former is intrinsic to the theological foundations. Precisely, in view of the need to develop human capacities as a necessary step in the ultimate salvation, the emphasis here is on dialogue as a central principle in the church’s mission to the world.

Bujo’s basic assumption so far is that once correlations are drawn between the essential function of an ancestor and that of Christ, then, Black Africa is able to understand the latter’s importance for their lives. On the surface, the Proto-Ancestor Christology presumes to provide the soteriological and needed basis for Christ to claim
the seminal functions of ancestry in the African religio-cultural experiences. This is also how some readers perceive the proposal in question. For instance, when Alfred T. Hennelly, S.J, proposes Bujo’s synthesis as “the major resource for African Theology” to illustrate the trend of liberation theology in Africa, he is convinced that “Bujo is one of the pioneers in the search for a truly African theology.”

Contrary to the fact, there are defective Christological and methodological subtleties that are basic in nature and obtain from the correlations drawn between the ancestral and the Judeo-Christian tradition. As a result, and granted the fundamental function of Christology for Christian theology, the Proto-ancestor Christology and the theology it advances must be understood against the complex matrix of Bujo’s ancillary themes, ideas and arguments, and the various means he employs to achieve a synthesis between all these elements. This task, then, demands getting beyond his high sounding statements about the primacy and universality of Christ to see ancestry as the interpretative framework he is proposing for understanding who Christ is per se, and who Christ is for Africa. This important step can be achieved by situating this critical analysis in the context of three basic problems associated with the proposal as a whole.

There are issues in Bujo’s proposal related to:

a) An absence of a clear cognition and a compelling articulation of the actual problem(s) of contemporary Africa;

b) Problems rooted in the lack of “inner theological consistency”; 

c) A lack of a meaningful anthropology and Christology that could bear effectively upon (a) above, and consequently inform the development of viable methods of inculturation and pastoral strategies that Africa is so much in need of today.

At the same time, because these issues constitute the subject matter for the subsequent chapters, this critical analysis basically points out the major flaws in Bujo’s basic
arguments. We shall begin with the issue of ‘inner theological consistency’ and tie in key points from (a) and (c), above.

**Inner Theological Consistency**

Stephen B. Bevans has used the concept of the “inner theological consistency” to indicate one of the key issues in contemporary concerns for the “[criteria for Christian orthodoxy]” in the field of contextual theologies. In summary, this concept speaks to the “basic movement of Christianity” that contextual theology ought to embody and reflect. But since Bevans outlines this concept as a matter of fact, this section develops it further to show why and how the question of inner theological consistency bears directly on the central question of the “theological foundations,” especially in relation to Bujo’s proposal.

We begin by taking a line from Pope Paul VI. “The Gospel and, therefore, evangelization cannot be put in the same category with culture. They are above culture” (EN, no. 20). This statement presupposes an understanding of the basic principles governing the mission of salvation entrusted to the Church. Paul VI is not saying that culture is not an important theological reference point, but that relating the two must be done in such a way as not to merge the contingency of the human on the divine, also represented in the “faith” and “culture” relationships. Paul VI’s position can also be explained in the following way. Culture as a reference for theology introduces an attendant question: who is Christ for a particular culture, to the basic question of who is Christ per se. These, are in fact, the two major interrelated themes in Christology that ground the idea of theological foundations. For purposes of convenience in this study, we shall term these questions as “the Christ-questions.” These are equal dimensions of
the same reality called “Christology” and as such, constitute the “defining structure of meaning” called the “Christian theological foundations.” While the basic question entails scripture and tradition, the second “applies” the salvific dynamism (in Scripture and tradition) in relation to culture. The inner theological consistency that Bevans and others write about derives, therefore, from the interplay between these two central themes in Christology. The delineation we have just made is imperative in order to reflect on the condition in the Catholic tradition that scripture, tradition and culture are three major sources for contemporary theology. We seek to understand Bujo’s application of this provision in the Proto-Ancestor schema. In the ancestral model for a contextual theology that we are currently investigating, for instance, these elements tend to merge to the point where a distinction cannot be made between explicit and implicit revelations. Bringing into perspective these two dimensions can help to clarify the Christological ramifications of Proto-Ancestor Christology as the foundation of African theology.

We have seen that in view of the theological foundations, Bujo makes the community of the church and the person of Christ the scriptural frame of references for the Proto-ancestor Christology. In connecting Christ and “the community of the Church” he seeks to evoke the experience of the early Church that led to the formulation of the Gospels. This is not a new strategy or proposal since our knowledge of Christ cannot be separated from the community of the early Church. But Bujo is doing something quite novel. The “community of the early Church”85 (Scripture) and the transcendent “person of Christ” are his points of reference only insofar as they establish the paradigm for his synthesis. He states, “The person of Jesus Christ” and “community of the Church” are to be “[examined] in light of Africa’s ancestor-tradition.”86 A closer examination of the
grammatical expression in this last statement can offer insight into the meaning of “theological foundations,” especially as it applies to his “synthesis” or method.

There is a fundamental difference in meaning and method between the foregoing statement and its reversal; i.e., Africa’s ancestor-tradition is to be examined in light of the person of Christ and the community of the church. According to Bujo’s paradigm, the ancestor tradition is the ultimate frame of reference. In the second statement Christ and the Christian tradition are the ultimate frames of reference. In other words, Bujo is not simply using words to convey neutral meaning. The grammatical structure of the particular postulation contains Christological and methodological significances; i.e., the meaning and terms of his method are hereby structured by language itself. The African ancestor-tradition is Bujo’s primary source and ultimate point of reference, while his projected synthesis is worked out by drawing upon the mutual interchange between the person of Christ and the ancestor personalities, situated in the context of the local Church in Africa. But, if by this Bujo’s intent is to evoke the experience of the early Church that led to the four Evangelical traditions, his strategy contains a basic shift from the early Church model. Whereas the scriptural traditions are a result of the early communities’ experiences of Christ, incarnate and Risen, Bujo’s synthesis is premised on the conviction that the essence of the Christ event is already present in the African traditions. We saw that his incarnation Christology evokes *praeparatio evangelico* in direct relation to the idea of prot(o). In the final analysis, therefore, Bujo has made Christ not the foundation per se but his point of validation. How does he do this?

Attributing all Jesus’ “virtues and qualities” to the ancestors is Bujo’s way of stating that the essence of Christ and what he represents is already present in the ancestor
personalities and traditions. As a result, this gesture also imparts Christological significance to the ancestors and what they stand for. Ancestry becomes, not simply the mode of communicating eternal truth, but also the basis of what Africans can say about God and about their existence. Whether or not Bujo was aware of the inherent anomaly, this is a point at which “ancestry” displaces the would-be proper function of Christology in his synthesis. The ascription of Christ’s personal qualities to the ancestors overlooks that these flow from the unity between Christ’s human and divine natures. Moreover, the unit of two natures introduces ontology as the axis of theological foundations. The foregoing explanation can be expressed differently by appealing to specific technicalities in a theological method. That is to say, the basic question of who is Christ seeks to address all reality at the level of primary principles. It speaks of the meaning and purpose of existence in ultimate or decisive terms. The question of who is Christ for a particular context such as Africa seeks basically to render the first question meaningful for the cultural contexts concerned. The second question, however, must be answered by bringing the “first question” and “cultural realities” into play. In other words, the second question is the domain of contextualization, but which must make the person and meaning of Christ its backdrop. Because these two questions are critical to contextualization, understanding how Bujo has handled them can clarify where the problem with his synthesis lies.

Bujo answered the basic question of who is Christ in two ways. On the one hand, he makes an exclusive reference to the Johannine transcendent Christology to illustrate who Christ is as indicated in the preceding discussions. His references to the Passion, death, and the resurrection are transient in nature and have no soteriological bearing on
his overall synthesis. On the other hand, and very significant, he also explains the Christ factor by appealing, not to the scriptural tradition but to the ancestral experiences. We saw this with reference to the juxtapositions he sets between the African and the Judeo-Christian traditions. He does this, because he seeks to justify and illustrate his conviction that the ATRs contain elements that are in harmony with the Judeo-Christian vision. His approach lends itself well to the views of one of the most eminent forerunners in contemporary African theology. John S. Pobee’s also believed that “[t]heological formulations spring out of people’s experiences and culture.” The issue, however, is that the specific end product of contextualization is a “Christian theology” but not just any theology for that matter. And this is the problem with Bujo’s synthesis. By appealing to the ancestors rather than the Christ event in its complexity, Bujo merges the Christ-questions to the point where the conceptual peculiarities and significances between them disappear. The basic question of who is Christ is overtaken by the attendant question, and in Christ’s place we have the ancestors as the explanation of the African existence and the would-be Christian experience. Christ becomes the ineffectual ideal toward which the African heritages aim. At this point, it must be underscored that the Proto-Ancestor scheme can be appealing when one forgets that the question of who is Christ comprises an ontological question. And that humanity, according to Christian faith, cannot find ultimate meaning by appealing to human experience while simultaneously making very basic presumptions about the Redemptive plan of God realized in Christ. In summary, the Proto-Ancestor Christology shifts theological foundations from its Christian ontological status to the cultural-historical level: the ancestral experiences. This for Bujo is not without purpose.
Convinced that “African traditional religions promised salvation, and freed people here and hereafter,” the most logical suppositions run as follows. Since ATRs are rooted in the ancestral traditions that embody a salvific dynamism, then, the best that theology can do is to find a point of connection that enables ATRs to resume their original religious vitality. As for the Christian-based acknowledgement that “Jesus…transcended [the ancestral ideal] and brought it to new completion….Christ is the ultimate embodiment of the virtues of the African ancestors, the realization of salvation for which they yearned” have a single purpose. They ought to be understood in terms of the basic direction of ATRs presumed here. By affirming Christianity, Bujo treats or presents Christ simply as the ideal beyond to which the African traditional religious propensity is geared. This is the only logical means by which the “Africans [can] bring the world of their ancestors in modern life” without being adulterated by Western Christianity.

It is not far-fetched, then, to identify the following as the purpose for the Proto-Ancestor Christology. By correlating the person of Christ, and the early Church’s experience with African religious heritage, Bujo seeks to assert a direct continuity between the two religious traditions in a very forceful manner. Perhaps more revealing is his belief that, “the conclusion must be that Africa has a vision of the future that is not radically different from that of the Judeo-Christian tradition.” As a result, “[w]hat is needed is a new synthesis. It is not the question of replacing the God of the Africans, but rather enthroning the God of Jesus, but not as a rival God of the ancestors, but as identical with God.” True enough, Christology seeks to affirm and clarify the “oneness” of God experienced in other religious traditions, but there is more to this
central task. Christology, first and foremost, seeks to verify and clarify simultaneously the claims by religious traditions to the spiritual and moral integrity, and their orientation to the fullness of truth regarding human life that Christ expresses through his incarnation. Seen this way, “Christianity does not replace the God whom traditional Africa sought.” But Christianity, through Gospel Mission, goes a step further and puts cultural religions to the task of refining and advancing their initial religious impulses. This process happens neither automatically nor in haphazard manner. Christianity presents the Jesus event along with Revelation in Israel as the points of reference among non-Christian believing cultures. When the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed incarnation as the normative principle for evangelization, for instance, the Council Fathers were convinced of the universality of grace antedating the event of the incarnation. But they stated this cautiously without merging the fine lines between implicit and explicit revelations (GS, no. 58).93 For purposes of this investigation, a holistic response to the basic question of who is Christ should not be limited to correlating deistic concepts, meaning and values in the Judeo-Christian with the African traditions. A satisfactory response should make the Redemptive plan of God in its total complexity and in its transcendence and concreteness the framework of such a discussion. “Formal or structural resemblance” between the two traditions is not the essential substance by which the two traditions can be linked. Hence, because of the importance of the relationship between faith and culture94 for contextualization, we must examine how an indispensable principle in Catholic missiology features in Bujo’s Christological schema: Christian-cultural dialogue.
The Implications of the Proto-Ancestor Christology for Christian-Cultural Dialogue

The attempt so far has been to point out that the problem of the lack of “inner theological consistency” stems from the larger and basic question of the “theological foundations.” This section takes a step further to point out the implications of ancestral Christology for Christian-cultural dialogue. The discussion will be limited to the implication of Proto-Ancestor Christology for dialogue. Theological foundations are determinative as to whether a contextual theology will allow for or stave off effective dialogue between Christianity and cultural traditions. It was indicated that the question of who Christ is for Africa cannot be answered unidimensionally; i.e. without putting into proper perspective the basic question of, who is Christ per se? We have also seen that Proto-Ancestor Christology is a result of patterning New Testament Christology on the ancestral dynamics. Moreover, this process is carried out without due consideration for the serious negative values inherent in the ancestral traditions. As we shall see in Chapter II, some of the most revered ancestral values are contrary to the Christian faith and practice. Also, since the negative aspects of ancestry exacerbate the existing crisis in Africa, if Christianity is to have any impact on the collective African psyche formed by the ancestral moral tradition, contextual methodology must accommodate a dialogical dynamic. This point makes it imperative to show the reason why the synthesis in question curtails rather than promotes a dialogical approach as a condition for the development of cultural religious traditions.

Like all other elements of Christian faith and practice, dialogue depends on the structure of Christology as the foundation of a Christian theology, but not after the fact. The salvific substance (deposit of faith) must be present in whatever one decides to make
the foundation of theology. That is, Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, who by virtue of his life, death and resurrection, is the model for humankind as well as their ultimate savior. Here we can appeal to Robert Kaggwa’s conclusion regarding Bujo’s synthesis. After relating the concept of “church” to the various levels of meaning in the Christian faith (trinity, Christology, pneumatology), Kaggwa had this to say about Bujo’s synthesis, especially as it relates to his ecclesiological position. “A new understanding of the Church as koinonia is not foreign to Bujo…but the problem is that ‘[he reads] it back’ into the clan system and the world of ancestors. In the final analysis, it is the African clan and the ancestors that become the solution to all problems.” Kaggwa could not have been any more accurate. Yet we must still inquire whether the tendency which Kaggwa describes is limited to Benezet Bujo. For the specific concern of this study, the basic nature of Bujo’s problem amounts to the juxtaposition between unequal subjects of existence: the human beings called the ancestors and the Christ, who is also God incarnate. Even more so, the ancestors eventually displace Christ and become the explanation of what Africans can think and say about God and existence. This is basically why the mechanics of the Proto-Ancestor Christology oppose dialogue as a central dynamic in evangelization and in human existence.

What all these lead to is that dialogue cannot proceed fruitfully when it takes off at the level of basic doctrine or formal confessional statements. For example, Bujo states accurately that, the ancestor constitutes the unity of the community and represents the pivotal point from which all actions of the members of the clan can take their dynamism. This function of the ancestors thus understood, in a very formal sense of religion as an institution, is a doctrinal statement at the level of basic meaning. It describes the
determining function of ancestry in African societies. When the same faith statement is translated into practice, moral actions would ensue, as Bujo expresses accurately:

“Anyone who does not remain in this vital union with the tribal father… and with the members of the clan community condemns himself or herself to death, because outside the community in its visible and invisible dimension no one can survive.”...97 Ironically, in the same way that this central belief fans intense tribalism and exclusivity in Africa, it would have provided a fitting basis for Africa’s understanding of the pre-Vatican II ecclesiology that there is no salvation outside the Church!

Nevertheless, ancestry thus understood is the ultimate frame of reference in the ATRs in the same ways that Christ is for the Christian tradition. Hence, when dialogue begins, by setting Christ and ancestors on the same plane, the dialogical process becomes deadlocked; in principle and in practice. On the part of the religious adherent, dialogue evokes a “defensive response” not merely as a reaction but as a human necessity. Why is this so? Ancestry is the concrete point at which moral precepts (doctrine) and self-explanations are defined, in much the same way that Christ is for the Christian faith. In other words, dialogue becomes deadlocked when it is conceived and carried out at the level of confessional statements. This is more often than not, because doctrine does, to a great extent, hold a symbolic significance in the similar mode of rituals. Certain doctrines are very compact representations of the “rational limit” of what the believer understands fluidly through faith. A Christian belief that God is a Trinity is a compact statement that also represents the backdrop of Christian faith. The human mind alone cannot get beyond the concept of the Trinity, especially when what the mind seeks to understand is not related to God’s self-communication in the world. Faith can get beyond
compact statements but only, because faith understands reality through love and hope. Where one does not “yet” possess faith in something, one approaches it rationally and as such, cannot get to the religious meanings that may be involved.

Reflections on dialogue in contemporary Catholicism tend to overlook that religious faith touches the believer at all levels of being. To such an extent, the believer responds to challenges to his or her faith by summoning resources from various levels of his or her being: mental, physical, psychological, spiritual, etc. Whether a believer will respond or simply react in the dialogical setting depends on the interplay between these various levels of personal being. In a situation where dialogue is between convinced and faithful adherents to different religious traditions, reaction, however subdued, underlies much of the exchange. The intensity of reaction also depends on the level or substance of confessional statements that are being challenged. And from the rational and psychological points of view, the believer tends to react defensively in dialogue because the concrete basis of his or her faith and experiences are being shaken. In the final analysis, this is what Bujo’s Proto-Ancestor Christology leads to with respect to Christian-cultural dialogue.

The matter of dialogue in Africa is more complex than Bujo or the local church seems to have yet grasped. Ancestry has no borders, because African Christians are informed by ancestral values in the same way that non-Christian Africans are. When the Christian message encounters the traditionalists, who are as convinced as Bujo about the salvific integrity of the ancestral traditions; the evangelical summons often fall on deaf ears. This reality happens to plague the African Christian faith and practice. So, if the African Christians, together with the adherents of ATRs, are to aspire to the fullness of
truths and experiences that the Christ event represents, it is of paramount importance that contextual theologies accommodate a dialogical evangelical dynamism. Inculturation cannot afford to proceed from what appears like a naïve understanding of ancestry in relation to Christology proper.

One of the most subtle problems with Bujo’s proposal is his avoidance to state explicitly where he stands with regard to Revelation in Israel. However, this can be inferred from what he says, and how he says it. For instance, the claim to [fullness of salvation] such as the one he makes on behalf of the ATRs is arbitrary and tends to mar the experiential and conceptual peculiarities with respect to the idea of salvation in Israel. The claim reflects no effort to see a distinction between “formal basic religious inclinations” in ATRs and the “content or substance” of that inclination. Since this matter is treated in Chapter III, it suffices to state the following. That traditional Africa did aspire to the realization of a life lived in the presence of the divine is a formal basic religious inclination. But to proceed from this general religious posture and ignore the particular “substance” of that inclination; i.e., meaning, ideas and moral values that would help to clarify ATR’s aspirations, their basic assumptions and ethical norms, is inappropriate. Of course, most of Bujo’s elucidations of the African religious views are accurate. The problem is that those ideas and values are flawed by virtue of moral limitations or sin that marks all cultural realities.

In contrast to this, what stands out in Bujo’s argument is tantamount to a précis that the ancestral traditions attained a normative theological (and moral status). They can thus provide an autonomous source and frame of reference for understanding and living the New Testament event. These glaring overtones are partly the reasons why this study
stands in disagreement with Bujo’s proposal. The entire ancestral schema renders irrelevant the question of normative history as originating with Revelation in Israel. For history would be one religious history as Karl Rahner’s theology of the anonymous Christian has been rightly interpreted. The functionality attached to terminologies of profane and sacred history, grace, human freedom, and sin is rendered superfluous in the theology of the anonymous Christian. This is precisely the same direction to which the Proto-Ancestor Christology points. So, if Bujo’s line of argument is taken seriously, it would mean that the ancestral religious propensity simply converges into the normative history that Revelation in Israel represents without any basic contradictions. Thus far, this background furnishes the context for pursuing further a corollary theme to that of dialogue: the function of Christology in fostering the development of cultural traditions.

**Christian Faith and the Development of the African Cultural Traditions**

We now seek to pursue further the function of dialogue in the Christological schema, especially in facilitating the development and growth of cultural traditions. In view of this, the major problem with Bujo’s use of incarnation Christology has to do with what appears like an exclusive use of *praeparatio evangelica* as the proper context for understanding the incarnation. There is no attempt to use concrete Scriptural traditions. All we get is an abstract Christology of incarnation that replaces the actual mission of Christ: Gospel mission.

The idea of *praeparatio evangelico* derives its meaning from John’s transcendent Christology as already described (Jn. 1:4c). This understanding is also implied in the teaching of *Dei Verbum*, where it expresses the Church’s missionary stance to the world, particularly in relation to existing religious traditions. And in contrast to Bujo’s stance,
Revelation in Israel is the proper context for *praeparatio evangelico* primarily, because the former provides the rationale (ultimate salvation) and its potency (Christ) for the mission (DV, nos. 7-10. cf. EN, no. 9).  

It follows that Christian Revelation as the sum total of God’s self-communication through the Christ event, comprise the events of the incarnation, the Passion and Death, the Resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. These as equally important dimensions of Christology modify the notion of *praeparatio evangelico*, thus giving the “incarnation” a particular leaning and propensity. In sum, the incarnation has the Judaic culture as its proper context, but not as an event that took place simultaneously in all cultures. There is an erroneous perspective that colors some application of the idea of *praeparatio evangelico*, such as one championed by Iniobong S. Udoidem. There is a tendency to confuse the “affirmation” of the cultural realities made possible by event of the incarnation with incarnation of the “Christ event in world cultures.” Incarnating Christianity in cultures is a process that is forever contingent on the “free will” of cultural subjects, and for that matter, happens gradually. If this were not so the church would not be theologizing about the dialectical relationship between faith and culture or Christian-cultural dialogue. In terms of contextual methodologies, incarnation of the Christ event in cultures is a complex matter requiring the balancing of Scripture, tradition (doctrine), and culture. An illustration can show why an absence of similar perception in Bujo’s schema hinders dialogue as a condition for the development of the African cultural traditions.

The task of incarnating Christianity entails bringing Scripture, doctrine, and culture to bear on the development of a cultural tradition. In light of the current considerations, Bujo’s argument that “Christ constitutes the explanation of human kind”
reflects a measure of understanding the church’s teaching on the universal significance of the incarnation. But because Bujo takes the church’s recognition of implicit revelation as an indiscriminate validation of cultural values, there is need to illustrate the difference between a “formal doctrinal statement” and its “application” to shed more light on what is the issue here.

The Council Fathers stated that for the church’s evangelizing mission to become effective,

…it is necessary that in each of the great socio-cultural regions, theological investigation be encouraged and the facts and words revealed by God, contained in the sacred scriptures, and explained by the Fathers and Magisterium of the Church, submitted to new examination in light of the tradition of the universal church. In this way it will be more clearly understood by what means the faith can be explained in terms of the philosophy and wisdom of the people, and how their customs, concepts of life and social structures can be reconciled by divine revelation, (Ad Gentes Divinitus, no. 22).

Church doctrine such as this is not an end but points beyond itself to a particular spiritual and moral path that the Catholic faith represents in its entirety. By implication, doctrine always requires interpretation before it is applied. At this level of the church’s teaching, this declaration is a doctrinal statement in the form of authoritative guidance. It provides the basis for understanding the Catholic faith in the incarnation and the practice of that faith through missionary activities. As it stands, the statement naturally follows the dynamics of the “proclamatory nature” of the spoken Word of Scripture. That is, although its intent is to protect the deposit of faith, doctrinal formulations do not spell out how local theologies should be developed, but leaves to the proclamatory principle in the scriptures to manifest itself through dialogue with cultures. “Proclamation” as the character of official teaching derives from the intrinsic quality of Jesus’ style of teaching.
That is, there are two moral trajectories in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God that culminate in the church’s teaching on the “defense” and the “purification” of cultures. At the first level, Jesus’ preaching was always an invitation to Israel to identify and recognize her own religious experience in the proclaimed Word. This is what the doctrinal statement is inviting the local churches to do. The affirmation of what has always been good in Israel since creation is always implied. In view of inculturation, the idea of “defense of culture” so prominent in Vatican II missiology can be located at this level of proclamation. The church defends culture when evangelization seeks to recognize and make use of the valid truth in the culture as a “starting point” for encounter with the Risen Christ. Yet, defense is not the same as validation, for the mission of the church is to defend in order to invite a culture to embrace further growth. Why? God’s “invitation or call” is dynamic, because it seeks to bring human beings beyond their cultural ideals and meanings to new horizons of meaning and experiences. Thus in view of the greater scheme of things, it is at the level of “interpretation” that our individual and communal faith and spirituality do find and give fuller meaning and expression to the reality of salvation to which any authentic doctrine points. To this end the second level of proclamation is directed.

Proclamation at the second level consists in the “challenges” such as those contained in Jesus’ call to Israel to outgrow its “weak” points: to the benefit of later generations of non-Jewish cultures. Because of the fierce resistance to his message, much of Jesus’ teaching is conveyed along the path of “challenge or confrontation.” This line of proclamation underscores the necessity of taking a critical view of culture at the point of social contemporaneity. Similarly, it is at this second level that we can locate the
purification of cultures which contextual theology must express through a critical approach to culture (GS, no. 58). Weighed against these two moral imperatives, therefore, Bujo’s synthesis is devoid of the proclamatory dynamic; i.e., the power of the Word to affirm and to challenge simultaneously in order to promote further growth. The ancestral synthesis enforces religious and cultural status quo. What is remarkable thus far is his failure to distinguish between formal doctrinal statements, such as the one mandating the local Churches to carry out appropriate research into their heritages. Seen this way, this teaching cannot be used simply to affirm indiscriminately what is already in the cultural religious heritages of people. Moreover, interpretation and application of doctrine must always preserve the essential meaning and character of the core message of the Gospel. Where these important points are violated or not well synchronized, the defense of culture would stand in opposition to the dynamic of purification. As result, the Gospel cannot act as a “leaven” of society in cultural domains. What this study is saying repeatedly is that dialogue is an intrinsic function of Christology, because it enables and facilitates the development of cultural traditions. For that matter, dialogue has direct implications for contextualization. Its reality attunes local theology to be attentive not only to culture but also to the existing conditions of the human being involved. That Proto-Ancestor Christology is very deficient in this important and initial stage in inculturation is illustrated by the following paragraph.

Bujo acknowledges the question of contextualization as an important dimension of inculturation. However, contextualization, as far as Africa is concerned, demands attentiveness to a number of factors: a) the concept of a human being; b) the meaning and basis of culture; c) the reality of social change; d) cultural domination, and
e) cultural dialogue. His handling of these issues, if any, leaves a lot to be desired. Although his main concern is contemporary Africa, the context that supplies the subject matter for his synthesis is decisively pre-colonial Africa. Many questions remain unanswered in this regard among which is whether self-determination could be achieved by focusing solely on ATRs in their institutional past. Thus Bujo fails to treat adequately issues of social change in their concreteness and consequently betrays contemporary African humanity. The most outstanding issue in this particular instance is a general perception of culture as an entity separate from its authors. His view generally suggests that the African people may be impelled to change by present world conditions, but their cultures have unfaltering tenacity and dynamism. The mistaken belief seems to be that all social values constructed in the remote past can be inserted in the present history uninterrupted and still function viably.

Despite his inventive uses of African ancestry, Bujo shares a common impulse with most writers in African Theology, as explained at the beginning. More than most who have delved into the aspect of ancestry, he is outstanding in his foresight on the function of ancestry in the totality of the African world view. Be that as it may, the resultant theology does not speak to the basic direction of Christianity for reasons already outlined, and those yet to be discussed. In view of the basic issues of theological foundations discussed so far, let it be clear that Bujo’s proposal is one of the most radical challenges to the claims of Christianity regarding the meaning and the primary function of Christ in the greater scheme of ultimate salvation for all humanity. Whether or not he was cognizant of the full implications of the Proto-Ancestor schema, the following is the outcome. Because the ancestors are raised from their social function to the level of the
basic theological foundations, a Proto-Ancestor Christology challenges rather than enhances the basic function of Christ for a Christian theology. It is, therefore, the basic nature of this problem which necessitates that this rebuttal takes the reflections on Bujo’s proposal to the level of theological foundations. This task is extended to Chapter III, where it will be possible to treat ontological issues beyond the terms of the present working objective. All in all, Bujo’s proposal aptly represents the prevalent trend of theological thought prior to the African Synod. The next step is a reflection on the contributions to the African Synod event, 1994, to the basic question on the person of Christ and his meaning for the Church’s mission in Africa. The end result of this particular task is a necessary step toward an understanding of the importance of the vision proposed by this study.

SECTION IV

A. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AFRICAN SYNOD (1994) FOR CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

For centuries the Catholic Church has convened extended meetings of the hierarchy to discuss and deliberate about matters relating to faith, morals, or theological discipline. Pope John Paul II convened regional and national ecclesial Synods to take stock and consider where the church’s mission in a particular region or nation is proceeding. Synods, therefore, meet to address existential needs and to speak authoritatively in response to them as magistra vitae. The African Synod was called by the Pope John Paul II in 1989 in order to respond to major pastoral and theological concerns, in this case the evangelization of Africa. This entire process was termed by John Paul II as the building up of the “family of God on earth” in
ways suited to the African context. This chapter thus attempts to situate this study in the pastoral-theological context of the African Synod. However, given the broad range of the Synod’s concern, this chapter is limited to the significance of the Synodal teaching for contextual theologies and for inculturation. While this chapter situates the critique of African theology in the context of the general theological-historical background of the African synod, this exercise is not meant to be comprehensive.

On the surface appearance, the African Synod did not have an explicit agenda for critiquing African theological efforts. But the deliberations by the Synod Fathers, in conjunction with John Paul’s Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa*, have direct bearing on the nature and orientation of Africa theology as from 1994 onward. Related to the issues raised in the preceding critique is an important question also addressed by the Synod Fathers and John Paul II. What is the fundamental basis (principle) for missionary work and contextual theology in Africa? Their response to this critical matter is indicative of the appropriate direction for the African theological efforts.

The specific concern by this study, with regard to this matter, is the extent to which contemporary African theology is in accord with the decisive points in the Synodal teaching. For while the Synod event bears directly on the issue of the authenticity and the commitment of the local African Church to the mission of the universal church, the event and especially the theological emphases therein do not seem to have caught the attention it deserves in the post-Synodal theological writings. The current treatment of some important aspects of the Synod is based on the available evidence and on the conviction that the search for contextual theology must be firmly rooted in the major
points of departure taken by the African Synod and John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation. The Pope’s particular nuanced teachings on these matters have methodological implications for local theologies in Africa. Published two years prior to the Synod, Bujo’s theological horizon, before and after the Synod, was an appropriate point of reference. We shall begin with the general prevalent attitude prior to the African Synod, because it reflects the standing attitudes of most African theologians

A cloud of indifference in Catholic African Christianity still hangs steadily over the African Synod since its conclusion. While many are convinced the Synod achieved nothing, theological reflections also continue with little, if any, reference to the core substance of its teaching. But if a synod is in actuality what Engelbert Mveng proclaims it to be, then, it must be an important milestone in the development of the Catholic African Christian tradition so much yearned for.

The synod, both a divine invitation and a call to conversion, was viewed [by some] as a decisive step to allow the Church in Africa to discover itself and to become aware of the many challenges that the future poses. By the grace of God this synod could be an opportunity for the Church in Africa to discover its conciliar dimension and to lay the foundation of a true communion of the churches of Africa to build the kingdom of God on our continent in solidarity and charity.105

Before presenting major highlights related to this event, we will begin with an illustration of particular expectations on the part of the African Catholics that might have led to a general misunderstanding that continues to hinder viable reflections on what the Synod (1994) was all about, and what it stands for in terms of the Catholic African tradition.

In the final moments toward the actual Synod event, “The New People Editorial Staff” based in Nairobi, Kenya, sent an emotionally charged “Open Letter to the Holy Father” alleging that
Due to the African tradition of respect for the elders and superiors combined with the authoritarian attitude of the Roman Curia a good number of African bishops have developed an attitude of passive obedience. Holy Father, do not allow your collaborators to misinform you. The members of the local church in Africa are not happy with the decision to hold the Synod in Rome. To speak of what happened as a ‘genuine African event’ adds insult to injury.\textsuperscript{106}

Even though the expressed disappointment and the consequent despondency revolve around John Paul’s decision to hold the Synod in Rome, the real cause is the misunderstanding fomented by a general unwillingness to examine events in their total complexity and totality. The Editorial staff’s take on John Paul’s involvement in the events of the African Synod also illustrates this point with telling effects. They further questioned the Pope whether “there [is still] any room left for experimentation, for a reflection that is not a mere repetition of what is stated in the official documents?” They went on to point out very poignantly that:

Inculturation without profound reflection is impossible. Why then is there so much fear of African theologians? Why do new rules make them only responsible to the secretary of the Synod rather than to the synod Fathers? Will their voices be heard at all in Rome during the Synod? At Vatican II, Bishops were entitled to have a personal theologian. Was that experience so harmful as not to be repeated at the level of a Synod in Africa?...The ‘Higher Theological Institutes’ were mentioned a couple of times…and it is said that they ‘should be further developed’ and ‘should continue to do research in this area (the African Traditional Religion) and make proposals to bishops.’ What about the proposal they have already made? How long are they supposed to make proposals which are systematically ignored?\textsuperscript{107}

We shall observe in passing that Bujo’s proposal is one such example, written in anticipation of the Synod event. On the whole, this letter aptly illustrates the current argument that the most basic concerns underlying the African Synod may not have been immediately clear to many. Or some simply refused to acknowledge the challenges in view. The aim here is not to question whether or not the letter should have been written, and much less whether or not the
local African Church was unhappy. The important question is whether the expressed discontent, in view of the greater scheme of things, communicates a real understanding of the events. Even the Pope’s personal concern for Africa was telescoped through the Synod related disappointments, thus illustrating the tension many African Christians put between the Pope’s compassion and his responsible intervention. “We find in your attitudes and speeches you give when you visit African countries a deep and compassionate knowledge of our life and problems. [But] we do not find this knowledge in the text of Instrumentum Laboris.”\(^{108}\) Despite the expressed discontent, John Paul’s deep concern for Africa comes in a complex matrix of personal compassion and pontifical responsibilities. For this and other reasons, the fullness of the Pope’s vision still remains a future possibility for the entire Catholic Church of Africa as indicated in his Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa. For immediate purposes, this letter represents, to a great extent, the prevailing emotional and intellectual climate that continues to hinder the African Catholic elite to reflect deeply on the Synod event. To get beyond the cloud of misunderstanding and indifference, we must conjure up some soul searching reflections with respect to John Paul’s take on African Catholicism prior to and after the Synod.

**An Overview of the Theological-Historical Context of the Synod**

The concept of “African unity” discussed earlier on gradually impacted the self-understanding of the African local Church. From the initial collaborations, among African Bishops, in expressing pastoral concerns on the continent during Vatican II Council (EA, nos. 3, 5); a sense of unity among different Episcopal Conferences gradually emerged over the decades. Coupled with the commitment of African theologians and others, this drive apparently blossomed into the desire for an African
Council long before the African Synod, 1994. According to Engelbert Mveng, the pastoral vision for an African Council consisted in “[exploring and examining] future directions for Christianity” in order to “create conditions for the development of the Christian religion so that it could establish deep roots.” Thus in view of the issues at hand, a concept of an African Council is a very important stage for understanding the circumstances that led to a Synod as the appropriate province for collegial functions in the African Church (EA, no. 7). In other words, John Paul changed from the council to the synod as the appropriate venue for reflecting on the African reality vis-à-vis the church’s mission. It suffices to mention here the significance that the aforementioned transition holds for understanding the African Synod’s specific focus and John Paul’s post Synodal Exhortation. Engelbert Mveng’s succinct and honest historical account sheds needed light on the pros and cons that accompanied the process of formulating the structural and operational philosophy for an African Council. The concept of “particular churches” will be the main focus in this particular regard.

According to Mveng’s account, the concept of particular churches had to do with the theological-structural and operational framework which theologians, in liaison with SECAM, proposed for an African Council. He points out two pivotal issues regarding the transformation of an African Council into an African Synod. First, Mveng observes that the “task force” for an African Council decided to use Canon (439.1) as their frame of reference in applying to an African Council the “doctrine and practice of the particular churches.” And that the imprecision in the Canon and the African interpretation of it resulted in a disjunction between the theological and philosophical underpinnings laid for an African Council and the Vatican II Council doctrine on the particular churches.
(OE, no. 2. cf. AG, no. 19-22). He states significantly that “The statutes for an [African Council or SECAM] did not correspond to any of the ecclesial structures envisaged in the Code of Canon Law. [T]he [nature of conciliar gathering stipulated by the Code] has neither statutes nor jurisdiction nor power.” Despite this, the task force found in the New Code of Canon Law cited above (1983) the basis for stipulating how an African Council would relate to the Holy See and other ecclesial communions. “SECAM could invite a delegation or representative from the Holy See, but this delegation would have no voting rights” in much the same way as “ecumenical representatives from Africa or delegates from Catholic ecclesial communions outside the continent” would not. In addition to these two major factors, Mveng observes that the process of creating an African Council was daunted by a [general lack of consensus in Africa] on the number of major issues. It is, therefore, no small matter that some people “saw the calling of an African Synod as the quite logical gesture of a pope, tired of waiting for an African episcopate to take responsibility, took it upon himself to do what the law allowed him to do—convene a Synod of Bishops and designate the evangelization of Africa as its central theme.” True as that may have been, it would be an overstatement to attribute the basic causes for transforming the proposal for an African Council into an African Synod to the immediate circumstances surrounding the process of setting up a council structure. This study also observes that the fundamental weakness in the theological underpinnings for an African Council, and other related matters, were indicative of a much greater problem that loomed before John Paul II. His decisive concerns in the post Synodal reflections center clearly on the Catholic African expressions of theology, precisely Christology and ecclesiology. The weaknesses in the formulations for an African
Council stem from this greater reality. In other words, the meaning of Christ and its implication for evangelizing Africa is the one major factor that impelled his decision on the Synod, and the one thread that binds the Apostolic Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa*.

The goal and theme of evangelization assigned to the Synod only makes sense against the Christological background treated by the Pope. The Catholic Church is founded on Christ, but it is equally grounded by the various levels and dimensions of theologies and pastoral practices that articulate Christ’s foundational character in the totality of the Church’s mission. If a theology is flawed at a very fundamental level, it follows that the Christian practices and spirituality it engenders will be equally skewed.

The desire for a greater measure of self-determination as an African local Church, though a good aspiration in itself, was frequently expressed in theologies that were not genuinely grounded in Christ and what he stands for. An immediate example is the current proposal under investigation in which Bujo had designated ancestry as the basis of new Christology and ecclesiology for Africa. The tensions cited in his proposal in particular are representative of the general trend of the African theological enterprises prior to the Synod. M. L. Daneel reports similar extreme positions in African theology that sought to assert the “superiority of traditional African religions,” for instance.

Proponents of this view “advocate an unconditional return to the indigenous religions of Africa. Others ‘assigned’ more or less equal value to Christianity, so that the former is not seen as introducing a special, new dimension to Africa.” Given this propensity that dominated the theological scene, we can safely assert that the provision in the Canon that Mveng comments about resonated well with dominant impulses in African theologies of
inculturation than with Vatican II theology of ecclesial communion would have. John Paul II did not miss this. He begins by reminiscing that

Right from the beginning of the preparations for the Special Assembly, it was my heartfelt desire, fully shared by the Council of the General Secretariat, to ensure that this synod would be authentically and unequivocally African. At the same time, it was of fundamental importance that the Special Assembly should be celebrated in full communion with the universal Church (EA, 19).

This statement is critical to the understanding of the different themes and the emphases that the Pope makes in his Post-Synodal Exhortation. To verify these claims we must turn to the John Paul’s teaching in view of the African Synod.

B. JOHN PAUL II ON GOSPEL MISSION IN AFRICA

Ecclesia in Africa is a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. This document consists of a synthesis of John Paul’s teaching with that of the African Synod (EA, nos. 1-2). While the Synodal teaching and the Apostolic Exhortation encompass all areas related to ecclesial life, the present analysis is limited to matters relating to the concept of Catholic faith and theology as articulated by John Paul II and the African Synod Fathers. This task necessitates picking up and weaving some important threads pertaining to Bujo’s proposal with major points in the two documents. Ecclesia in Africa not only reveals the importance of the church’s universal mission to John Paul’s thoughts, but also that this dimension of Christian faith and life presented itself as a problem with respect to inculturation in Africa. In the exhortation the Pope maintains a gentle but firm attitude toward African Christianity; on one hand affirming the positive and viable propositions from the Synod, on the other hand, inserting explanations and challenges where the Synod apparently did not give sufficient attention to certain basic matters (EA, nos. 60-61). This mood that pervades the entire document is also indicative of what was of
primary concern to the Pope with regard to African Catholicism. For purposes of this study, therefore, understanding the meaning and purpose of John Paul’s teaching in *Ecclesia in Africa* is necessary in order to better grasp the issues raised in this study against African theology in general, and Bujo’s proposal in particular.

To enable the church in Africa to assume full responsibility by which it would take a lead in ensuring that Christianity plays a role in setting the Continent in a new direction, the Pope took a number of important steps. In a statement that is clearly a criticism of the operational philosophy of the African proposal for Episcopal gathering, he said: “Synodal Assembly cannot be reduced to a consultation on practical matters. Its true raison d’etre is the fact that the Church can move forward only by strengthening communion among her members, beginning with pastors” (EA, no. 17). He clarified that the African Synod would “promote an organic pastoral solidarity within the entire territory and nearby Islands” (Pope’s emphasis) (EA, no. 5). He, however, maintained this without losing sight of the longstanding quest by the African Catholicism for some measure of ecclesial autonomy. In a reminiscence that indicates this awareness the Pope said; “The celebration of the Special Assembly showed to the whole world that the local Churches of Africa hold a rightful place in the communion of the Church, that they are entitled to preserve and to develop their own tradition” (EA, no. 11). But to ensure that in doing so the Church remains, ‘one, holy, and apostolic’ (EA, 11. cf. OE, no. 2), the Pope adds that this must be done “without lessening the primacy of Peter. This chair presides over the assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time it sees that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute towards it” (EA, 11. cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13). These two complementary statements are typical
examples of the many pointed emphases the Pope made regarding the mission of the church in Africa. The statements point specifically to the creative tension John Paul II put between the pastoral needs of the local African Church and the universal mission of the church (EA, no. 2, 16). By inference, the development of a “Catholic” African tradition ought to emerge in communion with the universal church’s faith and line of thought. And the African church, represented in its hierarchy, could not afford to focus on issues that would cripple rather than facilitate the proper function of the Gospel Mission in Africa (EA, no. 13). In the introduction alone, John Paul II mentions over 25 times the theme of “ecclesial communion” in relation to the “universality of the Church and its missionary role.” These two themes flow in tandem in the introduction, which also happens to be the space where the Pope makes the effort to cast off a shadow of any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of his role in the Synod (EA, nos. 1-6).

The second step that John Paul II took was to identify the theological frame of reference that would ground the Synod event. He put this into perspective by basing himself on the three important events. First and foremost, the Pope understood his role in the Synod event in light of his pontificate and personal calling. Two major important highlights of these were the realities of his pontificate that occurred between the event of the Second Ecumenical Council, and the movements of the church and of human history toward the end of the Second Millennium. Thus he points out that the Synod was “an event of such decisive importance for the church in Africa” (EA, no. 1): a decision that led to the selection of a theme that would effectively cover all the issues at hand.

The theme assigned to the Special Assembly-The Church in Africa and her evangelizing mission towards the Year 2000. ‘You shall be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:8) expresses my desire that this Church should live the time leading up to the Great Jubilee as ‘a new Advent,’ a time of
expectation and preparation. In fact, I consider preparation for the Year 2000 as one of the keys for interpreting my pontificate (EA, no. 18. cf. EA. no. 16).

Remarkably, this theme echoes a major theme of Vatican II missiology (Ad gentes, nos. 10-18). Given the Pope’s reasoning, his choice of this theme had the purpose of making the teaching of the Second Vatican Council the authoritative basis for understanding how the Spirit was moving the church’s mission in Africa. He states in retrospect: “The Second Vatican Council can certainly be considered, from the point of view of salvation history, as the cornerstone of the present century which is now rapidly approaching the Third Millennium. In the context of that great event, the church of God in Africa experienced true moments of grace,” (EA, no. 2). Hence, Vatican II ecclesiology provides an evangelical framework in which to deal adequately with Africa’s ecclesial and pastoral concerns as well as the Pope’s own. He later evaluates the teaching of the Synod along the same themes and objectives he had established before (EA, no. 8). If different Episcopal Conferences in Africa were seeking for some kind of meaningful inter-collaboration, the Pope managed to unite them around the concept of a Synodal Assembly (EA, 15-16). Clearly, then, the Pope sought to challenge African Catholicism from focusing only on the immediate pastoral concerns, but to reflect on them in light of ‘salvation history’ as it was being defined by momentous events, local and global. Significant too, he sought to put collegial activities in their proper perspective beyond the juridical function of Canon Law as we saw in matters relating to an African Council. Referring to the Second Vatican council event he said, “That historic event was truly the crucible of the affective and effective communion of worldwide bishops” (EA, 2, cf. 2 Cor. 11: 28).
Keeping the African cultural and ecclesial realities in view, John Paul II enunciated central aspects that must accompany the African Christian search for the truths regarding Africa’s total destiny and the church’s mission. One aspect that is evidently John Paul’s initiative appears in segment (60-61) of the Apostolic Exhortation: a segment that deals with theological foundation. The Synod Fathers had treated the meaning of Christ for Africa, and expressed their firm faith in the function of theology in the evangelizing process, but had not focused explicitly on the question of theological foundations for theology and mission. They had instead treated this topic indirectly by pointing out the “Theological basis of inculturation” (Prop, 28). The Pope’s position on this theme is critical, because it is closely tied with Peter’s primacy, collegiality, and ecclesial communion as essential themes in the overall church’s universal mission. That is, it is theological foundations that ground these themes giving them a viable and dynamic unity deserving the title of a Catholic theology and mission.

Referring to the ‘Theological Basis of Inculturation’ the Synod had declared that ‘Every culture needs to be transformed by the Gospel values in the light of the Paschal Mystery’ (EA, 61. cf. Prop. 28). John Paul went beyond to situate this affirmation in the framework of theological foundations to indicate where the central dynamic for cultural transformation lay. He observed that “Given the close and organic relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and the Word that the Church proclaims, the inculturation of the revealed message cannot but follow the ‘logic’ proper to the mystery of redemption” (EA, 61ff). In other words, it is not enough to base inculturation on the Paschal Mystery. Christ by his very person and eternal mission situated in the Jewish religious is the foundation and consequently the organizing principle: “the logic proper to the mystery of redemption.”

This sublime mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, a mystery which took place in history: in clearly defined circumstances of time and space,
amidst a people with its own culture, a people that God had chosen and accompanied throughout the entire history of salvation, in order to show through what he did for them or what he intended to do for the human race (EA, no. 60).

By this emphasis the Pope points out the unique role played by Revelation in Israel in the missionary function of the Christian Church. Accordingly, this role cannot be appropriated by any cultural religious tradition. By implication, the development and growth of the Catholic African tradition can take place only when theology in Africa is rooted in authentic Christology.

John Paul II was not alone in seeking to attune the African theological enterprises to the Christological horizon. S. O. Abogurin, a West African theologian, had earlier on argued forcefully and accurately that “The Church in Africa today is concerned about indigenization and contextualization. It needs to be equally concerned about the dangerous heresies of syncretism, of direct and indirect denial of the uniqueness of the power and adequacy of Christ, and of the denial of the completeness of our salvation in him and through him.” With the same conviction, the Pope exhorted African Christianity not to withhold preaching the Gospel of Christ from the followers of ATRs. He reminiscences that “All those privileged to be at the celebration of the Special Assembly for Africa rejoiced to see how African Catholics are assuming ever greater responsibility in their local Churches and are seeking a deeper understanding of what it means to be both Catholics and Africans” (EA, 11). In a nutshell, the chief problem which John Paul II perceived in the African Church was how to be both Catholic and African. He also understood that this would not happen unless Catholics assume due responsibility through their church leadership. The Synod was the first step in the long process of seeking how to be at once Catholic and African. These were calls that the Synod Fathers had to confront afresh with binding force.
With a touch of humor, the Pope gathered the Synod Fathers around “the Tomb of Peter for the opening of the Special Assembly” and had them profess their faith in the “unique Church of Christ,” following the famous exchange between Jesus and Peter, “Do you also wish to go away?...Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God” (Jn. 6: 67-69) (EA. no. 10). With that confession, the Pope solemnly and ritually led the hierarchy to recommit themselves to its primary obligation, and through them, the entire church in Africa thereafter. In his own words: “The fact that evangelization is the theme of all these Synodal Assemblies is meant to indicate how alive today is the Church’s awareness of the salvific mission which she has received from Christ” (EA, no. 18). Referring to the expressed commitment to Christ’s Lordship, the Pope reminded and emphasized that the: “the Bishops of Africa entrusted their Continent to Christ the Lord, convinced that he alone [not their ancestors] through his Gospel and his Church, can save Africa from its present difficulties and heal its many ills” (EA. no. 10 cf. 40). All these in practical terms imply that while the Chair of Peter retains the duties stated in Lumen Gentium, no.13, the path of inculturation and its success in Africa is, henceforth, incumbent upon the authoritative guidance of the African ecclesial hierarchy in communion with the universal Church. Evidently, it was clear to the African Bishops that as the local church in Africa continues to seek ways of articulating its concerns and teaching in light of its mission, its ultimate frame of reference had to get beyond the immediate confines of the African cultural experiences to the very foundation of the church’s mission.

The Synod as a Major Point Departure for Contextual Theologies

The present purpose is to bring out the points of departure, which the Synod took in view of inculturation and contextual theology in Africa. Hence, with reference to theologians
the Synod states unequivocally, “Your mission is a great and noble one in the service of inculturation which is the important worksite for the development of African theology….The Synod knows that without the conscientious and devoted exercise of your function something essential would be lacking” (MS. no. 56). The Synod Fathers also acknowledge that “You have already proposed the African reading of the mystery of Christ” (MS. no. 56). The Synod then affirmed that “Jesus Christ the Son of man…is the center and model of every aspect of Christian life (i.e., Church-as-Family, and Church-as-Brotherhood). The Incarnation of the Son of God is the principle and model of inculturation” (Prop. no. 28. cf. EA, nos. 60-62).

Having rooted inculturation in incarnation Christology, the Synod declared that “the Gospel itself becomes the principle that purifies, guides, animates and elevates the culture, transforming it in such a way that there is a new creation. There is need for every culture to be transformed by Gospel values in the light of the paschal mystery” (Prop. 28). Thus the Synod Fathers concurred with John Paul II in recognizing that the salvific power of God lies with the Gospel, not with culture.

Against this background, the Synod went further to lay down “a criteria of inculturation [emphasizing that] the project of inculturation will respect the two following criteria: a) compatibility with Christian message, and b) the communion with the universal Church” (Prop. 31). This emphasis was nailed in by a statement that “In all cases, care should be taken to avoid syncretism” (prop. 31). Taken as a unity, these major positions bring out three important elements in the contextualization process. First, incarnation is the theological-evangelical framework for contextual theologies and Christ is the overall foundation as well as the organizing principle. The mutual interplay between African theology and inculturation is made possible by the New Testament Christology as their primary basis and condition. It also
follows that, if “inculturation…is the important worksite for the development of African theology,” the Synod situated contextual theologies in the framework of the church’s mission. That is, pastoral commitment in contemporary Catholicism does not take its dynamism from somewhere else, not the least from ancestral heritages; it must be informed by Vatican II missiology. Therefore, the challenge for contextual theologies in Africa is how to draw upon positive elements in the ATRs at the same time upholding Christ as the foundation of a Christian theology. In practical terms this means that certain pastoral concerns for the local church in Africa may be valid, but the entire process toward the perceived goal must preserve and reflect the evangelical dynamism at the heart of the Christian tradition: i.e., salvation is in Christ. This in turn implies the need to shift the interpretative framework for contextual theology from the predominantly cultural-historical premises defined, by a pre-and-post-independence reactionary philosophy, to the Gospel, the contemporary human and cultural realities. In reference to this reality the Synod Fathers said:

….we also share a deep concern and call for a new and urgent thrust in the evangelization of African men and women, wounded in their dignity by the scourges of the colonial past, oppressed by wars, disturbed by so many sects, manipulated by local and foreign means…The Synod wishes therefore that the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation refer to the actual situation of Africa so as to help determine pastoral and missionary priorities and address the message of salvation to men and women of the Continent (Prop. no. 2).

The key word here is ‘the actual situation of Africa,’ although there is no mention of African cultures being possible causes of the present situation. Nevertheless, the Fathers favored “an onward-looking vision” while mentioning past events in light of the present. But for some this gesture is tantamount to an abandonment of the historical approach favored by African
theology. Basing his reflection on the *Lineamenta*, Justin S. Ukpong, for instance, maintains that “history repeats itself” when past realities are not brought to bear on the present.

Given the fact that the Synod’s theme is the future evangelization mission of the African church, this approach does not seem very helpful. The history of evangelization ought to have been presented in such a way as to provide the proper vision, inspiration and commitment needed for the church to create a new history in the third millennium. For history is not necessarily a presentation of dead facts but rather a matter of interpretation of facts; the purpose of interpretation determines the selection and organization of facts…Thus history repeats itself when knowledge of the past has not been utilized to create a new situation (his emphasis).

The problem with Ukpong’s perspective does not consist in the relevancy of the historical events for current discernment. The main issue is the preeminence he accords to the past. Precisely, inculturation as a working principle of evangelization requires that evangelization makes the present rather than the past the starting point for reflection. The General Directory for Catechesis refers to this approach as “the pedagogue of God, source and model of the pedagogue of the faith.” By necessity, the past experiences find many relevant and apt entry points in the present. We see a similar trend in Christ’s entire missionary activity. He approached people where they were. The traditional issues such as “respecting rules of the elders,” (Mt. 12: 1-8) are historical realities that came into play only after that fact. He did not require that his contemporaries first recount and commit to memory the historical abuses stemming from the imperial powers of the time before they could understand the contemporary and future significance of his message. Once his message would be understood in relation to their current situation, the past experiences would not elude the dynamic character of Israel’s religious memory. Israel’s spiritual genius lay in making the past meaningful in every generation.

Moreover, the nature of Jesus’ mission could not accommodate prioritizing an historical
approach to people’s needs and problems. Animosity as a natural consequence of dwelling on the past hurts militates against the “love of neighbor” as the axis of the kingdom of God Jesus came to establish. In similar fashion and in contrast to the line of approach sought by Ukpong, the Synod Fathers avoided turning the Synod into a “war zone” by dwelling on the past missionary blunders and omissions, and only mentioning them where it was necessary (MS, no. 10).

In brief, Ukpong’s position represents a general inclination in African theology to overlook the vitality of the present moment. Accurate reading of the past consists in making the present moment a vantage point for reflection. A present moment contains experiences that can help to better re-cast the past. Jose Comblin’s viewpoint speaks to the relevance of any contemporary human situation for contextual methodology. “The real signs are human beings, human responses to the challenges posed by objective events. Only human beings, through their gestures and actions, can create realities that point out a roadway and a course to be taken.”127 The basic problem with the insistence on the historical approach consists in the failure to perceive that the signs of the time should be discerned from current human actions that signal a transition to an objectionable way of life in Africa. Harvey J. Sindima observes accurately that “The African condition is very complex; the problems are many and seem to feed into each other in an endless and vicious circle: political problems produce economic crisis which cause civil unrest, ethnic prejudice, linguistic tensions as people scramble for what seems to be an ever diminishing national economic pie.”128 Yet in utter contrast to the Synod’s basic position and other issues raised here, Bujo maintains the most contradictory and
self-defeating argument. Convinced of the viability of the ancestral vision in the post-Synodal era, he recurs that:

The ancestor is the main pillar on which a community or clan rests. The ancestor constitutes the unity of the community and represents the pivotal point from which all actions of the members of the clan can take their dynamism. This observation is extremely important for an ecclesiological blueprint that strives to be at home in the Black African cultural heritage…the primordial ancestor, to whom the founding of the clan may be attributed, plays an indispensable role. It is the primordial ancestor who is the sustaining force for later ancestors, who form a chain of unity and through whom the contemporary generation is able to trace its origin back to the first ancestor.129

This post-Synodal reflection is remarkable in terms of issues raised in this paper. The real problem does not consist in the essential truth regarding the function of the ancestor; it lies in the enduring potency Bujo attaches to ancestry in a totally changed world. The very fact that Bujo maintains the same theological stance after the Synod suggests two things from his point of view. Either the Synod did not provide any valid and authoritative teaching on contextual theology, or Bujo was not convinced of its Christological focus. At any rate, this determination imparts to his proposal a contemporary significance. For, if he had to make a proposal in the post-Synodal era, he would construct the same reflections that appear in ‘African theology in its Social Context.’ Yet, from what we have seen, the teachings of the Synod in conjunction with John Paul’s Apostolic Exhortation constitute major points of departure for theological thought in Africa. Without this authoritative teaching making some head-way into the area of theology, the Synod event will, like many historical decisions in Africa’s recent history become a relic of the past.
For the main purpose of this study, the Christological affirmations made by the Synod provide the rationale for situating post-Synodal theological reflections in the context of universal theological dialogue. That is, to acknowledge Christ(ology) as the foundation of inculturation and eventual theologies is to open these efforts to the legitimate interest, dialogue, and the scrutiny of the universal church. By implication, when the Synod Fathers call for the need for the “local churches [to be given] trust and freedom to accomplish [their] task” (Prop. 28), this freedom must be understood as effective freedom. Otherwise, theological fruits must be open to universal dialogue. A theology that is overly defensive or inward-looking cannot claim a “Christian” let alone a “Catholic” status. This brings us to an important point on the “reactionary approach to theology” and how it plays into the issues discussed so far.

**A Legend of the Reactionary Approach to Contextual Theology**

Bujo advances his synthesis like his predecessors believing that African theology is a legitimate ‘reaction’ against the West in its Christian and cultural orientations toward Africa. An outstanding evidence of this is the outright avoidance of non-African sources and church tradition in general. It is as though the church, of which African Christianity forms a part, just sprang up yesterday and, as such, it has no history, no tradition and consequently no religious memory. Bujo follows in the footsteps of writers like G.M. Setiloane and Buthelezi, who specified that, “There is also a distinct reaction [in African theology] against Black theologians who display a lack of originality by constantly falling back on the views of Western theologians which they imbibed during their training in Western Universities: Barth says, Tillich thinks, Eliade suggests, Bultmann argues…” One should observe that this attitude is not directed simply at a
“a lack of originality” that involves unreflective use of sources by simply paraphrasing original authors. A reaction against such tendencies does not necessarily have theological content. But when “reaction” is made the principal basis of action for an enterprise as deep and as complex as a Christian theology, it is not just inappropriate; it is regrettable.

The reactionary inclination represented by Bujo, Setiloane, and Buthelezi’s views is indicative of a theological direction that strives to exclude “Christian imagination” from theological enterprises, in addition to failing to recognize the “end” sought by a contextual theology. A reactionary mentality is generally indicative of a “cloud” that hangs over some contemporary Catholic writers with regard to the subject of the ultimate function and goal of Christology vis-à-vis the plurality of religious traditions. Is the end of inculturation “an African theology” or the identity of a local church, even as these may be essential to the process? How does the end sought by inculturation in Africa relate to the end sought by the church’s universal mission or Christology for that matter? In other words, a reactionary approach is not without decisive Christological content. A practical issue is fitting here.

By not being able to participate effectively in the historical events that continue to shape and propel the contemporary world, Africa is already “standing still” as the world passes by. Theology in Africa cannot afford, therefore, to abstain from making intelligent use of non-African and Catholic Church traditions as valid resources under the cover of “originality” and “identity.” If African theology is to serve any relevant function in the life of the local church and in the lives of the peoples of Africa, it should not be closed-up. To do so is to cease to be Christian, for like Christianity, human beings
exist and mature through dialogue. There is no human hurt, betrayal, or contentment that can justify a theological abandonment of this moral propensity at the heart of the Christian faith.

Moreover, the continuing problem of obstructive activities in Africa by the West requires a “creative response” not a Christianized reaction. A reactionary philosophy or approach to this important issue compounds the complex human or cultural issues that confront Africa now. A reactionary approach accommodates an intrinsic methodological dynamic that negates the function of Christology in facilitating Africa’s search for fresh solutions as pointed out above. In brief, only those theological visions bolstered by valid approaches to inculturation will defend and validate the integrity of contextual theology and ecclesial identity in African Catholicism. Otherwise, a reactionary or defensive approach undermines inculturation efforts at a very fundamental level. In contrast to this mentality, the Synod event contributed decisively to the development of contextual theologies in Africa. The success or failure of this teaching hinges on how theologians utilize the Synod’s strengths and weaknesses in conjunction with the teaching of the universal church, and available theological resources. And not the least, future success also hinges on the preparedness of the African hierarchy to put into effect the Synodal deliberations.

CONCLUSION

The critique of African theology through the theological lenses of Benezet Bujo, and others, bring this discussion to some important and transitional conclusions. The factor of Ancestry is the one basic element in the African world view. Ancestry continues to dictate African morality in many ways. Bujo’s merit lies in having
recognized its importance for inculturation. For the most part, his interpretation of ancestry is, no doubt, an accurate representation of the moral and spiritual ideals Africa attaches to cultural ancestors. His rationale for romanticizing the “past” has to do with the enduring significance of the cultural religious function of ancestry in the African societies. These facts notwithstanding, the moral and spiritual realities he asserts evoke divergent moral pre-dispositions and experiences in the contemporary nations of Africa. To take the reality of ancestry literally is tantamount to overlooking an ever-deepening human alienation in Black Africa rooted in the ancestral tradition. African cultures are rooted in the long experiences of ancestry without a recognized common center or origin. Consequently, Africa is now afflicted with experiences of social malfunctions stemming from human alienation, fomented by diverse experiences of ancestry. These experiences are much deeper, complex and elusive than the problem of Western cultural domination. Ironically, effective rectification of obtrusive activities in Africa by the West is contingent upon Africa’s honest unwillingness to confront the reality of ancestry. Otherwise, an idealization of ancestry or using it in its “pure religious confessional status” shows how much Africa stands in need of understanding its own “past decisions” and coming to terms with it.

To conclude, a genuine concept of African ancestry is, therefore, one that must be understood in terms of cultural diversity without a common unifying center. This cultural reality is one of the “greatest challenges” facing, not only the contemporary mission of the church in Africa, but also national governments in Black Africa. Cultural diversity calls for a “wholly new approach” to inculturation beyond current proposals in African theology, also epitomized in ancestral theology. Contextual theology need to move
beyond the presumption that because ancestral experience is pervasive, it can provide a fundamental basis for effecting positive development on the African continent. Idealized claims based on common heritages do not immediately come across as contradictory until one realizes that “similarity” is not “identicalness.” This distinction ought to draw attention to the confounding cultural diversity made possible by universal yet diverse experiences of ancestry. These are not theoretical speculations without a practical basis. For from the political and economic life of present day African nations, the universal experiences of ancestry hold the prospect for meaningful survival as well as the risk for the total demise of African cultures in a world that is constantly changing. If ancestry is to play any effective role at any level of Africa’s existence, it must be interpreted as well as reinterpreted. To arrive at this, African theologians will need more than intellectual acuity; they will need honesty, courage and openness to articulate the most basic problems in contemporary Africa as a condition to the discernment of the best means of incarnating Christianity and formulating a contextual methodology suited to a diverse cultural context. Chapter II attempts a systematic interpretation of the reality of African ancestry in its past and contemporary significance

CHAPTER II: THE AFRICAN CULTURAL CRISIS

INTRODUCTION: The Challenge of Articulating the African Reality

This chapter presents an alternative to the dominant emphasis on pre-Christian traditional beliefs as a source for a Catholic theology in Africa. This is a necessary step for effective incarnation of Christianity in Africa. The present chapter derive the indicators for African transformation from the ancestral past and the present African
situation. To this end, the *African cultural crisis* is a working theme employed to express realities in contemporary Africa. The theme, nonetheless, introduces concepts and topics that are very broad in meaning and scope. The term *African* raises questions about the soundness of speaking in general terms about a continent as expansive as Africa, with varied demographic, geographical and cultural alignments. These factors make it seemingly difficult to speak about Africa in terms of its entirety. The political-historical factors created certain demographic alignments corresponding to three broad cultural regions, for instance. The system of apartheid in the South, and the infiltration of Arabic cultures in the North define two different cultural regions. North Africa is oriented to Arabic culture and also maintains vestiges of European colonial cultures. South African society is economically and politically aligned to Western civilization with many pockets of Black African cultures. This leaves Sub-Saharan Africa; a region predominantly composed of traditional African *cultures* existing side by side with Western based social systems. Given these diverse histories and cultural expressions, Sub-Saharan Africa comprises the most complex segment of the Continent. Yet complexity does not necessarily imply impossibility. These are challenges signaling the need for better and effective ways of articulating the African reality. The following sections outline technical considerations that inform the basis of the subsequent argument

**TECHNICAL CONCERNS**

**The Main Argument**

A meaningful understanding of the African reality in its complexity must examine ancestral traditions in light of the present situation. The African biological ancestors hold the key to understanding the cultural similarities and differences on the African
Continent. This is what this chapter is about. At the same time the chapter proposes an urgent need to recast the meaning and value of the ancestors and their respective legacies. Theological reflection should not place so much emphasis on the traditional philosophies and yet fail to recognize their inherent limitations. The positive and the limitations of African cultures are recognizable when the varied traditional philosophies are interpreted in light of an accurate understanding of the human being, situated in the context of contemporary Africa and the world in general. It is the view of this author that once knotty issues in the ancestral philosophies are understood, then, it becomes possible to evaluate the true character of Western cultural hegemony in Africa.

Having said that, it is also important to note that the present argument is not about whether or not ancestral philosophies can provide the conceptual and the working framework for understanding the African reality. Rather, it inquires in what manner and to what extent can ancestral world views be at the service of contextual theology and inculturation. While Benezet Bujo and those in his camp are accurate in maintaining that the ancestor is the basis of religious and social unity, they fail to recognize an extremely important point. The “unifying function” of an ancestor is exclusive to tribal cultures. For these very reasons, the function of an ancestor is not a transcultural experience such that it can be equated to Christology. There are profound cultural and ethical differences in the collective traditional perceptions and usages of the value of ancestry. Those differences are not relics of the past; they are ongoing and are manifest in the lives of contemporary African societies-tribal and national. Therefore, in the same way that ancestry has varied interpretations, so are the mindsets, perceptions and ethical commitments among the numerous Black African tribes. One is therefore bound to find
different beliefs and practices that define distinctive cultural entities. This being the case, where does this leave the persistent belief in cultural homogeneity ardently espoused by African theology? There are various ways which this study seeks to account for this dominant assumption. The best way to do this is to examine the deeper question of the place of God in the historical experience of African ancestors.

For a long time the search for a contextual theology has consisted in associating the ancestrology with a more theocentric tradition reminiscent in the beliefs, ideas, and names of God. This way of proceeding obscures the existing avenues for discovering the distinctive strata that make up the various phases in the evolution and development of Black cultures. Otherwise, direct association of ancestrology with a more theocentric tradition has the effect of canonizing the meaning and the role of ancestors. The philosophical-theological distance that would enable us to comprehend the true historical and religious worth of ancestry is consequently obscured, and in its place we have their hallowed roles. Little wonder that Black Africa has ceased to view its ancestors as typical human beings who were only attempting to make sense of the world in which they lived. These religious and philosophical dispositions notwithstanding, there is need to presuppose the existence of two main streams of religious traditions among the common heritages: ancestrology and theocentrism. We cannot simply presume that the general tradition of belief in the Supreme Being developed in the context of the ancestral social structural set up still evident in the present day African tribes. To do so is to merge ancestrology and theocentrism in a manner that obscures the urgent need to come to terms with the glaring limitations rooted in the ancestral heritages. To facilitate clarity on
this important subject, this chapter seeks to proceed on the presupposition of two distinctive cultural religious heritages.

There is evidence of an ancient religious (theocentric) tradition with a general tendency toward a universalistic world view. There is also another tradition with a general propensity toward religious and cultural fragmentation. The second tradition is characteristic of the present day ancestral religious beliefs and social practices still in currency. When the two traditions are examined carefully, there are irreconcilable tensions between them. It is on these accounts that this chapter maintains that the transcultural similarities do not necessarily imply the existence of a single African culture. The tendency to posit a single culture is a way of simplifying the African reality and the problems therein. As for this study, the presence of two religious traditions constitutes a fundamental problem to which this chapter seeks to give a realistic portrayal. Before that, the following sections outline the way in which this chapter seeks to articulate the reality.

**The Method of Social Analysis**

The method of analysis points to the general direction of this chapter. Social analysis of the African reality often focuses on the economic and political underdevelopment. In all aspects there is a general tendency to exclude any valid question about the meaning of culture. Yet this is a key to a deeper understanding of African anthropologies, which are extremely important factors in any attempt to evangelize the continent. The failure to proceed by a clear concept of culture has meant that the structure of contemporary social analysis diminishes rather than enhances the possibilities of understanding persons vis-à-vis their social environments. The end result
is that economic and political policies rarely correspond to real issues of people and their societies. It is for this reason that this chapter lays stress on the need for a comprehensive understanding of the term “culture” in relation to the native anthropologies. The purpose is to facilitate the coming to grips with what is not readily available through modern empirical methods. A few statements can clarify the value of culture in the social analysis of the African ecclesial situation.

A genuine Christian theology cannot simply bypass the substantive value of African cultures in a hurry to construct a universal contextual theology for Africa. Theological methods that simply romanticize traditional cultures only embolden the unfolding cultural crisis in Africa. Hence, to bring some fresh insights into the existing efforts, the following few paragraphs introduce foundational themes for the current and later chapters. That is, the “condition” for the success of the Christian mission in Africa depends, among other factors, on the accurate understanding of culture based on the universal meaning of a human being. This is the inroad into African cultures and the key to unlocking the hidden realities therein. Accurate understanding of culture is also basic to discovering the meaning of cultural diversity, especially as it relates to the African situation. On the whole, the concepts of culture and cultural diversity are basic to understanding the depth and scope of the emerging cultural crisis. Hence, the main argument calls for a systematic analysis of the traditional African heritages with the purpose of bringing out the reality of cultural diversity in Africa. Cultural diversity is also key to grasping of the diverse concepts of a human being in Africa. Concepts of culture and of a human being therefore constitute a fundamental problem in Africa. Anything else said about Africa is better grasped against these two factors. The first part of this
chapter, therefore, focuses on the meaning of culture, while the remaining part examines
the meaning of cultural diversity in light of the existing cultural crisis.

Because a coherent view of culture can function as a tool of social analysis, it is
perceived by this study as one of the most effective means for explaining the traditional,
and the contemporary African cultural realities in relation to external influences. The
concept of culture, therefore, affords to this study the terms and conditions for speaking
about contemporary realities in Africa. The factor of “contemporariness,” among others,
introduces into perspective the appropriateness of “social analysis” being conducted in
Africa today. That is, in attempting to articulate the African reality, cognizance has to be
made of the constant intersecting of the historical and contemporary factors and
circumstances that make those obstacles elusive. That is to say, there are specific social
changes initiated in Africa by colonialism and evolving conditions in the world that make
it extremely difficult for people to recognize the meaning and value of “culture.” Yet,
this is essential to a genuine grasp of the African cultures. Hence, the theme of “social
analysis” is directly related to that of culture, and serves two purposes. First, it provides
an intellectual and social framework for understanding the crisis brought about by the
encounter between Africa and the West. Second, social analysis also facilitates the
identification of obstacles against a better understanding of culture in relation to African
heritages. The theme of contemporary social analysis is, therefore, a very crucial area of
concern if the church in Africa is to grasp the significance of major social changes as
emphasized by the Second Vatican Council. Contemporary social analysis operating at
many levels poses a serious obstacle to development efforts in developing countries.
SECTION I
AN OVERVIEW OF THE AFRICAN SOCIAL ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

The reality of economic underdevelopment in Africa is common knowledge, and a copious literature on the subject exists. This overview seeks only to put a face on this reality by providing terse examples of reviews and opinions on the existing economic situation. The purpose is to match the total African reality with the dominant interpretations of it. The end goal is to critically evaluate the appropriateness and viability of the existing perspectives in the social analysis of the African economic reality.

Giovanni Arrighi has conducted studies on African underdevelopment over several decades. In one of his recent studies he examines the World Systemic Context of African Crisis. This analysis opens with the following general remark: “Over the last half century, the African crisis of the late 1970s has been transformed into what has aptly been called the African tragedy.” His judgment resonates with Paul Gifford’s work. After a painstaking research on the public role of African Christianity in development, Gifford makes the following conclusion. “The African continent is slipping out of the Third World into its own bleak category of the nth world.” Dismal as this may sound, Gifford based his judgment on the number of case studies on selected African countries, regions and, many official reports. The most outstanding report is issued by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa which he paraphrases in this way:

[Africa’s share of the world trade has all but disappeared….In 1950 it was 5.2%, in 1980 it was 4.7%, in 1990 it was only 1.9%….Between 1961 and 1995 Africa’s food production per person decreased by 11.6% (by comparison Latin America’s increased by 31.4% and Asia by 70.6%)….Returns on investment in Africa dropped from 30.7% in
1960 to 2.5% in the 1980s…There has been a general collapse in infrastructure….Africa has fallen well behind other developing areas of the world…][137

The suffering caused by the ever-deteriorating economic situation is becoming a way of life for the African majority. Most disturbing is the deteriorating sense of confidence and hope in the ability of the contemporary African nations to steer the respective collective destinies. The prevalence of a steady decline and uncertainty also led Adrian Hastings to conclude that, “if the 1980s were the ‘lost decades’ for Africa, then the 1990s may well become the decade when “Africa [is] rendered irrelevant to global development….”[138

This particular evaluation by Hastings is coming to pass to a greater extent.

The marginalization of Africa is perhaps materializing more rapidly than would have been imagined a few decades ago. While economic and political patterns in Africa remain divisive and alienated, the so-called first worlds, like Europe and developing countries in Asia and South America, are building economic blocs or alliances to facilitate better working relationships. Perhaps, none has explicitly voiced the economic and the political alignments of the emerging global structures better than Chirac, the former president of France. Prior to his visit to Britain to “celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Entente Cordiale, a pact that ended centuries of intermittent warfare between the two countries,” Chirac expressed his “vision of a ‘multipolar’ world in which ‘there will be a great American pole, a great European pole, a Chinese one, eventually a South American pole,’ with the United Nations mediating among them.”[139

Any serious thinking person ought to be concerned about the plight and role of the African Continent in this “multipolar” world projected by Chirac and similar propagators of globalization.
Whatever the case may be, Chirac represents a growing attitude in the economically and politically developed countries. Countries which do not catch up with the changing patterns of life in today’s world, or show sign of doing so, cannot become viable partners in the new global drama of human interdependence operating in the context of economic and political solidarity. Granted that the majority African nations are continually losing their moral credibility, a crucial factor for the operation of statehood, their marginal status should not surprise as much as it should worry us. But there is more to this multifaceted global phenomenon. The less Africa participates in the affairs that determine and shape the course of a world culture and history, the more the most powerful players in the global culture will continue, with more tenacity, to define who Africans are as a people. Put simply and tentatively, Africa is entering a phase when the most powerful portion of the human community will ultimately shape its core identity.

Therefore, weighed against this emerging social landscape, Gifford’s phraseology of the continent “slipping into its own bleak category of the nth world” is accurate. The idea of “slipping” rightly denotes a steady decline of cultural life, and the Continent’s standing in the world community. This is the reason the current study attempts to articulate the African reality in terms of a crisis as a step toward recognizing a serious problem in Africa. However, because the human suffering in Africa is explicitly felt at the political and the economic levels, the essence of the crisis is, more often than not, explained solely in socio-economic and political terms. For example, explicating the present African economic reality in terms of a “crisis” is neither exceptional to this study nor to the three European analysts cited. *African Crisis Areas and U.S. Foreign Policy* is a diversely co-authored work covering nine selected African countries. These authors
from different continents “focus attention on the conflict in the political and military arena….” Their aim is to point out where U.S. foreign policy is at odds with self-determination in Africa. This work reveals an important fact; foreign aid to Africa comes with strings attached. As a result, it does not meet the real needs of the Continent.

Foreign aid ends up as a tool used by donor countries to control, manipulate, and destabilize African nations. Tunde Obadina, a native of Africa, is eloquent in regard to the economic implications of slave trade. He is not, however, equally convincing when he traces as well as attributes the “contemporary African crisis to slave trade.” For example, he concludes that because of the slave trade evils, “African underdevelopment is [thus] inevitable.” There is indeed a sense in which the slave trade deprived Africa of human resources, both in reality and in potentiality. Among other negative outcomes, the slave trade reinforced negative attitudes toward the Black peoples in countries where slaves were exported. These facts notwithstanding, it would be too simplistic and naive to attribute the current crisis to slavery alone!

The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies comments on Carlos Lopes’ work in these words. “The African crisis is a recurrent theme in all discourses on Africa in the 1990s, in stark contrast with the optimism of the first decades of independence.” Based on his personal experience of the workings of United Nations Development Program, Lopes weighs the interplay between the external and the internal factors in the overall economic underdevelopment at different phases of post-independence African history. Although Lopes’ primary intent is to draw attention to the importance of the cultural factor in development, he generally dwells on the economic and political realities, attributing the crisis to poor economic policies, local and international. On the
whole, he manifests no cognizance of the possibility of the traditional cultures being part of the problem rather than the solution. His concern for the cultural factor is handled in the same style of uncritical assertion of the viability of traditional African social structures. In the end, Lopes concurs with most analysts who associated the crisis with poor local governance, public corruption, non-productive but self-centered African elites, natural disasters and many other afflictions, such as HIV-AIDS, as part of this long list. But important as these factors may be, the African crisis, according to this study, is more than the lack of material progress and external interference.

The economic and political anomalies signal the existence of a much deeper problem than has been explained. Many of the causes usually cited like “poor local governance, public corruption, and non-productive and self-centered African elites” are symptomatic of a deeper cultural problem. It is with this conviction that the remaining sections develop this argument in detail. Before that, it is necessary to indicate points of dispute between the existing perspectives and this study. The basis of disagreement with the existing forms of social analysis consists in a narrow understanding of the meaning of “crisis” with respect to the total African reality.

**General Perceptions and Explication of Contemporary African Reality**

The analysts cited share common denominators relevant to the present pursuit. Each employs a working theme of “African crisis.” On the whole, their particular perspectives represent two types of social analysis often conducted in Africa. As a native, Otunde Obadina represents the dominant perspective that frequently determines causality by focusing on external causes “alone.” There is hardly an explicit intent to examine the possibility of Africa’s own contribution to the crisis. Arrighi and Lopes
represent analysts who seek to achieve some balance by making sense of causal factors underlying rampant African economic and political underdevelopment. Carlos Lopes’ work deserves a special mention. His perspective stems from having recognized the ongoing Western stance to Africa. He argues that

Democracy cannot be sustained in the context of economic crisis with countries under pressure that will not enable them to make any changes of their own, but rather apply standardized economic reform packages, that entail political compromises, political bases and specific objectives and targets which are imposed from top, and may be from outside.144

To transform the political and economic landscapes in Africa, Carlos strongly emphasizes the need to consider native African “culture” as a necessary and possible model for economic development. The problem, however, is that Lopes entertains these convictions without due consideration for possible flaws in the traditional cultures. He assumes there is a native model that can be well matched to diverse cultural and social experiences without triggering philosophical and ethical conflicts in contemporary African nation-states. There is no doubt each one of the analysts cited casts significant light on one or more factors underlying the African crisis. Their individual merit withstanding, the general perceptions and modes of analyses are limited to economic and political dimensions of modern African social life. Lost to this general picture is the meaning of the ordinary Black African person and his or her role in the crisis. Instead, the politicians and structures of social evil associated with modern economic and political life are made to bear the entire burden of responsibility for the existing crisis. Jean Marc Ela makes a similar point, to a greater extent.

Our people’s situation cannot be attributed solely to the penetration of our continent by multinationals, which regard
Africa simply as a playground for the superpowers. We must look for internal factors in the dispossession of the African masses. This process continues despite modernization programs and growth efforts, since their benefits are monopolized by an elite in Africa of ever worsening economic and social disparities.\footnote{145}

These are certainly serious issues, but do not constitute the fundamental cause of what this paper considers “internal factors.” The depth of Ela’s insight is undercut by ascribing the perceived problems to “the monopolization of benefits by African elite and the ever worsening economic and social disparities."\footnote{146} All these are symptoms and, therefore, understatements of the African reality. We must discern that which enables multinational companies and the many evils that impoverish all Black African nations. Should we not be looking into our native traditions to discern that which predisposes Black African elites and politicians to behave in more or less the same way when they assume positions of responsibility and privilege? Can their behavior be traced back to their respective native cultural predispositions? In sum, an effective study of the African reality ought to place the Black African person and his or her native anthropology at the centre of analysis. For, even though the economic and the political aspects play an important role in development, these aspects of culture alone do not comprise the primary causes of African underdevelopment.

In his second expanded edition on *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Mbiti is gradually sobering up to a very critical realization. He recognizes that without appropriate understanding of “traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices can only lead to a lack of understanding of African behaviour and problem.” These are realities “to be reckoned with in modern fields of economic, political, educational and religious life.”\footnote{147} Mbiti rightly sees that the development of a culture suited to modern African society
requires putting native anthropologies into proper perspective. Mbiti is not simply calling for more of the same. He recognizes in the traditional anthropologies obstacles to socio-economic and political development. Before delving into this important subject, the following paragraphs attempt to present the historical roots of the lopsided social analysis of the African situation, an essential factor in comprehending the depth of the African crisis insofar as it relates to traditional cultures. Special attention is given to the actual dynamic of excluding native cultures from development strategies.

**Intellectual and Philosophical Footprints from the African-Western Cultural Encounter**

A lopsided approach to African development began with the onslaught of colonization. The general trend of social analysis in Africa is a result of the intellectual and philosophical footprints from that historical event. What began as a misguided and biased approach to socio-economic and political development has become normative in a world that is becoming increasingly complex with the passage of time. The colonial intellectual stance has not vanished. There exist conditions today that perpetuate the colonial error of contemplating cultural development solely in economic and political terms. But if development efforts are to bear lasting fruit in Africa, traditional cultures have to be put into proper perspective. Placide Tempels’ account of the colonial stance in Africa provides a general but important window into the historical problem of excluding the meaning of culture from development strategies and policies.

Placide Tempels, a French missionary priest working in Africa during the colonial days, somewhat broke with the prevalent intellectual perception of African cultures. The conclusions and portrayals of Africa then were based on the surface interpretation of customary behaviors. According to Tempels, for example, R. Allier, a contemporary
psychologist had observed that “If you ask the Bantu, for instance, the reasons for performing their customs, they cannot tell you.” Allier meant to say that the Bantu have the inability to offer a rational explanation behind their many practices and ritual experiences. He went on to conclude, the Bantu “do not indulge in reflective thought. They have no theories or doctrines. The only thing that matters is the carrying out of certain traditional acts, preserving contact with the past and with the dead.” In the mind of colonizers, represented by Allier, the Bantu are typical Africans. Tempels stood up against this tide of thought arguing that “Anyone who claims that primitive people possess no system of thought excludes them from the category of men. Those who do so, contradict themselves fatally elsewhere.” Apparently, Tempels recognized this philosophical outlook as the general drive behind the colonial tendency toward haphazard erection of the Western social system in Africa. Thus Tempels voiced his convictions to those he regarded as “colonizers and missionaries of good will,” urging them to take African anthropologies seriously. The central portion of his argument says it all.

The persistence of these attitudes through the centuries of simultaneous evolution can only be satisfactorily explained by the presence of a corpus of logically co-ordinated intellectual concepts, a lore.’ Behaviour can be neither universal nor permanent unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, a logical system of thought, a complete positive philosophy of the universe, of man and of the things that surround him, of existence, life, death and of the life beyond. Without excluding other factors (divine and human) we must postulate, seek and discover a logical system of human thought as the ultimate foundation of any logical and universal systems of human behaviour.

Tempels sought to lend insight into the missionary endeavors and the colonizers’ intent to erect in Africa the Western social institutions of economics, politics, education and jurisprudence. But, the colonizers’ primary interest was more in transforming Africa into the Western likeness than in the cultural situation and mindsets of the African
beneficiaries. Tempels’ profound insights thus had little impact, if any, on those to whom they were directed. The Western social system was implanted in Africa in total disregard of the African ontologies. It would be a misperception, however, to conclude that these intellectual and philosophical dynamics have abated, or that if they do exist they are explicitly carried out by foreign and public policy makers. The reluctance to take a comprehensive view of culture is a globally complex problem that manifests itself differently today. There is a tendency, either deliberate or born out of ignorance, to ignore the significance of traditional cultures in the understanding of the contemporary underdevelopment issues.

The disregard for native anthropologies in development was a transformative action. In this action is embedded a negative principle of ongoing disorientation as far as the African existence and self-determination are concerned. Of urgency, therefore, is the need to reverse cultural disorientation: an issue African theology has not tired to give voice to. Yet contrary to the majority theological position, there is urgent need to critically examine traditional anthropologies in conjunction with the mechanics of “cultural exclusion” in its historical and contemporary significances in the world today. To that end, the following subsections highlight an important aspect in the overall dynamic of cultural exclusion.

The Crisis in Contemporary Social Analysis

The formal structure of on-going social analysis is determinative of whether or not Africa will overcome the cultural crisis in which it is currently immersed. The crisis in social analysis today can be recognized in the chasm between present historical social realities and the analysts’ modes of operation. Taking Africa as an example, the functional
significance of traditional African social philosophies and the attendant cultural structures were supplanted by Western social philosophy since the colonial period. Thus, a functional disharmony characterizes traditional African nations. Creating functional harmony does not consist in reinventing the ancestral modes of operation. Rather, it requires the reformulation of traditional African philosophies in ways suited to the ever-changing social conditions in the world in general and in Africa in particular. This goal can be achieved by means of diverse and comprehensive methods of social analysis that take into consideration the possible role of traditional anthropologies in the ongoing economic and political crises. The religious, socio-economic, and political viability of traditional anthropologies ought to be ascertained through the same process. This condition applies equally to the church’s missionary strategy in Africa. These are not options but urgent demands for contemporary Africa. The perspectives in social analysis are not only too fragmented, there is the lack of a coherent notion of culture as an encompassing paradigm for relating, explaining, and reconciling points of conflict between African and the Western social system. Father Placide Tempels hinted at the primary cause behind the stated “lack.” There are historical roots behind the on-going reality of including native cultures from political an economic policies. The next few paragraphs expand on this issue by outlining the historical factors that continue to shape the mentalities decried by Placide Tempels.

The overall colonial stance to the colonized peoples was not accidental but a consequence of the mindset formed by complex events in the Christian Europe of the time. There are two types of interrelated events: the religious events treated in Chapter III, and the socio-economic and political events of modernity. The latter events comprise the focus of the current section, without necessarily rehearsing what actually happened.
The main objective is to discern in the formal structure of modern social analysis the historical dynamic of excluding “culture” from development considerations. Particular attention is given to the basic assumptions underlying contemporary social analysis. This aspect, according to this paper, comprises a fertile arena where a pattern of “cultural exclusion” continues to unfold with new vitality. The following highlights draw mainly upon the contributions by Herb Thompson and Bruce Kapferer on the current crisis in social analysis.

A familiar phenomenon today in the majority of schools and universities worldwide is the paucity of academic programs in cultural anthropology as an important academic discipline suited to the needs of the globalizing world. Two contemporary European professors have treated the epistemological implications of this phenomenon and its impact on contemporary methods in social analysis. Herb Thompson was a professor of economics at Murdoch University, (located in Perth, Western Australia). Bruce Kapferer is a professor of anthropology at the University of Bergen (located in Norway). Though anchored in different disciplines, the general thrusts of their arguments lend themselves to the stated objectives and issues discussed so far in this chapter. Their discourses focus on the uncertainty and inability of cultural anthropologists in academia to contribute effectively to modern day social theories. They emphatically attribute this state of affairs to the recurring impotence of anthropology, and the contemporary social theorists’ irrational refusal to acknowledge its epistemological significance for integral development. The work of these two professors facilitates an understanding of the root of the ongoing anthropological impotence, as well as its repudiation by contemporary social theorists. Therefore, through historical analysis, Thompson and Kapferer demonstrate that
epistemological and methodological controversies concerning the value of native cultures in development have been around for a while. Significant to their pursuit are the major historical factors responsible for the diminished understanding of culture, and the functions and value of cultural anthropology in the field of knowledge and contemporary social discourse. They trace existing controversies to specific historical events: the drive to modernity, colonization, and postmodernism. These, according to the two authors, are not isolated occurrences. The moral and philosophical assumptions since the early modern time (16th & 17th centuries) are the connecting and the ever regenerative link to the current crisis in social analysis.

Precisely, the intellectual and philosophical impulses that gave birth to “modernity” drew moral imperatives from an abstract or elitist view of culture. “Modernity,” Thompson observes, “was a project of global conquest originating from Europe” and has always been part of North American political consciousness and cultural stance to the world. Its “obvious Eurocentric position holds that because of the exceptional characteristics of European culture and rationality, the people were able to transcend their cultural limitations and extend their influence across the world.” That this basic assumption translated into a programmatic-ideological course of action that fanned colonization into flame is history. “Europe, while not the normative centre of modernity, [has] priority as the historical point of reference in any processes of change from the 15th century onwards.” And it came to pass; colonization became the main vehicle by which Old Europe transmitted its civilization beyond its own territories.

As a result, it was not so much the humanity and the well being of conquered people that motivated the colonial decisions to alter their traditional ways of life, but the
promise of political advantage that would come from spreading the fruits of modernity. Henceforth, colonization operated and thrived on the basic assumption that development strategies and policies can be imported into and thrive in any given social milieu independent of indigenous cultural mindsets, religious consciousness, and moral dispositions. From the epistemological and historical standpoints, however, modernity fashioned and encouraged a certain way of viewing the world as much as it attenuated intellectual motivation to delve into the meaning of culture and of the native cultures of colonized peoples. It was the same stance that prompted Placide Tempels to call for conscientious insertion of Western social philosophy into traditional African societies.\textsuperscript{157} This was a call impelled by Christian reason, which is shared by Herb Thompson and Bruce Kapferer in non-religious terms. The perspectives of the two professors are generally presented here in three interrelated sections. The first section explains, among other factors, why the colonial mentality puts into question the freedom to create culture.

**The Human Freedom to Mould One’s Own Culture**

The Christian vision of humanity fosters free participation in molding one’s culture. Freedom of participation allows for the emergence of diverse cultures. At the same time, the Christian religious dynamism fosters a creative tension between the notions of unity and diversity as an ontological necessity. But modernity was a major point of departure from this Christian vision as the moral horizon of Western culture as a whole. The departure occasioned transformation in Western intellectual consciousness; a phenomenon that continues to unfold into the larger world through Western influence.

Culture has increasingly ceased to be a moral imperative for human existence and has become an ideological construct, transposable from the West into all cultural milieus by
any “possible” means. \(^{158}\) Practical and moral considerations for human development consequently shifted from the concrete reflection on the actual situations of real people, to the abstract structural frames of reference. \(^{159}\) Empirical method is now entrenched as the norm of social analysis. Call this moral and intellectual aberration, but ideological protagonists, now as then, uphold “political and economic propositions…that [equate] the intellectual, cultural and technological advance of victorious nations as something that needs to be emulated by the ‘poorer,’ less ‘civilized’ peoples of the world.” \(^{160}\) Henceforth, the meaning of culture as an intrinsic human reality has been transformed into a “specific category” of “civilization:” modern Western civilization. \(^{161}\) But for thinkers, who share Thompson’s and Kapferer’s vision, a purely empirical approach to the human condition disregards the meaning of culture in development and spells doom for the entire world. It is impossible to muster adequate understanding of peoples’ conditions and needs without real knowledge of their cultures. The fundamental problems of contemporary social analysis can be better grasped from this global standpoint.

All things considered, there is need for regenerative efforts to precede development efforts. According to the two professors, regenerative efforts in cultural anthropology consist in identifying two major and interrelated factors that currently foster the entrenchment of an ongoing aversion to the significance of culture in development. First, there is need to comprehend the rationale and basic direction of modernity to determine the seminal “content and mode” of contemporary social analysis. Second, a course of action which befits the present times ought to be determined. Because modernity made lasting imprints on the global intellectual consciousness regarding the
nature and process of development, the primary aim of Thompson and Kapferer is to challenge this dominant intellectual stance. They see the need to step back into history and locate the sources of the philosophical and the moral assumption that underpin contemporary social analysis. It is possible then to identify the many points of moral conflict and departures that increasingly lead to the trivialization of cultural anthropology, be it in academia, or among policy makers. The following summary of Kapferer’s response to the issues in question can illustrate the common stand with Thompson.

**An Anthropological response to the Lopsidedness of Social Analysis**

Having assumed a single world (European) view, colonizers were able to unilaterally impose massive changes on native cultures. Kapferer calls attention to this problem as the original *raison d'être* for the emergence of anthropological studies in European universities. In academia, he points out; anthropology arose, first and foremost, to challenge cultural homogeneity as the philosophical horizon for colonization.\(^{162}\) With the intent to reverse this anomalous trend, originating anthropologists placed emphasis on “vital methodological and ethical concerns.”\(^{163}\) Essential to this goal, “culture and field work [were established as] the twin pillars in anthropology.”\(^{164}\) Kapferer points out that within the original structure of theory and method, anthropology “was not merely adding to the knowledge of human being but as opening up new possibilities for thought and theory concerning the human conditions that were closed to other disciplines. Anthropology was the new way to explore the human condition.”\(^{165}\) That these academic efforts in the remote past continue to persist, even if dimly, can be observed in the writings of contemporary American anthropologists,
George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer. They give forceful and comprehensive testimony to the validity of Kapferer’s argument. Although the convictions which Marcus and his colleagues express have not yet made observable impact, their basic direction reaffirms the nature of anthropology and its future prospects. This consists in:

exploring new ways to fulfill the promises on which modern anthropology was founded: to offer worthwhile and interesting critiques of our own society; to enlighten us about other human possibilities, engendering an awareness that we are merely one pattern among many; to make accessible the normally unexplained assumptions by which we operate and through which we encounter members of other cultures. Anthropology is not the mindless collection of the exotic but the use of the cultural richness for self-reflection and growth.

The objectives Marcus and Fischer lay out are at the center of the ongoing controversies between anthropologists and social theorists. Contemporary social theorists adamantly rebuff the view that knowledge about a particular culture brings valuable insights toward a holistic development. The social theorists’ stance is conceivably borne out of the influence from modern and postmodern thought. According to Thompson, the dividing line between epistemological and philosophical positions of the modern and postmodern eras appears to be very slim—the next subsection illustrates this.

A Socio-Economic Response: Recognizing the Postmodern Twist

Although postmodernism initially sought to challenge the basic assumptions of modernity, it is as ideologically oriented as modernity, according to Thompson. Given the internal logic and theories propagated by postmodernism, Thompson rightly points out that postmodernism elevated the epistemological and methodological value of social sciences while alienating cultural anthropology as a valid source of knowledge for human development. The consequences in its wake are the “[dominance] of structuralism,
institutionalism, Marxism and Dependency theory.”170 In all these, it is the pre-
conceived abstract ideas on development that ultimately matter most as opposed to real
persons and circumstances in which they live. The postmodern era can thus be seen to
complicate rather than unravel historical issues from the past, a point Kapferer also
emphasizes.

Thus in the context of a postmodern epistemological stance, anthropology
according to Kapferer is unable to impact the intellectual, philosophical, moral, and
methodological quagmire ushered in by modernity. Not only do contemporary
anthropologists suffer from “intellectual timidity,” there is neither clearer perception nor
deeper interest in native cultures by the host of academic disciplines in the colleges and
universities.171 Anthropology thus remains a superfluous discipline, incapable of
touching real life situations.172 Meanwhile, “culture” has been replaced with the
specificity of class, race, and gender in the development process.”173 This emphasis is
based on a postmodernism’s flawed presumption that such analytical constructs can elicit
a meaningful understanding of diverse situations, peoples and societies. In reality,
postmodernism disregards the fact that the categories of class, race, and gender, like
many others, have arisen out of a particular social context in response to specific
concerns in development. For this reason, the same analytical constructs do not
necessarily speak to all dimensions of meaning embodied in the concept of
“development” as a human category. Hence, their shortcoming notwithstanding, the
growing popularity of postmodern analytical constructs cannot be ignored. Their overall
effect can be seen in the current aversion to the significance of culture in planning and in
the enacting of development policies. The outcome of this intellectual scenario is the
ever weakening concept of culture, and the consequent fragmentation of various levels of existence. The following is a synthesis of the summative viewpoints by Thompson and Kapferer.

**The Meaning of Culture Remains Shrouded in Mystery**

The central motifs in Thompson’s argument, presented in the form of an inquiry are a thematic articulation of major philosophical perspectives by means of which the crisis in social analysis can be better understood. The issues he raises therein aptly bring the present objective of pinpointing the shortcomings in contemporary social analysis to a constructive conclusion. Thompson inquires whether: “…certain cultural traits promote economic development…, or does economic development adapt to immutable cultural traits? Does economic development instill certain cultural traits…or do cultural processes internalize and appropriate developmental processes? Are culture and economic development relatively autonomous?” The point is well made: not all traits in native cultures are conducive to economic development presupposed by Western social philosophy. The presumption that economic and political processes can bypass individual and collective psyches formed by definite cultural beliefs and practices is a complete distortion of what social analysis ought to be about. Contemporary social sciences hardly prepare modern persons to relate empirical methods and the perceived needs of society to the meaning of “a person” in relation to that of culture. Methodological configurations in social sciences, for instance, are more and more defined by social predictability in view of profit making than the need to serve real persons living in the real world. Yet, human needs consist of more than the aspirations for material well being. It is against this extremely narrow understanding that Thompson raises his five questions cited above.
These, he believes, constitute an “extremely fertile and intellectually searching debate and dialogue, as the institutional and cultural perquisites and foundations for economic development has been simply ignored by most of those in the economic profession.”

In summary, the particular merit of Thompson and Kapferer lies in their ability to perceive the crisis in social analysis as a dynamic rooted in the past, and presently linked with the internal mechanisms of the present historical processes. Modern analytical constructs have a role to play in the overall scheme of social analysis, but it is a limited role. The lack of an encompassing theory of culture renders perspectives in contemporary social analysis ineffective and impracticable. The dominant tendency to proceed from *a priori* principles crafted from a particular social context or time in history reinforces pathetic ignorance about the meaning of culture, in addition to engendering a constraining belief that “culture is a diversion from the alleged real processes in the contemporary world (or worse, is a purposeful cover for capitalist, racist and sexist oppressors).” These typically postmodern viewpoints can be sweepingly narrow and uncompromising. Devoid of appropriate structures of meaning for achieving comprehensive social analysis, postmodern epistemology in this regard complicates rather than enlightens what is holistic and genuinely important for human development. It does not provide answers to deeper questions regarding the meaning of a person in relation to culture. Today’s social conditions need an encompassing structure of social analysis that can effectively speak to universality without eliminating legitimate diversities. The enforcement of modern and postmodern analytical constructs has a lot to do with the present preoccupation with the material aspects of development as opposed to the development of the whole persons and their cultures. Interestingly, culture is also
made of non-material dimensions that are not unconditionally attainable by empirical means.

Convinced, therefore, that the true meaning and value of social analysis should not be equated with the basic method in social sciences, the current author aligns the objectives of this study with the growing discontent with the paradigmatic approach to reality established by empirical methods. George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer’s position explains this point:

The present is a time of reassessment of dominant ideas across the human sciences (a designation broader than and inclusive of the conventional social sciences). This reassessment is more salient in more disciplines than others, but its presence is pervasive. It is not just the ideas themselves that are coming under attack but the paradigmatic style in which they have been presented. Particularly in social sciences, the goal of organizing principles by abstract, generalizing frameworks that encompass and guide all efforts at empirical research is being fundamentally challenged.180

Marcus and Fischer recognize “the problem of loss of encompassing theories” that would render meaningful the “considerations of such issues as contextuality, the meaning of social life to those who enact it, and the explanation of exceptions and indeterminants rather than regularities in phenomena observed…”181 In light of the current study-objectives, an encompassing theory of culture is both a necessity and a means of addressing conceptual fragmentation brought about by modern and postmodern relativism. Hence, an attempt is made to define culture since effective analysis of the traditional African cultural heritages depends on this important step.
SECTION III

A. WHAT IS CULTURE?

There are many authors, representing different fields of study who offer conflicting and less-than-whole definitions of culture. Thierry Verhelst makes a compelling argument in this regard. “Conferences about culture often suffer from a lack of precision when it comes to the terminology used.” 182 The definitions tend to be limited to “values and customs, others think essentially of art, yet others think of education.” 183 His perceptive appraisal withstanding, Verhelst’s own definition is not different from those he criticizes. He defines “culture” as “a complex whole of solutions that a given community inherits, adopts or invents to face the challenges of its natural and social environment.”184 Verhelst merit consists in having recognized the functional limitation of existing concepts of culture. But be as that may, his definition is as vague as a general view that culture is a way of life.185 In addition to not providing diagnostic concepts for social analysis, it is difficult to decipher from as pithy a definition as that the essential relationships between culture, person, and development.

The issues raised in the previous section are local, but they are also global in scope and character. They precisely revolve around the larger question of human wellbeing, and a partial conception of culture is inappropriate to the present task. Conceptual clarity is thus required in the face of conceptual and methodological complexities involved in the African encounter with Christianity and Western culture. Present concerns about contemporary social analysis reveal that the changing concept and experience of culture world-wide renders the aforementioned encounter more complex and elusive. It is, therefore, in view of working toward conceptual and methodological
clarity, that this study turns to the Second Vatican Council teaching on the meaning of culture. The intention, however, is not to present an exhaustive analysis of Vatican II teaching on the subject. Rather, the purpose is to heighten the exceptional clarity with which the bishops at Vatican Council II defined culture. This the Council accomplished by delineating dimensions that make up the reality we call culture. But first, reference to Vatican II teaching is preceded by a comparative summary of two other views on culture: the physical anthropological view and the African theological view. This will heighten the importance of Vatican II teaching on culture beyond the present study.

**Physical Anthropological Approach to Culture**

There are many perspectives in the physical anthropological view of culture. The perspective taken by Leslie A. White and Beth Dillingham presented here represents just one of the kinds. Their intention was to provide a conceptual framework in which the meaning of culture can be explained. Their propositions generally reflect common conclusions based on empirical assumptions that make the theory of evolution the primary point of reference. Accordingly, they situated their research in the framework of an evolutionary view of human life convinced that generic biological functions in the human species developed gradually over time. They then concluded that humanity’s self-consciousness evolved along a similar process. Against this philosophical background the researchers established the origin of human cultures. Linking it to habitual behavior, White and Dillingham maintained that every human being, unlike non-beings, has the ability to symbol. This is the “ability freely and arbitrarily to originate, determine, and bestow meaning upon things and the events in the external world, and the ability to
comprehend such meanings.” The next step was to determine the origin of these natural mechanics.

In accordance with scientific research methods, the researchers located the origin of producing symbols in the “neurological evolution of the nervous system” of the human primates. Basing on this as their physical evidence, White and Dillingham then reached a conclusion: the universality of this biological function gave humanity the capacity to “originate” and “impose” meaning on reality. The choices of “verbs” they use to describe the foundation of culture are as important as the total meaning of culture conveyed. Culture is brought about through a process of symbolizing; i.e., by humans attaching new meaning to an independent reality. For example, the meaning attached to a national flag is neither inherent in the material that makes the cloth nor in the cloth. It is imposed on it by persons who want to convey a specific meaning related to social life.

So based on the idea of symbolizing, they concluded that “[a]ll definitions of culture are arbitrary,” even if they are [valid, justified and useful]. They further deduced that “Man and culture constitute an inseparable couplet. By definition there is no culture without man and there is no man without culture.” By implication, there can be no definition of culture unrelated to specific and concrete experiences of culture.

Interjecting the primary motivating factor for White and Dillingham’s research project can clarify the thrust of their conclusions.

The above assertions are made in the noble effort to dispute the “biological inferences [often] drawn from cultural data, and used in the assignment of “superior brains, nerves, glands” to some cultures rather than others. Because such a perspective tends to associate the essence of culture with only certain cultures, White and Dillingham
point back to the evolution of the neurological system as the *cause* and *basis* of culture. They found no scientific evidence behind the genetically based intent to define culture in terms of superior brains, and the like. So on the whole, Leslie A. White and Beth Dillingham undoubtedly introduce important elements into the multifaceted and ongoing debate on the meaning of culture. The attempt to identify the origin and foundation of culture is an important and needed step. It reflects the need for a common universal basis for understanding culture. This need is well expressed in their analysis of the arbitrary quality that marks every culture. Many elements of traditional cultures world-wide are based on whims rather than on objective facts, reasons or principles. Such arbitrariness equips cultures with a greater measure of subjectivity. This, more often than not, attunes cultures toward exclusivity. On this particular account, White and Dillingham’s research provides a measure of clarity to the present quest for an encompassing theory of culture. Questions remain, however, as to whether White and Dillingham’s research satisfy the quest for a coherent concept of culture that is also universally applicable? Does the effort to locate the origin of culture in neurological evolution effectively express the relationship between culture and a person as a whole?

White and Dillingham leave many questions unanswered. For instance, the need for an encompassing theory of culture implies that culture is definable outside the specific or concrete social experiences or milieus. Every definition of culture need not be descriptive and based on concrete forms of culture. After all, the possibility of locating in any one culture the concepts that speak to the commonalities and legitimate diversity in the universal experience of culture is negated by the very nature of cultural arbitrariness. Further more, the emphasis on the neurological evolution as the
foundation of culture is greatly laden with exploitable loopholes. It bypasses the meaning of a human being as an embodied spirit, with the natural capacity for rational reflection. These dimensions of human nature always carry the possibility for revision and further development. Our researchers’ focus concerns itself with bodily functions and mental task foremost – ignoring the fact that humans can originate meaning in more than one way. For example, while it is accurate to posit the human intellect as the center of the ability to create culture, it is equally important to take into account the significance of “bodiliness.” For example, White and Dillingham maintain that to be human is to be cultural, which must be realized through exerting a conscious habit upon existence. Critically understood, the mentally retarded persons, whose minds we cannot know but whose bodily structure and needs are nonetheless human would not be deemed human beings. Yet we know that by their very needs as human beings, they impose a culture of care and concern on the surroundings. It is thus valid to maintain that a human being can create culture in more than one way. So, what is the basis of culture: the mind, the body, or both? There has to be a coherent concept of culture capable of speaking comprehensively about the totality of a human person as the “subject” of culture. The merits of physical anthropology withstanding, we now present important highlights in the African theological conception of culture before treating Conciliar teaching.

A Summary of the African Theological Views on Culture

Instrumentum Laboris of the African Synod (1994) states unequivocally that: “Culture is not to be confused with the actual practices of a culture. The practices may differ from place to place and in the same place from one epoch to another, without essential change in the culture.” The document goes on to add:
The trained or experienced person can discover similarities of culture (depth level) where others see only diversity… Some people with diverse practices and languages can share an overall culture; such seems to be the case of Africa, south of the Sahara; there one tends to speak of African traditional Religion in singular, this without prejudice to the existence of sub-cultures\textsuperscript{195} (my emphases).

This statement more or less captures the basic assumption of the African theological view of culture. Those assumptions are significant, because they point to the basic differences between the African theological thought and the Vatican II theology of culture. The statements thus provide this study the reasons to critique the African theological concept of culture.

First, the view that “culture should not be confused with individual practices” is very misleading. It is premised on an erroneous perception of African culture(s) as a self-defining entity that transcends space and time, and consequently overrides diverse tribal expressions. For instance, after Instrumentum Laboris points out the cultural evolution “brought about” by major intrusions in Africa, the document goes on to celebrate that “[w]hen it comes to values and basic assumptions of the people, the resistance is still strong and the underlying African identity is still intact.”\textsuperscript{196} The problem is: “resistance and intactness” do not necessarily imply cultural strength and viability. Nonetheless, without necessarily overcoming a homogeneous view of culture, the African Synod contradicted this rather sanguine outlook by stating that “the culture (in the singular) that gave our people identity is in a crisis.” This is not to suggest the Synod made things any clearer. For how can a culture be “intact” and in a “crisis” at one and the same time? So, absent a clear concept of culture in the African Synod documents, it is difficult to tell precisely what the Synod meant by “a culture in a crisis.” Second, the expressed views
represent a general African understanding of cultures which comprises the horizon from which *Instrumentum Laboris* and African Synod explain the meaning of culture. Notably, this predominant perspective does not distinguish between “shared cultural foundations” and “genuine cultural diversity” in Africa. Nor does *Instrumentum Laboris* perceive that varied developments of the common heritages might have emerged over the passage of many centuries of reformulations and additions. There is, therefore, a general failure to recognize that while African “cultural foundations,” symbols, customs and practices generally cut across tribal borders, the experiences and meanings attached to them differ profoundly from one tribe to another.

Third, there is an easy transition from “culture” to “religion” and vice versa, thus giving the impression of religion and culture being synonymous. The reason for this theological anomaly can be traced to the African cosmological perspective, which resonates with the thinking behind *Instrumentum Laboris*, for instance. African traditional consciousness does not distinguish the secular sphere from the religious one. While this has the merit of conveying a sense of cosmic unity, it can be a hindrance to the attainment of conceptual clarity about the essential differences between Christianity and culture. Persons may be less prepared to readily understand the possibilities that lie within the range of each or the impact of religion in general on the development of peoples and cultures. This might as well be one of the greatest problems facing Africa—a theme addressed in the later section of this dissertation. Finally, can any culture, in the true sense of the word, endure meaningfully without appropriate cultural practices? The idea of “not confusing culture with cultural practices” introduces a passive relationship between “a particular culture” and “its people or subjects.” It denotes
African cultures as self-perpetuating entities, capable of surviving the changes in the human psyche and in society apart from what people do and value. The meaning of existence is also reversed. For, instead of culture being a reality as possessed by the subject; it becomes the “subject as possessed by the culture.” Fr. Nwachukwuike Iwe of Nigeria illustrates this state of affairs in unambiguous terms:

Culture is marked by continuity in time and comprehensiveness in the scope of its sway over its members, its members may die and perish but it continues its mark in time from generation to generation: its impact on its members is comprehensive or without exception, and inescapable as death.198

Nwachukwuike rightly emphasizes the all-inclusive impact of culture on the entire society. But we must still inquire into the origin of culture. Thus this study takes issue with the relationship the author sets between culture and its subjects. The unmistakable meaning he conveys is that culture apparently has an autonomous existence apart from the cultural subjects. He is right with respect to the traditional African heritages, because individuals are born into their respective cultures and die never having changed an iota of it. But, does Nwachukwuike’s conceptual horizon not raise the fundamental question as to whether contemporary Africans possess the “will” and, therefore, the “capacity” to advance the meanings they attach to reality in their environments, save that passed from the ancient ancestors’ times? What reasons would really dictate cultural transformations? Yes, Black African psyche signals a people under the sway of the ancestral world views. Their only and best choice in the face of the unfolding historical but providential events is to “repeat” the traditional beliefs and practices. It is not surprising then that the expressed views do not entertain consideration for the origin and foundation of culture.
In summary, the African Synod documents accurately bring out the general African view of culture. The Synod provides the background for understanding Africa’s resistance to a “conscious” choice toward radical cultural transformation where it is needed. The expressed views of culture combined with cultural resistance underlie the existing African theological arguments for uninterrupted continuity of the traditional religious heritages. But for the purpose of this study, there is no doubt that the African theological view of culture is flawed and is, as such, an impediment in the path of theological reflection and inculturation. In the context of growing global repudiation of culture, incarnating Christianity requires conceptual clarity with respect to the meaning of culture and to the character of social analysis. It is also vital in the discernment for an effective response to the socioeconomic and political development in specific social milieus. It is only by striving to understand the meaning of culture that anyone can truly understand Africa and its essential needs. To this end the reflection turns to the teaching by the Second Vatican Council. The Council Fathers made great achievements in assembling together key concepts that are basic in the comprehensive understanding of culture. All the loopholes identified in the preceding perspectives are adequately attended to. The teaching is referenced here for the immediate goal of identifying appropriate conceptual tools for social analysis. This allows us to put into perspective the historical and the ongoing conflicting encounter between African worldviews and the traditional Western social philosophy.
B. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THE MEANING OF CULTURE

The Human Person is the Ground of Culture

Lacking in the above views are the elements crucial to an in depth understanding of culture. These include the relationship between “person” and “culture.” Second and derived from the first are the “foundation” and “purpose” of culture. The third and equally important is the element of “cultural diversity.” Whether or not diversity is seen as a “necessary good” or “quality,” depends upon the relationship that is set between the first and the second group of elements. The supreme value of Vatican II teaching on culture consists in the Council having incorporated all these elements without arousing conflicting views. The following paragraphs attempt to highlight important dimensions of that teaching. The presentation of these elements follows no particular order here. Details on the same topic can be obtained easily from Vatican II Council documents, especially Gaudium et Spes.

Human life from a theological standpoint is more than a series of events which empirical facts can reveal or explain. The Conciliar anthropological thought emerged from the church’s recognition of the ever-deepening dichotomy between the spiritual and material aspects of human life. This theological trend is also indicative of the rift between faith and reason—a subject treated in Chapter III of this study. Gaudium et Spes no. 4 expresses the aforementioned rift in these words: “There is…a painstaking search for a better material world, without parallel spiritual advancement.” Paragraph 25 of the same document endeavors to reflect on human existence in light of what it means to be a person in the world. Discernible, therefore, in the Conciliar schema is a dynamic relationship the Council Fathers set between person and culture. The primary aim is to
bring out the interdependence between the two and the determination of the transcendent and contingent principles. Notably, though there is interdependence between various elements, the Council in no way places equal value on person and culture. For instance, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 12 indicates clearly that the meaning of a person always transcends particular self-understanding. Clearly then, the meaning of a human being (human ontology) is the philosophical-theological framework for a wholistic understanding of culture in relation to a human being. T.M. McFadden offers a fitting explanation of *Gaudium et Spes* no. 25. A human being is composed of spiritual and corporeal orientations by means of which one is enabled to live in the world. The simultaneous orientations to concrete existence and to the transcendent ground of being have direct bearing on the understanding of culture. “If man precisely in and through his finitude is ordered to the Absolute as the culmination of all human dynamism, says McFadden, “then this Absolute will be manifest within the social historical process and not centrally in some individualistic religious experience.”

According to McFadden, this is a corrective to any scheme of thought that seeks to create “any dichotomy between soul and body or the material and spiritual realms” of a society. His position is explicitly in disagreement with the social science perspectives that trivialize culture and physical anthropology that renders a concept of culture solely as a product of arbitrary forces. In this way McFadden’s views comprise a good transition to Vatican II teaching. For the Second Vatican Council closely linked human existence and destiny in such a way that the concrete and the transcendent dimensions of human being could also be discernible in the overall concept of culture. Human ontology becomes the appropriate philosophical
framework for understanding and explaining anthropological questions arising from contemporary social change.

**A Theological-Anthropological View of Culture**

The Vatican II definition of culture is premised on paragraph no 12 of *Gaudium et Spes*. “According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown.” This statement purposely grounds the meaning of culture in the universal humanity, and reiterates the Christian vision of a common origin and destiny. Embodied in this vision are the beliefs about a common humanity, i.e., possessing the same basic orientations and inclinations. This teaching fits into the methodological category as explained by McFadden. “Rather than propose an abstract concept of [human nature, contemporary Catholic theology] begins with the concrete unity of persons as they appear in history, situated within the one actual, and supernatural existential order.” This is indeed the theological-philosophical horizon to which *Gaudium et Spes* attunes the concept of culture insofar as it relates to a person or the human way of being. After identifying a person as the starting point for understanding his or her social environment, the document then goes on to aptly specify the different dimensions that make up the totality we call culture. After a statement is made regarding the purpose of human life from a historical standpoint, the Council then explains the functions of culture in view of the ultimate goal of human existence.

*Gaudium et Spes* no. 53 thus states: “It is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture, that is, through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Whenever, therefore, there is a
question of human life, nature and cultures are intimately linked together.” Notice that
the document does not speak about some abstract nature but about the fundamental
inclinations observable in all humankind and always manifest in all cultures. *Gaudium et
Spes* does not mention that the same inclinations can be disposed differently or diversely
when acted upon by different factors. The reason for this omission is clear. Once the
basic principles are understood, the practical questions can be derived accordingly.
Hence, with basic presumptions in place, the *Gaudium et Spes* no. 53 begins by defining
culture in these compact terms. “The word ‘culture’ in the general sense refers to all
those things which go to the refining and developing of man’s diverse mental and
physical endowments.” The basic human inclinations are condensed into what is meant
by “all those things” and are specified as follows:

- [The human being] tries to subdue the earth by his knowledge and his labor
  (human intellect).
- [The human being] humanizes social life both in the family and in the whole civic
  community through the improvement of customs and institutions (the basic
  inclination social development beyond the nuclei family).
- [The human being] communicates and preserves customs and institutions to be an
  inspiration for the progress of many, even all humankind (inclination to
  education).
- [The human being] expresses through his/her works the great spiritual experiences
  and aspirations of men/women throughout the ages (religious inclinations)

This section of Conciliar teaching continues to be the focus of many theological
studies. The intention here is not to give a detailed treatise on each aspect outlined
here but to indicate in general terms the constitutive dimensions of the total reality known
as culture. Accordingly, culture is composed of a series of specific interconnected
dimensions or moral principles corresponding to basic human needs and aspirations. The
first point combines the basic inclination “to know” with the reality of “human labor.” Persons are endowed with free thought and reflection, all of which ensue into concrete forms of livelihoods and all kinds of social facilities. In other words, all the distinctiveness associated with each culture has its origin in free human thought and reflection. The nature of the human intellect (in the classical sense) implies that the general human orientation toward a cultural life does not happen once. It continues as long as the functions of intellect remain integrally operable.

The second point speaks to the organizational aspect as a basic human inclination ordered to harmonious existence. The third aspect underscores the value and function of education in the advancement and sustenance of all cultural values and goods. The fourth dimension points out the reality of religion as the transcendent and organizing principles for all cultural good and the springboard of ethical principles and social morality. That is, religion offers the underlying moral values on which all dimensions of culture are based. All these elements that comprise the meaning of culture also constitute the “common good” of a cultural entity. In a nutshell, the Vatican II cultural ontological schema admits no room for arguments regarding religion as something existing outside culture. Nor do political and economic life realities simply co-existence “with” culture. Common phraseologies such as economics, politics and culture are consequently very misleading. Politics, economics, education, social institutions, the practice of religion, art and many others comprise the reality known as culture. On the Christian historical note, while this teaching validates the social experiences of all human groupings as essentially cultural, it does not justify or validate every element within any specific cultural experience. The next few paragraphs and the remaining chapter clarify will this last point.
Seen as a whole, the Conciliar anthropological schematic representation admits a number of empirically determinable facts. What is basically human is also what is constitutively cultural. A human being is neither a one dimensional species concerned only about material existence, nor an amorphous species without any basic direction. A person is an embodied spirit with an evident basic orientation toward integral human wellbeing. It is with this similar attentiveness to the unity of the material and spiritual dimensions of a person that led the American pollster, George H. Gallup (1901-1984), to assert that “I could prove God statistically. Take the human body alone – the chances that all the functions of an individual would just happen by chance is statistically monstrous.”

The specified human tendencies are not decoration. They are foreordained and are geared toward the development of “true and full humanity” that includes corporeal and spiritual realities. Thus far we have reached an important point in this chapter. Vatican II theological-anthropological view of culture has hermeneutical significance for this study. According to this study, Vatican II cultural ontology presents basic elements common to all cultures, namely; the relationship between person and culture, its foundations, the basis of diversity and the purpose of culture. The study now turns to apply those elements to the traditional African cultures in the effort to explain their internal constitution. This particular focus meets the objectives stated at the beginning of this chapter, namely, the cause of the cultural crisis, and of the conflict between African Nations today and the Western social system. Other essential cultural elements will emerge within this wider interpretative framework.
SECTION IV

Recognizing Cultural Diversity in Africa

This study cannot emphasize enough that recognizing cultural diversity is a crucial factor in the church’s mission and in the development of modern nations in Africa. In this factor lies a host of possibilities as well as very serious obstacles. So to assert that in the pre-colonial period the present day tribal collectivities in Africa were nations may sound too simplistic to the modern person so accustomed to using the notions of “state” and “nation” interchangeably; i.e., without due regard for their etymological meaning. The term “state” is a more modern political arrangement originating in the West and for that same reason is suffused with Christian ideals. “Nation,” on the other hand, is a general way of speaking about human communities and lends itself to global traditional forms of communities before modern civilization. The Oxford Dictionary definition of “nation” lends itself well to its etymological meaning. A “nation” is “a large community of people, usually sharing a common history, culture and language, and living in a particular territory under one government.” Each of the aforementioned aspects of a “nation” was an essential feature of the African cultural collectivities known as “tribes.” In the pre-colonial times, each tribe had its own sources of income “[or means of livelihood, a distinct social and political organization].” David Barret, a European theologian, carried out an extensive research on African tribal cultures. Following a set of criteria that speak to commonalities and differences among tribal cultures, Barret identified 100, 000 tribes. Barret observed significantly that in “much of Africa, the tribe has been for centuries past and to a large degree still today the main social, psychological, economic and even governmental reality.” That
said some clarification is necessary. The “governmental reality” strictly applies to the
pre-colonial period. What endures in this last regard is the strong tribal resistance to state
governance. This is manifest in the human and ethical postures of tribes as we shall see.

John Mbiti has for a long time served as a principal source on African Traditional
Religion. To explain the collective African experience and view of communality he opts
for the term “people” as the synonym for explaining the collective experience of African
tribes in general. The purpose for his choice is to heighten the distinction between the
African and the European usages of “tribe.” Mbiti’s selection and usage of the term
“people” resonates with his aim to present a *universal* African religious philosophy. The
question this study puts before this kind of approach is whether the generic term “people”
squares properly with African anthropologies and sense of “being.” Tribal cultures in
Africa have variant concepts of a person, which is why the use of people as a synonym
for African tribal communities in general is as misleading as Mbiti’s idea of *African
religious philosophy* (in the singular). This study prefers the term *tribe*, because of its
capacity to elicit deeper underlying meanings that are neither obvious nor are so easily
conveyed by the term “people.” Moreover, the tribal social framework is the
culmination of “culture” in the formal and real sense. It is from this view point that this
study presents the tribe as the normative social structure, and the legitimate expression of
the African view of a person, culture, and diversity. Thus properly understood, a tribe
is the embodiment of an African experience of self as a human being. There are
ontological and experiential characteristics that set one tribe from another.

Mbiti rightly points out that an African tribe is composed of members, who “share
a common kinship and history, which is often traced mythologically to either the first
[ancestral] man created by God or to national leaders responsible for establishing structures of the society concerned.”²¹⁵ He also spells out the essential features of the tribal cultures in these words: “a tribe shares a common language, customs, morals, ethics, social behaviour, and material objects.”²¹⁶ He accurately points out that these elements are still at large in Africa today. Notice that the elements cited as typical of an African tribe are universally shared by all human cultures. But when the same elements are interpreted in light of an African tribal culture one will discover not only cultural distinctiveness among the tribes, but also a basic orientation toward *inward-centeredness* in the expression of the same elements. Michael Paul Gallagher’s observations about tribal cultures in general lend themselves well to the factor of cultural distinctiveness and an ethnocentric propensity among African tribal cultures. “Differences between cultures,” he says, “are rooted in how people learn to perceive their social relations with one another.”²¹⁷ He points out four factors that “mutually [reinforce]” the emergence of social relationships or identities: “the acquired way of perceiving one’s place in society, the social context and its dominant patterns of interaction, individual behaviour, choices, and the form of religious vision typical of different cultures.”²¹⁸ He maintains rightly that because “one grows up assimilating basic assumptions of the tribe; such a one comes to view the surrounding world with a certain slant.”²¹⁹ Based on Gallagher’s explanation, a slanted view of the world is typical of human cultures. As a matter of fact, this is the manner in which tribal cultures in Africa also evolved. But Gallagher also offers an important and useful point for bringing out some differences with respect to the evolution African tribal cultures. A technical explanation is required to show the functional relationships among the tribal structural frames of reference. That is, it is very important
to understand how each element functions to heighten cultural distinctiveness in the entire tribal structure. For then it becomes possible to comprehend the diametrical opposition among tribal cultures and the claim by this study that the diverse ancestral visions and practices are the hinge of the existing human and cultural crisis in Africa.

When explaining cultural diversity as an ingrained element in the making of culture, Gallagher lays emphasis on “mutually reinforcing factors” in the emergence of cultural diversity. By presenting these factors as a matter of principle, this allows for a more specific explanation of each factor in light of concrete cultural experience. When applied to Africa, therefore, the mutually reinforcing factors[s] correspond to formative principles or moral values in an individual tribal culture. Tribal moral values refer to all structures of meaning and practices that convey the total world view embodied in a tribal culture. In other words, what gives an “African tribal” culture a “particular slant,” is the total (religious) world view, traceable to a tribal ancestor. Formative principles refer to the ancestors and their moral legacies which are the foundations of tribal cultures. These are also the interpretative moral frames of reference for individuals and tribal societies as a whole. At the same time, we can recognize a difference between a specific cultural “slant” and the overall orientation of cultural diversity among African tribes. The role of ancestral religions played a central role in fashioning the character of cultural diversity in Africa. John Mbiti exemplifies this dynamic in his effort to relate tribal religious heritages to the social dynamics of a group. He states unequivocally that “One must be born [into a tribal community] to participate in the religious system of a tribe other than your own.” He elaborates on the formal practical implications of this basic cultural–religious orientation:
To be human is to belong to the whole community and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and Africans do not know how to exist without religion.221

What this indicates, in essence, is that African tribal cultures are fundamentally closed social systems.222 This is not difficult to comprehend given the basic functions of religion within the entire structure of any culture. Leonardo Boff forcefully brings the function of religion in the societal orientation of basic values and priorities. He states:

Through religion, societies define for themselves the most transcendent meaning of their practices, and the destiny of persons and history. The vehicles of religion are powerful symbols, archetypes of great depth as well as of historical permanence. It is by way of religion that separations are repaired and points of convergence discovered between times and eras.223

If the basic function of religion is to organize disparate elements in culture, giving them coherence, then it is basic in the formation of moral and ethical consciousness of the cultural subjects. Similarly, the socio-religious scenario described by Mbiti is indicative of the fundamental alignment of personal self-consciousness within the tribe as the source of ultimate identity.

In sum, the previous observations are important for a genuine understanding of the difficulties that continue to dog development efforts in Africa. Like wise, a vision of inculturation that ignores basic elements in African cultural systems is bound to achieve no lasting fruits. But the reductionist tendencies in African contextual theologies ignore the reality of cultural diversity and its moral implications. For example, despite Mbiti’s
recognition of the role of religion in giving form and substantive content to tribal identities, he opts for a homogeneous interpretation of tribal worldviews. To explain the African philosophy of life, he says “there are no parallel systems which can be observed in similarly concrete terms.” Although Mbiti’s anthropological views generated enormous interest in African religions and cultures, and have contributed greatly to the development of African theological thought, this study takes issue with the stated assumption. How can different tribal communities rooted in non-accommodating religions, propounding diverse moral visions and ethical horizons, embodied in dissimilar languages share one religious philosophy? The answer lies in the general and longstanding need in African theology to present a coherent explanation of Black religiocultural experience. But it is a need that prefers reductionism to a critical presentation of traditional heritages. The nature of cultural diversity in Africa defies such reductionist approach. Thus far the present major section focuses on the technical relationship of the ancestors to their respective religious heritages. Since the manner of proceeding is basically structural, the current objective does not necessarily admit a specialized analysis of individual tribal cultures. Also because moral values can be too numerous for an analysis of this kind, the following reflection is limited to the tribal view of a person, the basis of culture, the concept of a common good, and of a community. In conjunction with the current objective, there is an effort to indicate the points of conflict in tribal cultures and how they feature in the development of African nation-states. This objective requires that we step back into traditional history to provide a window into the major footprints of the African collective psyche: Organic unity characteristic of traditional cultures was
dismantled by colonialism without necessarily eliminating the formative significance of traditional world views.

**Toward Understanding African Anthropologies and Ontologies**

In order to live a truly Christian life, one needs to have a right comprehension of the basic relationship between Christian faith and human culture. For the anthropological horizon from which a Christian derives his or her *ultimate identity* and moral frame of reference is determinative of whether or not that Christian will live a truly Christian spiritual life marked by the redemptive grace made possible through Jesus Christ. The present section is a very important one in this regard. It seeks to cast important light on the aspects of Black cultures that presently cloud as well endangers its positive values and future prospects. The present objective therefore focuses on the African human being in relation to culture. While a human being is the rightful foundation of cultures, according to the Second Vatican Council, African tribal cultures are constituted differently. The interplay between ancestry and tribal religions in the collective Black African history played a central role in the emergence of diverse traditional anthropologies and concepts of “being.” It is true that traditional African world views do accommodate recognizable awareness of the transcendent reality of the human being. However, the concepts of a person are deeply colored by individual tribal anthropologies and ontologies as we shall see in these final analyses. There is a level at which the transcendent realities of the human being fade away in the many matrixes of ancestrology. What matters ultimately is ancestral descent and legacies. It is therefore important to bring out this anthropological anomaly. Of great significance is the reality of African religions having essentialized ancestry to such a degree that the
consideration for contemplating God’s active presence became obsolete. It is due to this critical fact that the subsequent analyses lay stress on bringing out unwholesome dimensions of ancestrology in the effort to counter balance the exaggerated appraisals of ancestry in the Black African cultural experiences. We shall therefore account for the recognizable absence of God in the traditional religious experiences in order to provide the background for understanding the character of cultural diversity in Africa. However, given the fact that non-Christian Africans acknowledge the existence of God, it may sound contradictory to say that God is absent in the religious experiences of African religions. But is it not true that intellectual knowledge of God is not necessarily synonymous with personal encounter with God? Having said so, the present focus is only technical, because the study only seeks to account for a formal absence of God in the ‘faith structure’ of the traditional religions. Knowledge of this reality heightens our understanding of the origin of numerous tribal cultures, human alienation among Black African tribes and the moral behavior the latter engenders.

**The Existence of Two Religious Traditions in African Traditional Religions**

The following reconstructions are premised on the thesis that there exist two religious traditions: the more ancient tradition and the one initiated by the tribal ancestors much later in the history of African cultures. Many, if not most, of African religions are replete with valid concepts about the mystery of God in relation to the world. Interestingly, and in a very formal sense, some of these concepts correspond with the Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. The present reflection does not dwell on the detailed discussion of these concepts. The immediate purpose is to demonstrate that the most ancient religious tradition exist side-by-side with the ancestral religious tradition. For
instance, the traditional concepts of the mystery of God are not handed down in some elaborate and systematized conceptualization such as those one encounters in African theological writings. Traditional concepts of God come in many but succinct forms and often cut across tribal religions. These include but are not limited to phrases indicating God as the “creator” of humankind, and tribal names bearing some essential attributes of God. There is a fitting example from the Bantu of Uganda.

The sense of God as an inexplicable generous giver, the ultimate decision maker, finds particular expression in Bantu names for the divine being. Among others the following names selected from five different tribes: Kyagaba, Byarugaba, Niwagaba, Agaba, Hagaba. These names convey the sense of God’s inexplicable and indeterminable generosity. While in some cases these names represent the point of surrender to the divine will in case of the unexpected, they may also indicate the mood of celebration at the moment of birth. In other words, God gives freely according to God’s own plans.

While the nuances in the actual usage of these names are not discussed here, we shall note an important point. Although these names originate from different Bantu tribes, the root stem “gaba” “to give” is common to all and is indicative of a widespread belief among the Bantu in God as the one “who gives” life in various forms. But given the fact that each African traditional religion is exclusive to individual tribes, the religious sense conveyed by such names can be traced only to the distant common past before the emergence of the tribes. There are serious reasons behind this claim.

When one relates the Bantu sense of God’s boundless act of giving to that of God as the sole Creator of “all human kind,” one gets a sense of a common (universal) human nature as a significant element in the African religious heritages. Yet when we critically
examine the basic structure tribal anthropologies and anthropologies we find that each tribe views itself as a different humanity from the others. This then prompts one to inquire as to why Black Africa have such a strong sense of God as the universal Creator and value God’s boundless generosity, and yet we all fail to see this abundance in terms of the “whole”? Why, for instance, do we believe in God as the universal creator yet cling tenaciously to an ethnocentric vision that extols individual tribal humanity over and above the others? The answer lies in the historical shift from an ancient religious paradigm that focused on the mystery of God to an immutable and, as such, a limited value of ancestry. This shift suggests that later socio-religious traditions emerged in opposition to each another. These later traditions are characterized by divisive world views and the need for each tribe to outdo the other. Interestingly, while African theology has long celebrated Black African belief in God as a creator, the mentalities and relationships among different tribes do not demonstrate this reality. The primacy of ancestry and the attendant value of blood kinship hold sway over the ancient religious inclination toward the recognition of the common human nature. In brief, the previous correlation between the universality of God’s act of creating and giving, with the widespread expression of this reality, is just one example that justifies the existence of two religious traditions in African Religions. Brief and limited as these illustrations may be, they provide the rationale for examining the events that may have led to the truncation of the primordial religious dynamism toward the universal, and the consequent socio-religious momentum toward anthropological and ontological fragmentation in Black cultures. Carrying some moderate historical excursions into African history with the purpose of identifying significant points of departure remain the best option here.
The ancient tradition indicates that Black Africa in general had embarked on contemplating the mystery of God. Historical events must have led to the break up and evolution of numerous cultural units, which later became the foundation for present day tribes. The break may not have eliminated the significant values of the primordial religious meanings. But the experience may as well have established a common paradigm for tribal ancestral religious structures to emerge as important symbols of tradition thus ensuring continuity with the past. That is to say, the need to channel individual and collective religious experiences through an ancestor marks an important point in the development of the African religious tradition. The need to validate the cultural experience of separated groupings provided the occasion for centering every aspect of communal life on the ancestor. Although the need for unity, mediation, and continuity are important aspects of many religious traditions, the role assumed by later ancestors brought about adverse consequences. As group consciousness became more prominent and the good to be safeguarded, the mystery of God as the ultimate point of reference grew more and more distant as the ancestor came to occupy the normative point of reference or the transcendent ground. And we begin to see why an African is likely to be preoccupied with ancestors or materiality rather the mystery of God. From a practical standpoint, these considerations enable us to make sense as to why the biological factor of kinship easily overrides ethical commitment to the universal common good. The supplanting of the transcendent ground by later ancestors also meant the gradual decline of the need to explore new possibilities by rational reflection so as to continually transform the traditions in light of emerging circumstances. Passing on inherited values became normative for the material survival of a tribe. But in the minds of traditionalists,
there remains a conviction that persons are experientially connected to God through the ancestor as the mediator. There is a lot of evidence to corroborate the position taken by this study.

**Migrations of African Tribes within Africa**

Examining the factor of demographic change and the conflict it inspires can be an effective means for identifying the points in time and events such as those that led to the shift in the primordial religious paradigm. Although there is a lot retained in folklore and conveyed by oral history, the absence of literary history in African traditions renders the current project very elusive. But we must keep in mind that difficult does not always mean impossibility. What is provided is an estimation of social life in pre-historic Africa based on the available sources-written, oral, and concrete social structures remnant of traditional tribal nations.

Certain basic religious beliefs, customs and practices plus oral histories on Africa often converge on one fact: life in distant Africa was once a shared experience. The recent histories of major migrations in Africa indicate that the Bantu peoples originated from what is now mostly known as North Africa and moved southwards to the parts occupied by neighboring countries south and north of the Zambezi River. This is also the region that has been of great interest for archeologists. The remains of the oldest human species are reported to have been discovered in the same region. It is amazing, indeed, to recognize the similarities in social perspective between the Bantu people of South Africa, and the Bantu of East and North East Africa. Nonetheless, even if there may have been large social groupings spread over the Continent in primordial Africa, there appears to have been a general close proximity of one family unit to another. As one would expect,
sharing a common world view and societal arrangements would have been the order of the day. The multiplicity of cultural diversity characteristic of pre-colonial and present African societies is more likely than not to have begun with demographic changes. Population increase and the many social conflicts the former triggered are usually cited by historians as one of the primary causes for major migrations. The Luo migrations in East Africa testify to this reality. Those who settled in present day Uganda continue to regard themselves as Luo but with different ethnic identities which distinguishes them to the Luo of Kenya. These include Alur, Acholi and Jopadhola. The search for new habitats for people and domestic animals was an important venture, and an occasion for new social structural setups. Bartheolomew Abanuka draws upon Igbo (Nigeria) oral history where it is believed the latter settled in the present location around 2555 B.C. It is not clear how Abanuka arrives at that date, given the fact that African traditional cultures are not literary cultures. He nonetheless adds an interesting point that the Igbo idea of “chi” and belief in ancestry “would have developed around this time.”\(^\text{231}\) The question is; where did the Igbo come from to settle in their present location?

The phenomenon of social change was not unique to Black Africa. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in his work entitled, \textit{The Future of Man}, gives a compelling explanation of the divergent evolution of human societies over the globe.

\begin{quote}
Prehistory teaches us that in the beginning Man must have lived in small, autonomous groups; after which links were established, first between families, and then between tribes. These associations became more elaborate as time went on. In the phase of the ‘neolithic evolution’ they hardened and became fixed on a territorial basis. For thousands of years, this principle remained essentially unchanged; it was the land, despite social readjustments, which remained the symbol and safeguard of individual liberty in its earlier form.\(^\text{232}\)
\end{quote}
Though the nuances in Teilhard’s explanation might have been based on the evolution of Western societies, the general principle he cites reflects the social historical dynamics in the universal evolution of diverse human societies. The difference between this general picture and the African cultural histories revolves around two factors: the “hardening” of the tribal social structures and the importance of land in the overall need for collective identity. While, for instance, Christianity played a central role in breaking up “hardened” tribal borders and ethnic philosophies in the West, it has not managed to break consanguinity as the primary value and the organizing principle of social philosophy in Africa. This implies that one must first understand what may have happened historically before elaborating on the supreme importance of blood kinship in the hardening of tribal “boundaries” in the theoretical and in the practical sense.

It is credible to argue that in all primitive cultures world-wide, biological family units were the original foundations of social groupings. But in Africa, the need for identity and security seem to have accompanied the general search for peace and habitable environments. These family units were consolidated around the figure of a founding ancestor or family leader. From a realistic and psychological point of view, the precariousness of human life in the primitive eras may well be the reason primitive cultures evolved around individual family units. It was supposedly easier to solicit cooperation and harmony by appealing to blood kinship than any other factor. In Africa, however, the need to preserve and perpetuate family lineage and religious heritages emerged as a big motivating factor. Hence, something distinctive evolved in Black African cultures.
Because of the exclusive emphasis on the family ties, blood kinship persisted and became the universal organizing principles in tribal cultures over the ages. Whether initiated by migrations or conflicts, the break away groups retained the primordial world view, the value of consanguinity and pertinent major structures, customs and practices. New experiences, tribal visions, and perceived “needs” also called for further additions without necessarily eliminating primordial religious belief in God. This is the same reason this study maintains that there exist two strains of tradition and religious inclinations in the diverse cultural religious heritages in Africa. The ancient religious tradition embodies the religious dynamism toward a universal world view, while the more ancestor-based tradition tends toward cultural and religious fragmentation. That these two traditions exist in opposition to one another is a point that ought to be explored more deeply. John Mbiti has made significant advancements in his study on this subject since the first publication of his major work cited in this study. In the introduction to the second expanded edition, Mbiti has broken good ground which he presents in the form of a new quest to understand specific dimensions of the African religious beliefs and practices. His recent views indicate a major shift from an apologetic perspective to a critical view of African Traditional Religions. However, his acknowledgement of the shortcomings of African Religions challenges his previous philosophical assumptions, as well as indicates that he is at the initial point of searching for appropriate answers to his new insights.

John Mbiti has recently come to recognize in African religions an absence of a dynamic religious movement toward the universal as the general orientation of major religious traditions. Mbiti’s account for the inherent limitations in African religious
heritages is still far from satisfactory, because he presents African religions as a unified tradition that has developed uninterruptedly over the centuries. It is little wonder therefore that his analysis of African anthropologies vis-à-vis tribal religion is still idealistic. For example, Mbiti attributes the lack of the universal dynamism to the absence of missionaries for propagating tribal beliefs. This is how Mbiti explains the reason for traditional religions being limited to the respective tribes. It is rather surprising that he does not yet see the technical and religious significance of his own insight that “being born into a tribe is a condition for legitimate participation in the community of that tribe.” Nonetheless, the issues he points out are legitimate and raise further questions against the claims made by Benezet Bujo in Chapter I regarding the soteriological integrity of African religious traditions. Mbiti makes more important observations that redeem certain limitations in his initial assessment of African religions.

In his second edition, he draws a distinction between the formal African religious belief in the after life, and the manner in which the same belief is constituted and practiced. It is here that he makes extremely important summations of his recent reflections. Because of the forceful and prolific nature of this particular insight, it is quoted here in its entirety.

Mbiti admits that African belief in the after life

…does not constitute a hope for a future and better life. To live here and now is the most important concern of African religious activities and beliefs. There is little, if any, concern with the distinctly spiritual welfare of man apart from his physical life. No line is drawn between the spiritual and the physical. Even life in the hereafter is conceived in the materialistic and physical terms. There is neither paradise to be hoped for nor hell to be feared in the hereafter. The soul of man does not long for spiritual redemption or for closer contact with God in the next world.
In a fitting conclusion to his new position, Mbiti further says, ‘[t]his is an important element in traditional religions, and one which can help us to understand the concentration of African religiosity in earthly matters with man at the centre of this religiosity.’\textsuperscript{235} Thus far Mbiti provides us with basic insights into the limitations of tribal religions. All these need further analysis to unveil dimensions that remain hidden from sight. This analysis draws upon two important points from Mbiti, because they are related to the current objective. These are “the concentration of African religiosity in earthly matters,” and “the preoccupation with man at the centre of this religiosity.”\textsuperscript{236} Although Mbiti divides his study quest into these two areas, they are interrelated. The preoccupation with man (the ancestor) almost at the exclusion of transcendent questions is the fundamental cause of African preoccupation with earthly matters. When human beings obscure the basic inclination to the transcendent reality, they seek ultimate in earthly matters.\textsuperscript{237} The absence of hope for paradise and a longing for spiritual redemption, according to this study, results from the interplay between two problems. Having centered religious experience around the ancestors, the very avenue for further reflection and spiritual exploration was systematically “attenuated.” But since only the transcendent ground can offer infinite possibilities for breaking through the material sphere, the preoccupation with ancestry also means that the religious paradigm has to be drawn from the physical aspects of life. Mbiti does not delve deeper into the issues he raises. So the following analyses strive to bring out how the ancestral religious mechanism operates to bring about temporal and human fulfillment with a tribe. This is extremely important for one to understand the nature of the human and cultural crisis unfolding in Africa.
Essentializing of Ancestry and Its Implication for Self-understanding and Existence

The nuclei and extended families are essential to human existence. A natural family circle is where a person learns to relate to self, others and also develops a sense of the higher being. The different hierarchies of authority inherent in the natural family help different members to learn interdependence, as well as how to place oneself in a wider society. At the same time and in the Christian world view, the moral value of consanguineous social structures has to be regulated by other hierarchies of meaning. Most important is the value of a common human nature which steers persons toward unbiased openness to people outside one’s family. A basic common nature is the moral foundation for the universal common good. This has further implications in the Christian view of human existence. That is, a natural family has the moral obligation to widen the circle of relationship and to freely cooperate in building inclusive structures of existence. So while Christianity affirms that transcendent values are inherent in the basic constitution of all humanity, Christian life also demonstrates that a family which closes in upon itself can become impoverished at the many levels of existence. It is with this understanding that the following analyses explore the African problem of making ancestry and biological descent the ontological basis of personal and communal identity. That this ontological posture espouses multiple philosophies of human nature in Africa is still far from understood. This is the reason this study stresses the need to comprehend the reality of the basic structure of African philosophies of a person and of being.
The idea of a “world view” is an encompassing category because it expresses the reality of culture in its totality. To speak, therefore, of a traditional world view in Africa is to allude to a host of elements found in all tribes that cannot be analyzed in the scope of this study. Subsequent sections are, therefore, limited to elements of cultures that can bring out an *inward-looking* dynamic in traditional heritages. These include specific moral perceptions, shared values, the character of ethical commitments and attitudes. All these elements give expression to the total world view and to the general philosophical and moral disposition of tribal cultures. They help us to see how the tribal cultures prepare members to “focus” on the corporate values and goods of their tribes at the exclusion of those outside the group. The role played by cultural factors in “centering” the life of society is well illustrated by Dismas Bonner, O.F.M. He has used the concept of “a ‘focal thing and practice’”\(^{240}\) to illustrate the function of cultural elements in orienting persons in society. The examples he provides are means toward a deeper understanding of the mechanics of collective consciousness and ethnocentric orientation in an African tribe.

According to Bonner, social environments embody factors that often have power to center individual or collectivities around specific objects of value. He observes that “focal things are as diverse as the preoccupation of humanity.”\(^{241}\) He cites TVs, DVDs, computers, etc., as typical examples of things that “coalesce into culture” characteristic of the present times. With the intent to underscore the formative impact of modern technology, Bonner points out a familiar occurrence. “Once several hours on the internet or watching TV become a regular part of life, something else is going to disappear, such as reading, prayer, sharing meals…or the cultivation of personal relationships.”\(^{242}\)
[a] ‘focal thing or practice’ has a commanding presence. It engages one’s body and mind, puts us in relationship to others. Focal things and the engagement they foster have power to center our lives, to arrange other things around this center in an orderly way, because they help us to recognize what is important and what is not.

Following Bonner’s principle of “centering society,” the “focal things and practice” correspond to what this study regards as the “formative mechanics” in African tribal cultures. The ancestor has the purpose of centering a tribal community on the perceived common good, compactly known as a tribal heritage. The dynamics of centering is made possible by the general tribal perceptions, moral values, ethical commitments, social structure and attitudes that a tribe espouses. The centering roles of ancestry intersect at many points thus making it possible to see the interrelationships and functional differences between the tribal world views. At the background of all these lurks the most important question of all: the place of God in relation to the centering role of the ancestors. An enlightened understanding of the cultural crisis therefore consists in recognizing the role played by ancestrology in continually eliciting specific cultural responses or behaviors. In fact, the tenacity of African cultures does not so much consist in the in-built mechanisms which enable traditional heritages to hold out against social change, but in the power of ancestry to center every one on the respective tribal ethos and interests. For instance, in spite of the enormous social changes that have taken place, Black Africa is still more attuned to the tribal moral ideals than the Western social ideals which form the basis of socio-economic, political and educational aspirations.

There are notable observations in African theological thought regarding the preoccupation with ancestors more than with God. Africans recognize the existence of God but also see the need for mediatorial role of the ancestors, so the explanation usually
goes. Rather than get to the crux of this extremely important issue and explore its
teological and moral import, the general tendency is to validate the ancestral religious
paradigm unexamined. This predominant theological trend ignores a crucial issue that
could lead contextual theologies and inculturation toward a fruitful path. In other words,
without knowledge of the centering role played by ancestry, it is not possible to
understand that an ethnocentric social orientation is not simply an option but a part and
parcel of African culture-past and present. Nor can one appreciate the delusional
character of development strategies that seek to realize decisive corporate actions in
African nation-states by simply appealing to political or economic policies. We need to
make recourse to Mbiti’s ideas cited before. That is, “One must be born [into a tribal
community] to participate in the religious system of a tribe other than your own.” Being
born is therefore, a condition for participating in the life of a tribe. One must be deemed
a descendant of a tribal ancestor to become eligible for full (authentic) participation in the
respective community. Some reconstruction is worthwhile because of the elusive nature
of the ideas involved.

The emphasis on natural descent as a condition for legitimate participation in the
life of a tribe is a clear indication of where traditional cultures place the ultimate point of
moral and ethical references. Being born in the line of a tribal ancestor takes primacy
over the transcendent frame of reference that the Christian religion presents, for instance.
We once again see the point at which an ancestor assume normatives status and
ontological functions the Second Vatican Council associated with the meaning of a
person per se and in relation to culture. This trend, according to this study, is indicative
of a definite and constant shifting away from the transcendent horizon as the ultimate and
point of reference to the tribal ethos. We shall now provide some examples of ancestral values common to all tribes to illustrate the previous

**Blood Kinship as a Supreme Moral Value**

All religious traditions have founders and prophets. Their words and actions were often the basis for religious development and ethical practice. This is true for the Judeo-Christian tradition as it is for major religions in the world. However, it is one thing to make prophetic words and actions the basis of future faith and actions. But it is also another thing to take the *finite* and *immutable* principle such as “blood kinship” and make it a permanent and ultimate point of human existence. The last point constitutes a formidable problem in missionary work and social development in Africa. To grasp this is to have understood the underlying mechanics of cultural resistance, alienations among the same Black race, and the multitude of problems they all trigger. An immediate example here is the experience and concept of “being in community.”

In the Vatican II theology the idea of “being in community,” i.e., culture, is derived from an understanding of the person as a whole in relation to God. In African religious traditions “being in community” is an outcome of blood relationships within a tribe which shares a common ancestry. The meaning of a person is filtered through the experiences of blood kinship. The sense of belonging to one’s own is experienced with a certain immediacy compared to the Christian religious moral precepts. Here too Mbiti has made an important observation. Having recognized that African beliefs and practices are not formulated into a systematic set of dogmas which a person is expected to accept, he goes to add a point which can help us to appreciate the current argument. “People simply assimilate whatever religious ideas are held or observed by their families and
communities…the creeds are written in the hearts of the individual, and each one is himself a living creed of his own religion.” 244 Despite, however, the implications this has for ethical morality-given the spiritual and theological substance of African religions pointed out above-Mbiti adds an interesting conclusion. He says, “it is this which makes Africans so religious: religion is their whole system of being.”245 According to this author, one can be religious without being spiritual; one can be spiritual without being virtuous and one can also be virtuous without being holy. In other words, religiosity by itself does not tell us much about the quality of moral life and spirituality as lived by any person: action and attitudes do. Therefore, religiosity, spirituality and morality have to be weighed against the transcendent truths about the human being and the nature of human existence. The following behaviors and attitudes tell a lot about tribal anthropologies and ontologies.

Blood kinship and the sense of loyalty it elicits are the defining factors in the daily social encounters, either within or outside one’s tribe. Also because every aspect of social and religious life is filtered through the same finite value, “blood kinship” is also the fundamental cause for a deep-seated alienation and conflicts among the various ethnic groups that make up the present day African nations. Blood sets the tone for the Black African concept of a person, social relationships, the community, and so forth. It is in recognizing blood kinship as the organizing moral principle of social life that Chapter I steered against a unilateral adoption of ancestry as the universal foundation for contextual theologies and inculturation and inculturation. Citing another related argument made by Benezet Bujo’s can add new dimensions on the current issue.
In his work entitled *The Ethical Dimensions of Community*, for example, Bujo follows his usual assumption that there is a uniform moral principle which can be the foundation of “African morality.” Consistent with his typical line of argument, Bujo commends the traditional stance of unquestionable obedience to the ancestral legacy in his work cited here. He finds in this stance the rationale to argue for the continuation of the ancestral legacies, in principle and in practice. He draws the current line of argument along the African communitarian understanding of a person. This, according to Bujo, is a predominantly African view of a person as opposed to “the concept of the inviolability of the single person” as a Western cultural trait. Bujo’s aim is to show the different concepts and usage of freedom between Africa and the West. He reasons that “[d]ecisions must not be made individually, since the entire family and clan community have their say. This discussion may go to the extent that the single person has ultimately to obey, even if not yet convinced by the argument of the community.” There is some validity in this statement. The nature of obedience does not require that one completely understands a particular decision before such a one can comply. However, insistence on uncompromising obedience such as the one Bujo cites is rooted in the fact of “structured freedom”: a moral stance treated in Chapter IV. We shall allude to the communitarian view of a person with respect to African anthropologies.

Notice that in the African communitarian schema, the theological basis for absolute obedience to the community derives from the importance of a spoken “word.” And Bujo is right in recognizing that because “the Word is so important in the African context,” then it is even more important “for the formation of consciousness.” Let it be clear, however, that the “Word” refers to a specific ancestral legacy. What is right or
wrong about this picture? One ought to draw a line between the actual interpretations of
the formative aspects of the cultural heritages in general, and about which Bujo is
accurate, and the theological and moral implications of specific beliefs and practices in
the daily living of life in modern Africa. First and foremost, if the argument for cultural
diversity as presented in this study is understood, the claims to a uniform concept of
_African ethical morality_ as a model for dialogue become superfluous. Claims of this kind
are based on a flawed concept of a person, community, and culture in African cultural
experiences. The claims neither appeal to cultural diversity, nor do they foster
recognition of blood kinship as the defining factor for social relationships, within and
outside individual cultures. In fact, all claims about African communalism ought to
desist from getting lost in abstract theological technicalities such as the “spoken word.”
But even then, one must go a step further and inquire: _what is the nature of the word on
which the African tribal communitarianism is founded?_ This question is being answered
here by getting down to the internal mechanisms represented by the concrete thought
patterns in the daily execution of moral judgment among African tribes.

Emphatically, the entire African cultural anthropological and ontological outlook
is precisely _ethnocentric_. It is in this context that one can truly understand what Bujo
means by “The Word establishes the foundations of the community and causes it to grow,
because it means life.”^{249} Social relations in a tribe are essentially consanguineous!
Since one has to be born into a tribe to become a legitimate participant, blood kinship is
the most fundamental connecting link in the various clan-communities comprising the
tribe. The “natural” principle of blood kinship has the “religious” function of connecting
the new generations to their ancestors, and by the same virtue establishes legitimate
membership and participation in the tribal community. In the past, as in the present, the principle of blood kinship plays major administration functions. In this particular case, it is in the clan where the religious and the administrative functions of blood kinship are epitomized. The positive values usually associated with Black Africa as a whole are experiences within the tribe in general, and the clan in particular. These include but are not limited to; a deep sense of community, sisterhood and brotherhood, a strong sense of connectedness and responsibility to the extended family, the sanctity of life and of marriage, the love of children and the cherishing of elders, and so forth. The clan system organizes and administers these relationships around the natural principle of blood kinship. Because physical existence and family life are very central in consanguineous social systems, the clan system demarcates the boundaries of sexual morality, and particularly fends off incest and all kinds of immoralities. One cannot marry within one’s clan, because in the clan people are more closely related by ties of blood compared to the tribe as a whole. It is in the clan where social relationships and traditional religious experiences are intensified. There is also an important aspect to this arrangement: the experience and concept of personal and collective identity are further deepened in the clan context. In the past as well as in the present, the need for identity and ethnic purity fosters in-breeding. This practice is responsible for the evolution of distinctive physical features (genetic pool) that Africans often associate with the “gift of God” from the moment that “God created the tribes”! Each tribe therefore holds a belief in the separate origin from others.250

Further more, clans have a great flexibility in interpreting and using the common tribal religious heritages.251 The irony in this consanguineous social philosophical
structure is the deeper it gets, the tighter relationships become and the more alienated one community is from another. For instance, being a legitimate member of a tribe is not a warrant for participating in the religious life of any clan besides one’s own. One has to be born or marry into a clan to become a legitimate participant. Marriage is the means by which relationships are extended to all other clans in the tribe. It is, therefore, in the total context of a clan that *African communalism* can be properly explained. Similarly, the meaning of a person and ethical commitments the former evokes are all inconceivable outside the clan. Having linked intimately the meaning of “society” with the *natural* origin of the group, the meaning of a person took on the “natural” overtones in the tribal social network of meanings. That is to say, the meaning of a person is a by-product of a tribe’s experience of its biological humanity. Hence, to speak of human nature is to speak in terms of genetic heritage or biological qualities manifested in the tribal community.

In spite of all these obvious realities on the African cultural landscapes, African theology generally presumes that every African tribal world view proceeds from a univocal concept of “personhood” and “community. Such a position reflects an error in judgment. This study is in complete agreement with Marcus and colleagues, who admit to multiple views about personhood conditioned by specific cultural experiences. These authors propose that:

> Perhaps the most effective focus for the descriptions that would deal with ways in which cultures most radically differ from one another is the consideration of conceptions of personhood—the ground of human capabilities and actions, ideas about self, and the expression of emotions.²⁵²

This phenomenon is conceivably demonstrable in the African social contexts. Although all cultures are generally concerned about the human being, and seek to highlight his or
her importance and place in the world, African cultures are not founded on clearly
differentiated concepts of a human person and human nature such as that we encounter in
Christian anthropology (or Second Vatican II). Since a biological ancestor is the
founder of a tribe, the meaning of a person is arrived at indirectly, i.e., via the experience
of a tribe or consanguineous community utmost. This is another way of saying that
responses to ethical demands do not necessarily ensue from the questions regarding right
and wrong. That which is right consists in what my tribe and clan deems it to be. Since
the meaning of a person and identity are fundamentally tied to a tribe’s self-
understanding, actions tend to be spontaneous in the sense of doing what is expected of
one. This brief explanation opens a window into the previous arguments regarding the
major shift from the dynamic religious movement to the universal to preoccupation with
finite realities: ancestry and blood kinship.

In conclusion, African traditional anthropologies manifest little evidence of ever
having sought to explain the human person in terms of innate capacities. This possibility
was curtailed at a point when the religious frame of reference shifted from the Absolute to
the human ancestor. This basic stance has not changed. Nonetheless, since virtue was
encouraged and vice condemned, people of traditional African religions are still able to
live “virtuous lives” within the limits of the ancestral traditions. And the great virtues
associated with Black Africa are a result of that virtuous commitment. But on the whole
“to be” or “Being,” in the “African” traditional sense, consists in remaining in unending
relationship with those to whom one is bonded by natural ties of blood. These include
the living and the “living dead.” Against this cultural background, it is not surprising that
persons harbor animosity toward members of other tribes. This is an outward expression
of dehumanized need for self-preservation. Due to the many forms of conflict that preservation engenders in Africa, it is important to treat one of its many tools

**A Stranger: Concept and Function**

One of the enduring characteristics in Black African cultures is the deep psychological need to remain loyal to one’s own tribe. And since relationships are basically consanguineous, loyalty is considered a great virtue and a sign indicating that one is “true” to his or her humanity epitomized in the tribal humanity. Hence, to the extent that each person embodies and reflects the moral and ethical ideals of one’s tribe, such a one is “a person.” Thus far it is clear that personal identity is intimately intertwined with collective identity. And very importantly, because members of other tribes are not eligible participants in the inner life of another tribe, they are *ipso facto* known as “strangers.” Although the latter concept has many nuances and usages among African tribes, it is generally used to demarcate between those who belong with a tribe and those who do not.²⁵⁵ In other words, the perceptions of persons are filtered through the notions of *us* and *them.* Everyone else is a stranger and an intruder. Swailem Sidhom favors this stance while pointing out that “All that goes into making of a man is incorporated in the complex unity of a tribe, outside of which, all others are strangers and inferior if not enemies.”²⁵⁶ A few living examples can illustrate the previous point, as well as add another dimension to the meaning of stranger.

The concept of a “stranger” has different connotations in the African usage compared to that which one encounters in the West. In the West a stranger generally denotes an unfamiliar person, one who is not known in the neighborhood, or even a suspicious looking individual. A stranger in Africa is generally close to the English idea
of a foreigner in the sense of having no valid legal status in society. While all the connotations of a foreigner find expression in the African usage of stranger, the ethical dimension is what makes all the difference. The idea of a “stranger” is one of the most obvious means of determining a particular tribe’s attitude to members of other tribes. Indicating that one is a stranger is another way of saying such a one is not entitled to ethical commitment from another tribe other than one’s own. By implication, an African is always a stranger as long as one moves outside one’s own tribal territories. The irony is that a Black African is one who is always a stranger in his or her own country, given the present national arrangements! The following concrete examples are not exceptions but simply illustrations of the continued usage of stranger.

In Uganda one finds a common usage of Munamawanga among the Baganda, who use the term more covertly. The Buganda being one of the largest and dominant monarchical societies, we can presume the development and use of stranger was a necessary point of political emphasis. The term stranger would have been a political statement in the face of competing monarchical societies in the geographical area now known as Uganda, or the great lakes, and in the East-central region as a whole. The moral and ethical assumptions underlying Buganda’s use of stranger are more or less similar to those found in other parts of Uganda, and Africa in general. The Teso people are more direct in the usage of stranger than the Baganda. Seeped in the general trend of alienation, members of other tribes are directly addressed in terms of emoit or amoit, depending on whether one is a male or a female stranger. But it is the Tutsi people who express the deeper anthropological connotations underlying the traditional use of stranger in Africa. While Umunyamuhanga is the equivalent of munamawanga and emoit or
amoit, the Tutsi takes the meaning to its deepest level. In contrast to the rest of Black Africans who are foreigners, the Tutsi describe themselves as *U’mwana wu’muntu*, which literally means, the son or daughter of “a human being.” By implication others are not equal in comparison; the non-Tutsi is less human, and consequently irrational. On the whole, it is not the ontological basis, “Being,” that precedes and informs the concept of a society as in the case of Catholic social doctrine. The reverse is true for the traditional African experience. For when you put into perspective the basic metaphysical assumption of “Being,” the conclusion must be that the tribal cultural systems are not open social realities basically inclusive. In fact, there is correspondence between “racism” in the West and “tribalism” in Africa. Both cultural stances capitalize on the finite aspects of common origin, *skin* and *blood*, as the basis for understanding the meaning of a person as a totality. But while racism is no longer an official organizing principle for social life, and is officially acknowledged as a serious problem in the West, Black Africa deals with the reality of tribalism by “denying” its existence. As it happens, whatever is denied, not dealt with, takes deeper roots and becomes more difficult to uproot. One of the most explicit ways in which denial is carried out is the invocation of the belief; *blood is heavier than water*. Robert Kaggwa cites his fellow missionary of Africa who rendered this maxim appropriately: [in Africa, blood is heavier than the waters of baptism]. Not even Christianity can make fundamental claims where interests of blood ties are at stake. This self-destructive sense of loyalty surfaces today during the many economic and political crises that plague Africa. In the face of moral conflicts, for instance, the commitment to the common good collapses at the speed of lightening. It is so easy to switch loyalties in favor of promoting tribal interests; after all
what threatens the tribes also threatens one’s identity. The ethical implications and consequences of a consanguineous social philosophy are simply too many and far reaching. A few conclusive statements are made in this regard.

Rather than be concerned about ways of enhancing mutual regard, intellectual and psychological indifference comprise the over all moral disposition in Black African culture. Nicholas Kristof, an American syndicated columnist for the New York Times asks a telling question in his article on the current genocidal activities conducted against the neighboring African peoples by the Sudanese Arabs. “The Arabs want to get rid of anyone with a black skin…We could raise the issue before the United Nations: It is shameful that Africans and Moslem countries don’t offer at least a whisper of protest at the slaughter of fellow Africans and Muslims.” Kristof implicitly points out the Black African indifference toward his or her suffering brothers and sisters in the Sudan. High-level concerns and activities such as those conducted by the African Union ought not to replace explicit moral support for the Black people of Southern Sudan. In today’s world, public protest has become an effective tool against injustice. One does not need money to put up a protest; one needs a coordination of heart and mind. How about the insensitivity of African political leaders? Is it, for instance, accurate to attribute all political and economic problems in Africa to political leaders?

It is true that African politicians ruined the chances for positive change that marked the transition period from colonialism to independence. But, if one also takes an honest journey into the general African cultural psyches, one will not fail to discover that the actions of African political leaders are in conformity with their cultural upbringing. Unschooled in genuine concern about the universal common good beyond the tribe, the
strongest primary sense of political obligation is to the immediate family, and then the tribe becomes second. As for the African masses, governance becomes a political play of deception and military maneuvers. Therefore, based on what has been presented above, there is an intimate connection between tribalism and indifference to one another’s plight, between adherence to the natural principle of blood kinship and endemic corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is not an exaggeration to conclude that one of the outstanding traits of traditional African cultures is the ability to orient entire persons to be concerned with one’s own family and those with whom one is closely linked. As for the rest of humankind little or nothing else matters. Because the tribal mentalities so described have been sustained over a long time, they have formed habits and practices that are almost second nature. It is not surprising to find that practicing Christians also espouse some of the most dehumanizing values from African traditional heritages. It is thus impossible to understand the primary cause and the sheer extent of the contemporary crisis in Africa without getting down to the underlying structures of meaning in the African cultural systems. Emily Grosso recently put forward a forceful argument this author deems a fitting summation of the goal of this chapter. She contends, and rightly so, that the real problem in Africa has less to do with poverty and more with a lack of “priority given to strengthening human relationships, which would be another way of considering wealth and the ‘market’ exchange.”259 This general phenomenon, in essence, amounts to a certain cultural resistance [and] a fundamental contradiction difficult to resolve-in the encounter between Africa and the West in Evangelization…Africa would like to have access to the fruits of technology without the scientific principles that create it, or the philosophy of nature, the human person and his or her activity which are implied in it. ‘Give us your airplanes and keep your gods….260
These are strong assertions whose import may not be immediately obvious unless one is prepared to take a critical view of the structures of meaning that feed the basic philosophical assumptions underlying tribal cultures. Most importantly, Grosso’s indictment supports the call by this study to examine the appropriateness of the ancestral foundations for a local theology and inculturation. One way in which the current chapter seeks to challenge the ancestral theological perspective is to insist on the reality of cultural diversity, which in itself undercuts a uniform interpretation of ancestrology. Also basing ourselves on the preceding analyses, it is accurate to conclude that a flawed concept of culture hinders the possibility of recognizing the ways in which cultural diversity bears on contextual theology and inculturation. Arguments for cultural uniformity in Africa only compound the possibility of arriving at a more effective unified approach to the African reality. Beyond Africa, the factor of cultural diversity is essential to the realization of contemporary Catholic theological and missionary objectives. The persistent failure to account for cultural diversity within emboldens the present difficulty of understanding the essential link between the various local theologies within Catholic theological thought. With this primary in view, the following conclusion fleshes out the character of the human and cultural crisis in Africa.

SECTION V

CONCLUSION: THE ESSENCE OF THE AFRICAN CRISIS

A Closed Cultural Tradition can be Suggestive of a Closed Mind

The idea of a crisis effectively portrays the human and social conditions in present day Africa. In its ordinary dictionary usage, a “crisis” simply means a moment of
“great difficulty or danger when an important decision must be made.” The situation in Africa in general and particular terms indeed suggests a moment of great difficulty calling on the African continent to take a decisive course of action to avert the possibility of greater tragedies. The best of the resources for accomplishing this task lies within the reach of Africa itself. The most basic and urgent is the willingness to examine the traditional heritages in light of the changed human and social circumstances in the present day African nation states. This study is not the first to put forward a suggestion regarding Africa’s need to change unviable traditional mindsets.

In 1990, Aylward Shorter, a missionary who has lived and worked in Africa for a long time, wrote an article entitled: “Obstacles to Liberation in African Religious Traditions.” The observations he makes more or less encapsulate the main arguments presented in this chapter on the role of traditional structures of meaning in shaping collective mindsets. Shorter’s theme was motivated by his view that because African cultural systems are “tradition-directed,” they are “closed … closed to the possibility of innovation, change, and development….” To substantiate his view, Shorter points out evident characteristics of a closed society.

By definition, a closed society is unselfconscious and stranger to rational planning. Of itself, it is incapable of experiencing a change in organization or structure. Criticism is not tolerated and no alternative courses of action can be contemplated. Such a society is ignorant of everything save its own socio-cultural inheritance.

Shorter also explains accurately that, “The identity of each ethnic group is bound up with a local tradition that brings together a land and a people.” He goes on to indicate its implication for social structure and life. “These cultural traditions afford a sense of continuity and impart a well defined social identity, but they also impede socio-cultural
integration on a larger scale. Ethnic rivalry can be inefficient, unproductive, and corrupt.

In reality these characteristics are more or less typical of African nation-state cultures today. Thus seen against this traditional cultural landscape, one is bound to appreciate Shorter’s deduction that “[Unwillingness to change yields irrationality and more].” In sum, Shorter offers important insights into the traditional African philosophical strata. A key idea that best sums up all his points is the subject of rationality—a concept that ranks high in this study as a whole. It is almost impossible to truly appreciate the depth and scope of the contemporary African crisis unless one is prepared to recognize a great measure of irrationality in the traditional African social philosophies. According to this author, the crisis in contemporary Africa is in essence, the crisis of reason. Because Chapter III treats the latter theme in detail, the following outlines simply encapsulates evidence of irrationality on the basis of the discussions in this chapter.

The Absurdity of Blood Kinship as the Organizing Principle of Social Life

The entire human race, according to Genesis, originates from one divine cause. For this same reason all persons are embodied spirits. Unable to completely understand one’s self at any one time, individual persons gradually comes to self-awareness and full realization by interacting well within the world in which one lives. Gaudium et Spes affirms that “believers, no matter what their religion, have always recognized the voice and the revelation of God in the language of creatures.” The human being thus comes to integral maturity by coordinating the innate powers of the body and the spirit. Yet, even though the material and the spiritual dimensions are interdependent, it is the human spirit, as the transcendent ground of human existence which constantly draws persons
toward the infinite measure of fulfillment. Implied in *Gaudium et Spes* is an acknowledgement of the developmental character of self-realization and ultimate fulfillment. As the Second Vatican Council points out, human finitude impacts the coming to full self-realization by sole reliance on innate powers alone. Genuine spiritual and material development requires the recognition of the “transcendent ground” of human being and existence. This means that the flourishing of reason is contingent on the proper functioning of the spiritual dimension. This is necessary because reason is important in facilitating the hierarchical ordering of values in the scheme of existence. The most basic is a person’s relationship to God and to others in society. In most, if not all, African religious traditions recognize the existence of God as indicated before. The problem, however, is the disjunction between this formal recognition and where African Traditional Religions locate the moral frame of reference with respect to questions about existence. A few authors in Africa have acknowledged that, although Africans possess knowledge about God, the latter seems far removed from the real lives of people. In light of the position taken by this study, the aforementioned religious stance abides due to the scrupulous preservation of the ancestral legacies. The following subsections illustrate the moral and ethical implications resulting from the traditional position.

**The Dampening of Spiritual Capacities Generates Intellectual Crisis**

The determination to preserve the ancestral tradition intact also means that an African is one who sees no need to advance the traditional heritages by means of ongoing reflections, re-interpretation of the traditional heritages, and so forth. Instead, an ideal African sees in that heritage the absolute normative path for personal and collective fulfillment through the changes of history. However, there can be no doubt that the
traditional stance undercuts the proper development of the spiritual dimension persons. This is an indispensable dimension in the proper development of the human intellect. The practical consequences of this are the personal and collective intellectual disposition of seeking only to copy or imitate the material life designed by developed countries while holding tenaciously to the paths marked out by the biological ancestors. The worst expression of a dysfunctional intellection is in the resurgence of superstition—a topic deferred to Chapter IV. It suffices to mention that God continually works in human history and is known intimately when persons encounter others meaningfully. These experiences are generally limited, if not obstructed, by filtering reality primarily via the ancestral mode of existence. For example, the reason tribalism and public corruption pervade African society is because of the persistent reluctance to recognize and honor the humanity of the “other.” The maxim of “blood is heavier than water” is a very dehumanizing moral stance. Families, blood kinship, and so on certainly have their indisputable role in the wider scheme of human existence. Without family ties the human society becomes disoriented. But regardless of this, blood relationship cannot be the foundation of culture, because of the moral limitations inherent in the biological factor. Consanguinity is immutable and, as such, cannot be the moral principle for socialization beyond legitimate differences. For example, a family is a sacred space where one belongs only by virtue of natural descent. One cannot make rightful claims on another family without violating certain sacred rights. However, because the human species is communitarian by nature, persons have a moral obligation to form and widen relational boundaries. This obligation also means that belonging to a “wider family community,” is a natural and moral right of all persons. In other words, families exist by natural descent
while a society or community comes into existence by means of deliberate socialization. In the natural family biological nature is at work; in the second reason must hold sway over the instinctive inclination. Since socialization carries an element of freedom, it presupposes the openness of one person to another. Hence, while “community” is an expandable dimension of human existence, genetic heritage is not. But to us Africans, a “family community” and “community per se” are one and the same realities. Therefore, lasting relationships can only be expanded through marriage and reproduction. The impossibility of one ever getting married to everyone else is part of the reason the tribal community in Africa remains essentially closed to outsiders.

**The Common Good and the Crisis of Ethical Life**

Given the basic structures of meaning governing the consanguineous social philosophies, the common good is the good of those with whom one belongs. This is the reason it is extremely difficult for a Black African person to truly appreciate the concept of the “universal common good” of a nation-state. The great irony is that life in modern African nations is based on the Western social system. The meaning of a person and the concept of a universal common good are the two pillars that govern ethical commitment in the Western social philosophical framework. Obviously, the encounter between the African and Western conception of a person and the common good is one that abounds with many conflicts. The conflicts of that encounter feed into African underdevelopment and the ongoing cultural crisis increasingly fanned by the desire by each tribe to gain as much as possible from the central governments. The problem of conflicts based on the tribal interests leads to a brief considerations on the subject of justice. Perhaps nowhere are the contradictions of blood kinship most visible as in the exercise of justice.
The Crisis of Reason in the Exercise of Justice

Different societies have varied experiences and sense of justice. Yet the manner in which a society conceives and administers justice is a necessary condition for social development and for the attainment of political peace. When it comes to Black Africa, policy makers, politicians, educators take the cultural factor for granted. All that is needed is a good education or professional training and a rule of law, so the thinking goes. But considerations as to whether a collective cultural psyche impacts the administration of justice do not immediately arise. As a result, unhealthy competitions stemming from conflicting cultural world views, indifference to those outside of one’s own clan or tribe, and the squandering of public resources rank among the greatest evils in African societies today. It is on account of these primary obstacles that a new course of cultural action ought to be charted and without which African politics and economies will forever remain divisive and fragmented as they are today.

What ought to be taken seriously is the formation of individual and collective human psyches formed by diverse social philosophies as much as it is by personal choices. In the case of Africa where “tradition-directed mindsets” remain at large, individual and collective psyches manifest the following peculiarities in the exercise of justice. Since filial (love) relationship is the driving force of social life, we Black Africans have tended to have overdeveloped affectivity as well as moral insensitivity. That is, we tend to be moved by strong emotions rather than rational judgment even when we encounter persons outside family circles. In other words, in the exercise of justice (moral judgment) we, more often than not, tend to be moved by instincts nurtured by a life of curving in toward one’s own rather than from reason. It is little wonder that we
are very prejudiced toward each other. This is a deep seated problem indicative of serious spiritual malaise. Precisely, the affective domain as developed by African traditions is blind on rational issues, because it relies on instinctive drives. In the face of practical justice, priority is experienced along the natural duty to love and serve one’s own. In the same vein, it is no exaggeration to say overdevelopment of emotions steers toward instinctive responses to reality formed by a long habit of “curving in.” This dominance of the instinctive drive over rationality is not difficult to understand given the instinctive nature of filial love.

Filial love derives from a natural duty to love self and all those connected to one by ties of blood. The natural love for family tends toward emotions or natural instincts more than reason. This is not to say reason or rational judgment is absent in the actual living of family life. Rather, affectivity as the primary impulse in filial love gives the latter a distinctive orientation to justice. For instance, a normal parent does not need to ponder on whether or not his or her child ought to be rescued from a burning house. Justice on the other hand is a moral duty which thrives on the free response from the depth of one’s being. It derives from a sense of the ultimate causes tied in with the natural duty to “love” in the general and universal sense. It is the kind of love that prompts a parent to forget his or her own family, plunge into a burning house to rescue a child of a stranger. True justice instills persons with a sense of sacrifice. Comparatively, because filial love is mostly driven by the natural instincts ordered to natural survival, persons can be paralyzed by the fear of the unknown, while daring only to function within the sphere of what is known—the familiar. This fear extends to all areas of life, never daring to initiate something new unless one is certain about the outcome. In brief,
the key issue here is the existence of a fundamental conflict in Africa between the natural
duty to love one’s own, and the higher calling to justice as a moral duty. The conflict
presents logistical problems in the execution of social justice. An illustration from Bujo’s
Benezet’s views is helpful.

Contrary to Bujo’s fallacious claim that “equality and fraternity should come
naturally to Africans,”\textsuperscript{272} our traditional African societies do not create conditions for
persons to interact justly outside the tribal milieus. Fraternity and equality come
naturally within the clans, and less effectively within the tribe entire; but little or nothing
outside that familial domain. With blood kinship (blood is heavier than water) as the
center of gravity for social life, rationality as the axis of justice is easily sacrificed to the
instinctive drive toward the tribe and family members. Since the material world is
essential for the development of a whole person, there can be no doubt that being
enveloped by such habits affects the orientation and the functions of the intellect. Under
these circumstances, the rational intellect can still function by mastering well “that which
is placed before a person.” But left to oneself, the same person can be incapable of
generating the knowledge one needs to cope with emerging needs. This author is in
agreement with Emily Grosso on the fact that it is not poverty that is a problem in Africa
such that all African states and peoples can do is to imitate developed countries with the
precision of a photo-copier. In addition to the general unwillingness to makes conscious
and responsible changes in the traditional social structures, it is high time to realize that
rational abilities can be weighed down by instinctive responses to moral questions.
Authentic rationality is, more likely than not, to evolve when a person has an opportunity
to be constantly drawn to the higher callings of justice. The instinctively driven person
is, on the other hand, at best in a status quo environment. Such a one has to be moved by emotions of affection before one can commit oneself to another in truth and in justice. But since it is not natural to have spontaneous affection for total strangers, those outside the tribe or family may not be entitled to justice on the immediate or long term basis. Social justice presupposes commitment to “right relationship” with others, which relationship must be rooted in respect for the transcendent dignity of each person. But given the existing cultural scenario, the bottom line has to be that Africa is in a crisis of reason, which manifests itself in the exercise of justice. The attempts to attribute corruption to public leaders only are farfetched and wrong headed. Corruption is ingrained in our tribal world views. By the same virtue, every Black African person can be presumed to be potentially corrupt in matters of social justice until proven other wise. With this summary of the character of the African crisis gives leverage to discussions in Chapter III on the issue of whether or not Africa needs the Judeo-Christian religious dynamism and Western social system.

**Which Way Africa: Cultural Development or Self-Preservation?**

Thierry Verhelst is preeminently eloquent on the general principles presupposed in the relationship between a human being, culture and social development. His argument resonates well with many voices concerning the importance of culture in development. Verhelst states that:

Culture is the springboard to the blossoming development of any community or region. If a group is culturally impoverished, it follows into under-development for want of knowing how to find its bearing, how to select, how to resist and how to draw its indispensable self-esteem from its own identity. If this stage is reached, fatalism and submission, even inertia and anomie lie in wait for it.
According to this study, African traditional cultures and the modern nation-state cultures are becoming more and more impoverished along the terms described by Verhelst. Without a coherent and viable culture, it is impossible to realize and sustain any kind of development, now or in the future. While this seems to be the lot for contemporary Africa; both African and Western social analysts focus on the economic and political realities. There is a general reluctant to incorporate an adequate concept of culture, to say nothing about the general reluctance to critique traditional African cultures. These go on yet the social realities in present day Africa reveal that contemporary Africans are not insulated against the cultural trappings of their immediate environment. Therefore, to get beyond a rather superficial analysis of the African situation, we must work toward the discernment of a fruitful cultural path for Africa. This requires being critical of the ancestor-directed visions of reality, which obviously ignores two important factors that have greatly impacted modern day Africa, namely, Christianity and the Western social heritage. Closely associated with the issue of whether or not Christianity has anything new to offer Africa, African theological thought is prompted by the issue of hegemonic forces to denounce the viability of the “traditional” Western social system in Africa. Along with this is a more theological issue: the place of biblical theology in the fashioning of an African local theology at the service of inculturation. In the estimation of this author, the questions regarding the Western social system and biblical faith in Africa are interrelated. For this same reason they must be treated in unison. This is an extremely important point in the study, because the latter sets a new theological framework in which to address all issues raised from Chapter I up to this point. Chapter III is designed to point to a theological framework in Catholic theological and missionary
thought so that the same issues such as those addressed in this study can be examined from a legitimate theological horizon.

CHAPTER III: CHRISTOLOGICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

SECTION I
DEFINING THE SCOPE OF CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The present section introduces themes and topics relevant to the central theme of this chapter and study as a whole. Having examined the real problem(s) of Africa in the previous Chapter, this chapter reflects on the fundamental principles essential to contextual theological methodology and inculturation. The meaning of Jesus Christ for the church’s mission and theology in Africa is the theological context of the present reflection. So in its substance and main objective, this chapter mainly extends the scope of Christological and anthropological considerations introduced in Chapters I and II, respectively. Reiteratively, the significance of Christology for a contextual Christian theology can neither be established in abstract, nor can inculturation take place without meaningful contextualization. Contextual theological reflection must, first and foremost, be clear with regard to the meaning of Jesus, his person, and mission. Furthermore and indispensable to the stated tasks, theological reflection must present adequate understanding of the traditional African anthropologies. In other words, bringing the meaning of Jesus Christ to bear on the diverse self-understandings in Africa is the key to resolving rampant misunderstandings of the central significance of Christology for contextualization and inculturation. Also closely intertwined with the present Christological and anthropological considerations is the significance of the Western
social system for Africa today. This factor has to be included because the success of a social development that is truly rooted in the Western social tradition also depends on an inclusive concept of a human being beyond the ancestral anthropological horizons. To this general end, this chapter highlights the basic structures by which Catholic theology presents the meaning of a human being without which it would be impossible to appreciate Africa’s urgent need to advance the traditional concepts of what it means to be a person with obligations to build a culture.

The above central objective and themes evolve in this chapter by means of a teleological argument whose purpose is to justify the ultimate significance of Jesus Christ for the church’s mission in Africa. This schematic set up derives from having recognized the two-pronged character of the Christian mission per se. The Christian message of salvation requires dialogue with native cultures. Christian faith also offers conceptual hermeneutic tools by which a native culture can enter into dialogue with other cultures. The Jesus event comprises the primary principle and hermeneutic tool for Christian dialogue with native cultures. With reference to the diverse self-understandings treated in Chapter II, Christology unlike ancestry impels Africa toward a holistic dialogue and philosophical development among its many traditional cultures. Each tribal tradition is enabled enter into dialogue with biblical theology, the Western Christian religious and cultural heritages. This chapter then responds to the above expressed concerns and objectives by drawing upon the Second Vatican Council Christological perspective, especially its specific anthropological perspectives and writings. This Conciliar perspective is concerned with the meaning of Christology and the meaning of a human being in relation to his or her native self-understanding.
anthropological considerations emerge as a necessary response to the fundamental concerns in this study, namely, the constitutive \textit{theological foundations} for contextual theology and inculturation in Africa, and as the means for the effective assimilation of the essential substance of the Western social philosophy. Thus this chapter purposely reaffirms the traditional position in Catholic theological methodology: Christ is the foundation of Christian theology and mission. The intention, however, is not to explore topics and themes that naturally fall under theological foundations. Rather, the primary aim is to allow the meaning of Jesus Christ to emerge and speak to basic needs and concerns in African contextual theology and inculturation. To that end, Christological considerations are discussed in the context of contemporary Catholic theology of mission. Of particular significance is the Second Vatican Council document known as \textit{Gaudium et Spes}. This document spells out the path by which Christian faith encounters diverse cultural self-understandings. The following subtopics specify matters of principle relevant to current pursuit. Special attention is given to the essential link which the Second Vatican Council puts between Jesus Christ and the church’s mission in the world.

\textbf{Christology in the Context of Contemporary Catholic Theology of Mission}

\textit{Gaudium et Spes} particularly focuses on the mission of the Church in the world today. At the center of this mission is Jesus Christ whom the Council delineated as “alpha and Omega” for specific reasons given in paragraph no. 45. “The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as a perfect man he could save all men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history and civilization, the center of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations.” Against these basic Christological affirmations, the Council spelled out the
purpose of the church’s mission. “[T]he Church has one sole purpose—that the kingdom of
God may come and salvation of the human race may be accomplished.” It follows that
the church’s self-understanding as “the universal sacrament of salvation” derives from
Jesus’ person, the universality of his saving character and mission. Hence, internally
linked to Jesus Christ, the church’s mission consists in “manifesting and actualizing the
mystery of God’s love for men” revealed through Jesus of Nazareth.

The internal structural link as outlined above is but a primary step that must
precede and inform the church’s mission in the world. So the Council was also very
realistic in taking into account the complex matrices obtaining from cultural diversity, the
Nuntiandi*, elaborates on this particular reality in the following hermeneutical terms:

[T]his universal church is closely involved in the particular churches which
comprise this or that part of the human race, speaking this or that language. Each
will have its own cultural heritage, its own outlook to the world, its own historical
memories, its own human foundations, and these features will give a certain unity
to each.²⁷⁶

That said; a critical question arises concerning the ways in which diverse cultures are to
recognize Jesus Christ as the foundation, center, and fulfillment of human aspirations in
their cultural diversity. *Gaudium et Spes* treats this central concern under various topics
and themes. First and foremost, the document acknowledges the essential relationship
between a human being and culture. Be it to affirm the necessity of culture for integral
human development, this should not obscure the teleological view of the human being as
the main theme that ties together the various topics and themes in the aforementioned
document. The affirmation of culture also ought to be seen against a critical analysis of
modern (Western) culture and an explicit concern for the meaning of a human being in
general. Thus, *Gaudium et Spes* treats the meaning of a human being from two related horizons: the cultural (philosophical anthropological) and the Christian (theological anthropological) view of a person. This is evident in the emphasis that the growing awareness of the importance of culture is not necessarily helping the human race to recognize and claim the corporeal and spiritual dimensions as its true composite identity. Rather, the meaning of a person is more and more defined within the horizon of cultural experience: a human being as a “cultural being.”277 The unwelcome result of this prevalent view is an ever deepening sense of “cultural autonomy” which hinders “the unification of the world and the duty imposed on humankind to build a better world in truth and justice” (*GS*, no. 55). An instance of a philosophical-theological anomaly is well illustrated in the African encounter with Western culture, a concern expressed in Chapter II.

The view of a human being as a “cultural being” existing within an autonomous self-defining social sphere is the primary hindrance in the African-Western encounter. Both cultures presently project anthropological postures which foster alienation, hostility, and the will to dominate rather than engage in mutual dialogue. For instance, the West has generally maintained a dictatorial posture in its attempt to share its cultural wealth with Africa. The latter on its part responds with an unwavering posture of resistance to meaningful transformation that would allow for valid acculturation to take place. It is due to obstacles such as this that the current chapter explicates the meaning of a human being as a basic hermeneutic principle by which mutual dialogue can emerge between African cultures and Christianity and the West. This chapter draws this basic insight from the Second Vatican Council teaching on what is at the center of the Christian
mission (GS, 45). This concern for Christian-cultural dialogue is framed by the theme of faith and culture, which translates into faith and reason. The following subsection outlines the main substance of faith and culture, and the theological ideas that inform this particular trajectory.

**Faith and Culture: Christian Faith Encountering Cultural Reason**

The theme of faith and culture in *Gaudium et Spes* is tailored to the subject of the theological content from which the contemporary Catholic Church draws its working principles for mission theology (GS, no. 57). In other words, *Faith and culture* comprise a central working and hermeneutic principle in mission theology. This principle can, therefore, be recognized as a philosophical-theological framework by which the Second Vatican Council sought to establish an ontological link between the Christian faith and the diverse cultures. Paragraph no. 58 of the same document describes the stated link in general terms by referring to the “self-revelation of God” to all “peoples” which took place “according to the culture proper to each age.” This mode of self-revelation is denoted by a generic term: philosophical anthropology or human self-explanation. It is in view of the philosophical anthropological significance that the Second Vatican Council acknowledges cultural values, not only as a “heritage of each human culture, but of the human race” as a whole. At the same time, the same paragraph underscores that the general self-revelation of God “[culminated] in the fullness of manifestation (explicit revelation) in his incarnate Son...” This particular mode of God’s self-revelation comprises a body of knowledge known as Christology. And because Jesus Christ reveals the being of the human person, Christology is by the same token theological anthropology. Therefore, discernible in paragraph no. 58 is the intent to draw attention to
the object of God’s self-revelation. Be it the human race in its cultural diversity or Jesus
the Word Incarnate, a human being, including Jesus, is the common denominator and the
primary recipient of God’s self-revelation. Basing ourselves on this particular
anthropological-Christological juxtaposition, we can say that the human being thus
emerges as the basic organizing principle in the Christian faith’s encounter with world
cultures. This is vitally necessary granted the divergent nature of the cultural self-
understandings and the obstacles they pose in the path of intercultural dialogue, a
necessary condition for universal integral human development. Therefore, centering the
Christian mission on the human being offers an appropriate terminology common to both
human cultures and Christian Revelation. This terminology is philosophical
anthropology in the case of cultural self-understanding, and theological anthropology in
the case of the revealed truths about the nature of a human person. Thus very essential to
the revealed truths, the commonality which the Second Vatican Council identifies
between Christianity and culture should not be construed as an equation of faith and
culture. There is a fundamental relation as well as a difference between Christian faith
and culture. In a seeming paradox, anthropology is the meeting point as well as the point
of departure between the Christian view of a person and cultural anthropologies. The next
subsection illustrates this extremely important point in the Conciliar theological schema
for the church’s mission.

Self-understanding in the Framework of Theological Anthropology

While the Second Vatican Council acknowledges that cultural self-explanation is
a valid human experience obtaining from basic human nature, the same Council also
underscores the partial character of culture-based self-understanding. “For man will ever
be anxious to know, if only in a vague way, what is the meaning of life, his activity, and his death” (GS, no. 41). It is, therefore, due to this reality of being basically inclined to know the self and at the same time being unable to attain complete self-knowledge by one’s own effort that this chapter is designed to bring out the significance of the basic human inclination for inculturation or mission theology. However, at this initial point in the chapter, the aforementioned objective is limited to outlining the relationship the Council Fathers set between Christology and anthropology. Precisely, the Conciliar statement that: “believers and unbelievers agree almost unanimously that all things on earth should be ordained to man as their center and summit” (GS, no. 12) requires some clarification (my emphasis). The Council’s emphasis on the centrality of a human being for theology and mission presupposes an ontological view of a human being. This perception is very different from the prevailing view of a person as a “basically cultural being.” The last view implies that human beings are products of cultural creations—in the theological sense of creation. Note that the Council uses the “same” term center in the same paragraph to describe the universality of Jesus’ saving mission and to delineate the importance of a human being in cultural anthropologies. The theological rationale for placing equal accent on the centrality of Jesus Christ, and on a human being in general, can be established from the present and the following sub theme. That is, Christology or theological anthropology is the proper philosophical framework for understanding what Gaudium et Spes means by a person as the “center and summit” and Christ the fullness of what it means to be human being.
A Human Being as *Imago Dei*

The central significance of a human being as far as culture and Christian faith are concerned is presented in this chapter under the theological theme of a “human being as made in the image of God.” This structural set up has a number of functions. First, it heightens the significance of Jesus Christ for the church’s mission and for the human race. Second, the image of God delineates the teleological character of a human being and by so doing draws attention to what is common between all cultural subjects and Jesus Christ. Jesus as man and humankind as impacted by culture both have their origin and end in God. However, because Jesus Christ as God is also the foundation, center, and the fulfillment of human aspirations, the “image of God” comprises the appropriate anthropological context for expressing the centrality of a “human being” and Jesus Christ as the definitive expression of a human being. Therefore, the present structural set up has a basic purpose of drawing attention to the teleological difference between Jesus Christ and the human race. The difference can be determined from the paragraph in *Gaudium et Spes* framed by the theme: “Christ the new man,” whose main idea is captured by the following statement. “It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh [incarnation] that the mystery of man truly becomes clear” (*GS*, no. 22). Hence, against the background of *imago Dei*, the incarnation emerges as an event that expresses the ultimate meaning of humanity’s self-understanding. On this account, the Second Vatican Council declared, “the church is entrusted with the task of opening up to man the mystery of God, who is the last end of man; in doing so it opens up to him the meaning of his own existence, the inner most truth about himself” (*GS*, no. 41). In sum, this is a programmatic missionary statement, which this chapter explores to better bring out the unique character of the
Jesus event for humanity. Seen as a whole, *imago Dei* offers the theological rationale for framing Christological consideration in theological anthropological language.

**Christology as the Essence of Theological Anthropology**

The present sub-theme calls for the understanding of the “link” which the Second Vatican Council presupposes between God’s general self-revelation among cultures and the Jesus event which took place in the Jewish religious setting. That link consists in understanding the essential relationship between philosophy and theology, or anthropology and Christology. That is to say, when the Council speaks about the church’s task being that of “opening up man to the mystery of God,” it means opening cultural anthropology into Christology as indicated in the following citation from Karl Rahner.

As a Catholic Christian and theologian, Rahner formulated theological anthropological statements within the theological tradition behind him. That tradition can be recognized as mostly Thomistic. The Thomistic perspective in Rahner’s thought obtains from a basic concern such as that expressed by the Second Vatican Council: there is a relation between Christian faith and culture. Rahner’s argument counters the traditional and the contemporary theological tendency to confine the meaning of a “person” within the domain of philosophy alone. In this, he follows the Thomistic metaphysical principle known as the “the path of return” whereby “knowing” and “being” are closely related. Ary Roest Crollius, S.J., explains that for Aquinas, “knowing is always a return: …human knowledge means a complete return but essentially in such a way that this coming-to-oneself…is coming from another…, to which mode of being-present-to-oneself the image of return (*reditio*) is most suitable…” Viewed against the background of the Judeo-Christian world view,
Rahner’s argument, cited below is more or less a thesis of his theological anthropology. It is a thesis which allows for the distinctive philosophical and theological patterns of thought to emerge between him and Thomas Aquinas.

A genuine anthropology…must open into Christology….Christology is the end and beginning of anthropology. And this anthropology, when most thoroughly realized in Christology, is eternally theology. It is the theology which God himself has taught, by speaking out his word, as our flesh, into the void of the non-divine and sinful. It is also the theology which we pursue in faith, unless we think we could find God without the man Christ, and so without man at all. 

The above statement emerges as a result of Rahner wrestling with a basic question which the Judaic faith confronted with incomparable success: what is the fundamental relationship among human beings in their historical diversity? The Biblical story of creation emerges as the explicit revelation of a general anthropology, culminating in Christology as the “center and summit” of theological anthropology.

In other words, there is more to a human being than the historically conditioned self-definitions, which are always limited by the very fact of human finitude and sin. Hence, when the Judaic faith proclaims a human being as made in the image of God, it is putting forward a general human ontology by which diverse cultural groupings can recognize their common ontological identity, an identity which surpasses historical self-explanation. Consequently, it follows that an authentic human being is one who defines the self in relation to God, the origin and end of human life. In brief, Judaism transcended biological ancestry as the definitive point of what it means to be a person, and by so doing subordinated the former to the transcendental view of human nature. All people are made in the image of God without exception. Thus the conclusion must be: imago Dei constitutes a general human ontology. It also signifies the structure of existence by
which a human being is ordered to realize his or her transcendent nature. This particular form of self realization is in itself a “return” to God as Aquinas rightly understood. Therefore, since *imago Dei* applies to all human beings without exception, the human being is the foundation of theology and of culture. This is a self-evident argument in the Second Vatican Council theology of mission.

However, simply asserting the centrality of a human being does not necessarily resolve current confusions that have emerged in Catholicism as theologians attempt to contextualize Christian faith. The tendency is to focus on the available “elements of revelation in culture” without an equal attempt to consider that native anthropologies are not identical with theological anthropology, and for the same reason, cannot constitute the foundation of theology. Contextual theologians, nonetheless, put cultural anthropologies in opposition with Christology. When this happens, conflict rather than dialogue emerges as the normative characteristic of the Christian mission. The same conflict is “willingly” extended to the efforts aimed at intercultural dialogue. This factor is reflected in the African theological assessment of Western culture and of its Catholic Christian heritage. It is because of the urgent need to resolve this impasse in the African theological reflection that this chapter appeals to the theological anthropology of John Duns Scotus and Karl Rahner. The Selection of the aforementioned Catholic theologians is deliberate. Although Rahner works within the framework of dogmatic theology propounded by Thomas Aquinas, he critiques the latter for failing to achieve a systematic anthropology of “return” consistent with biblical anthropology. Succinctly, Aquinas emphasized, to a greater extent, the innate human capacity to know the “truths” to the point of undermining the basic human need “to listen to God’s revelation.” In other
words, Aquinas puts a stronger accent on reason than on faith. But for Rahner, faith or listening to God’s revelation is a condition for authentic ultimate human fulfillment.

In an attempt to point out the continuity of Rahner’s theological anthropology with pre-Vatican II anthropological tradition, John Duns Scotus emerges as an important source for grasping Rahner’s argument that historical self-understandings (anthropologies) ought to open to Christology. Both Catholic thinkers provide an extremely important background for a better grasp of the Second Vatican Council anthropological thought in relation to Christology. In sum, this is the background against which this study also re-affirms Christology as the valid foundation for African theology. The Christological-anthropological framework is also the basis for discerning the value of the Western Christian religious and cultural heritages for Africa.

SECTION II

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WESTERN CULTURE FOR CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The Second Vatican Council acknowledged cultural diversity in the world (GS, no. 2). Yet the Council also deliberately situated the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern world in a specific cultural setting: Western culture. This manner of proceeding raises a valid question regarding the “intent and effectiveness” of the Church’s approach to the world in which culture is not uniform. For instance, does the cultural setting of Gaudium et Spes not contradict the expressed Council teaching on the importance of cultural diversity in the same document? This is an important question which the non-Western contextual theologies of inculturation cannot overlook without
eliminating important contemporary realities that bear directly on the Church’s mission. Ignoring such a question can consequently undermine the pastoral effectiveness of the local churches within Catholicism that is greatly impacted by the Western tradition.

In order to underscore the significance of the Western culture for contextual theologies, a passing reference to the idea of the “signs of the time” in *Gaudium et Spes* ought to be made here. *Gaudium et Spes* states, “At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (*GS*, no. 4). It is important that we comprehend what constitutes the “signs of the time” in the Conciliar theological thought. Note that the document dwells at length on the epochal changes in the world, most of which are rooted in the technological advancement originating from the West (no. 3 cf. 5-10). The council enumerates different types of technological advancements. But as important as the material advancements may be for theological reflections, such changes do not constitute the sign the Council has in mind. Technological changes in the world are *signs of the time* insofar as they point to another sign, the human being, who is at once the primary cause and the victim of social changes. Hence, the document presents a human being in light of changes that are of a basic nature. “Swift upheavals…are products of man’s intelligence and creative activity, but they recoil upon him, upon his judgment and desires, both individual and collective, upon his way of thinking and acting in regard to people and things” (*GS*, no. 4). And also conscious that change does not necessarily imply uniformity in mindsets or moral objectivity, it is clear that the Second Vatican Council is particularly concerned about a certain philosophical stance underlying the many changes.

There are…[other people] whose hopes are set on a genuine and total emancipation of mankind through human effort alone and look forward to some
future earthly paradise where all the desires of their heart will be fulfilled. Nor is it unusual to find people who have lost faith in life and extol the kind of foolhardiness which would empty life of all significance in itself and invest it with a meaning of their own devising (GS, no. 10).

The aforementioned stance, as the next section elaborates, has roots in the Enlightenment movement which took place in the West. This philosophical phenomenon greatly impacted the once Christian-based Western anthropological mindset. In addition to affecting the direction of contemporary Western social philosophy in general, the influence of the Enlightenment had a direct impact on the general attitudes toward the meaning of a person in the Western cultural experience. Hence, it is by focusing on the Western cultural heritage and its modern version of self-understanding that the church strived to salvage its own traditional theological heritage, as well as develop new insights by which the existing errors can be corrected.

There is, therefore, a direct link between the Western philosophical tradition and the Second Vatican Council teaching on the meaning of a human being. The Council Fathers understood that today’s world has been greatly and irreversibly impacted by Western cultural development. This impact not only carries the overtones of the Christian world view; through it the West is also steadily shaping the social and the religious dynamics of an emerging global world. This ongoing and yet indiscriminate transmission of social values has the power of molding the personal and the collective self-understanding of the non-Western cultures, for better or for worse. In sum, this particular focus, on the part of the Council, was in no way a neglect of other cultures. Rather, by proceeding as it did, the Second Vatican Council paradoxically showed deep concern for the world cultures (GS, no. 9). The setting of Gaudium et Spes, therefore, ought to be seen as an invitation to the world to understand the enormous influence the West has on
the entire world. In the same vein, the Catholic Church invites the world cultures to enter into positive dialogue with the Western culture and its Christian heritage.

That said, in order to facilitate the aforementioned dialogue, the following historical overview highlights the positive developments in the West as a result of the Greek philosophical culture having opened to the Christian vision of humanity. Contextual theologies have a lot to learn from these experiences and developments. Needless to say, a statement of clarification is necessary at this point. This study as a whole and particularly the following analyses speak in the general terms of the West: a usage that can be illuminating and confusing at the same time. It suffices to mention, in passing, that Greek philosophy is, to a great extent, a cornerstone of Western thinking. This is because the same philosophical influence, like the Christian influence, encompasses Europe, North America, Australia and Canada. It is, therefore, in light of this common experiential background that this paper also speaks in the general terms of “the West”: without excluding legitimate diversities.

**The Christian Influence on the Greek Philosophical Anthropology: An Overview**

Important philosophical anthropological themes relevant to the task of contextualization emerge under the present topic. These include, but not limited to, a concept of human nature and how it affects the concept of a person, social order and relationships, and individual participation in society. These factors are particularly significant in understanding the pre-Christian Greek traditional social strata, in the period of 800-400 B.C. The concept of human nature and of a person, and how these translate into social-political order, is what immediately concerns us. The other factors mentioned only illustrate the main theme of “person and human nature.” David Walsh, a professor of
political science at the Catholic University of America, has written an extremely profound and a multifaceted reflection on the current theme. His work is, in many ways, a valuable source for coming to grips with the significance of Christianity on the development of the essential and enduring elements of the Western cultural anthropological outlook.  

There are other important sources in existence, some of which are mentioned in this dissertation. These sources however contain specific details on the present subject in a way that exceeds the present objective and scope.

When Christianity encountered the Greek intellectual culture, the latter had achieved notable developments in philosophical anthropology. Greek culture had attained significant philosophical differentiations regarding the concept of human nature and of a person. Put succinctly; following the Aristotelian philosophy of human nature, Greek philosophical anthropology closely associated the soul with reason. That association played a central role in the pre-Christian Greek understanding of a person and of human nature. Aristotle posited the soul as the ground of reason, thus pointing to the spiritual domain as the ground of human nature. At this level of comprehension, reason was specifically known as nous, or the capacity for rational reflection and the means by which persons come to authentic self-understanding and ultimate self realization. Reason was, on the same account, a transcendent reality. Aristotle also understood that genuine self-discovery consisted in the discovery of reason; and self-understanding involved the participation of reason in “Being” as the point of “self disclosure.” Therefore, anchored in the spiritual realm, reason was the light that guided the soul toward its ascent to perfection. This philosophical anthropological structure meant that it was reason or nous that defined human nature. In sum, these are very important philosophical
developments which measure up well with the Christian view of human nature and its
teleological end. But as the saying also goes, the devil is always in the details. For despite
the fact that Aristotle “identified the possession of the nous as the defining characteristic
of human nature,”286 “Greek philosophy did not acknowledge the unity of the human
being…The end of Greek philosophy was to deliver the intellect from the fetters of the
flesh.”287 It is, therefore, no surprise that “what bestowed worth and value on human
beings was the intellect.”288 At this point, it is essential to the present pursuit to take the
following considerations into account.

A citizen of the contemporary world societies, which are attuned to the practical
concerns for social participation, is bound to inquire about the ways in which individual
contribution featured in the ancient Greek polis. Such an inquiry stands to reason,
because every anthropological conception has immediate, concrete, and ethical
implications. It is, therefore, very important that we understand the ways in which the
Greek philosophical anthropology translated into a social-political philosophy. Jose
Comblin makes pertinent summary observations on this crucial point.

There was no room in the Greek world for the development of a concept of
the human person. Vis-à-vis the family and state, the individual had no
rights. It was unthinkable that the individual could have more value than
the “people,” the laos, the city state. Not even philosophy offered a route
access to the inalienable value of the individual. The universal and the
universal alone was the object of philosophy, not the individual. [And so]
Greek philosophy understood itself as a movement of a universal
intelligence that was the same in all individuals, a movement acting
through ideas that were independent of individual particularities.…289

Given the great Aristotelian philosophical anthropological achievements indicated in the
previous paragraphs, it is not immediately clear as to why the state of social-political
affairs would emerge as Jose Comblin succinctly describes it. David Walsh points out
some basic social problems resulting from Aristotelian philosophical anthropology. The key issue is the relation between reason, human nature, person, body and their implication for social order.

What Aristotle apprehended as the defining characteristic of human nature-the possession of \textit{nous} remains confined to a small segment of the race. Those who possessed the full actuality of reason were a handful within the population of the polis, and one of the abiding problems of Aristotelian political thought centered on just this contradiction. If the polis existed by nature, why was it in principle incapable of affecting the fulfillment of most of the human beings who composed it?...The universality of the life of reason seemed particularly attenuated.\textsuperscript{290}

Further clarification is in order:

\ldots having compressed the transcendent finality of the person into the self-realizing citizens within time\ldots Aristotle’s human nature is perpetually on the verge of disintegrating into a variety of human natures...Despite his formidable intelligence, he cannot break through the transcendent human nature and, as a consequence, struggles to fit such a conception into boundaries of an intramundane order.\textsuperscript{291}

In brief, Walsh is saying that there was an unwholesome mixture of valid philosophical truths and flawed conceptions of human nature in the Greek philosophical ideals. It is also in the flawed conception of human nature and how this translates into social order that the impact of Christian faith on Greek philosophy is significantly revealed. Thus, a Christian critique of Greek anthropology reveals the following: despite the philosophical discovery of reason and its transcendent quality, the philosophers failed to recognize the authentic universality of reason. The philosopher was the embodiment of the authentic human nature; the rest of the Greek masses were, by implication, a sub-human species. As a result, the common man’s existence and self-realization was dependent on the participation in the rational ideals generated by the philosophers. Put differently, it was
the philosopher who had succeeded in freeing rationality from matter (flesh) where it was
imprisoned.\textsuperscript{292} In brief, Walsh and Comblin are intent on spelling out the absence of a
universal philosophy of human nature in the Greek philosophical anthropology. Walsh
rightly points out that the “plurality of human types empirically present”\textsuperscript{293} reigned
supreme. Because the non-philosophers were inferior to the philosophers in terms of their
‘being,” there was more than one human nature. In short, it is when the basic
metaphysical inclination in the Greek philosophical anthropology is truly understood that
the fact of the Christian influence on the Greek philosophy and culture can also be
appreciated. So given the intrinsic Greek philosophical inclination toward a variety of
human natures, only a transcendental view of human nature could render ontological
equality expressible and human nature cease to be a possession of a few persons. This is
the constitutive fundamental role which Christianity played when it encountered the
Greek philosophical culture. It is, therefore, against the Christian view of human nature
that David Walsh also presents a compelling account of the emergence of political and
social liberty in the West.

Accordingly, the absence of a universal philosophy of human nature in the Greek
philosophical anthropology made it impossible to attain liberty characteristic of the
established Western social ideals.

[I]t would be impossible to sustain the commitment to liberty as an
indispensable principle, nor to acknowledge partnership in the open horizon
of history with all human beings, living and dead. In the absence of the
transcendent, we would forever seek a finite realization within time.\textsuperscript{294}

Walsh goes on to elaborate that:

The moment of breakthrough came with the recognition of the full universality of
human nature, the removal of the burden of the intramundane fulfillment, the
equal distance of all humanity from divine perfection, and the intractable presence
of evil in life derive from the Christian differentiation…The full emergence of reason in this comprehensive sense -the one we recognize as our own- is peculiarly dependent on the epiphany of Christ.295

These and other facts that Walsh point out bolster the basic thrust of his argument that Christianity enlarged Greek rationality by acting as its catalyst. Thus far, David Walsh and Jose Comblin bring us to a high point in the present effort to point out the development of a universal philosophy of human nature in the Western cultural tradition. Christianity is the constitutive moral horizon for the emergence of the transcendent view of human nature and of a human being as the moral basis of liberty and equality in the Western social philosophy. We shall return to the theological view of human nature in the later sections of this chapter.

The present aim of bringing out the limited scope of the Greek philosophical influence on the emergence of Western social philosophy is a needed step in this study. First and foremost, it serves to illustrate, though in a limited way, Karl Rahner’s view that a genuine anthropology must open into Christology. Toward the same end, David Walsh and Jose Comblin demonstrate that the rationale for such a step is at once ontological and experiential. Once Greek Christians recognized the limitations of their own philosophical achievements, they found in Christianity the point for self-transcendence: imago Dei. With the acknowledgment of each person as made in the image of God, the transcendent value of a person and of human nature emerged. In the same vein, the Greek understanding of “being” as a participation in the fullness of “Being” was elevated, thus contributing to the development of the Christian Catholic philosophical tradition. Ultimately, personal fulfillment would no longer consist in the participation of the ideas of a few philosophers. Each person is, henceforth, rightly endowed with the innate
capacity for the ultimate fulfillment. As a result, collective participation in socio-
political life, without discrimination, became a moral obligation for all. And this is
ultimately an obligation presupposing individual responsibility for moral development as
a condition for sustaining socio-political virtues.

In conclusion, the true significance of the Greek influence on the West in
general\textsuperscript{296} stems from Greek philosophical anthropology having “opened” up to the
Christian vision of humanity. In the same vein, a genuine appreciation of the Western
social philosophy and cultural achievements is, therefore, not possible without equally
grasping the pre-Christian limitations in the Greek philosophical culture. Basic to the
stated limitations is the meaning and value of a human being in the Western social
system. According to the authors cited in this paper, the present Western social ideals are
unexplainable without reference to the \textit{imago Dei} anthropology. This Judeo-Christian
ideal is basic to an understanding of the Western culture as a common heritage.\textsuperscript{297} All in
all, it is from understanding the Christian influence on the Western cultural ideals and
self-understanding that we can also grasp the full implication of situating \textit{Gaudium et
Spes} in the Western cultural context. Without the latter cultural setting, the Catholic
Christian heritage would miss something very important. Greek philosophical
anthropological heritage also boosted the understanding of the various aspects of the
Judeo-Christian revelation. And it is precisely for reasons such as these that the next
section presents an overview of the impact of the Enlightenment on the \textit{originating}
Western philosophical anthropology. Because of the enlightenment having reversed the
originating anthropological foundations of the Western social ideals and having borrowed
and assimilated the cultural values of the West, dialogue with Western culture becomes a
very complex matter. This is an important consideration which contextual theologies cannot ignore without defeating the very purpose of inculturation.

The Impact of the Enlightenment on the Western Christian Anthropological Outlook

After Christianity provided a solid foundation to Western culture, there also emerged a philosophical anthropology which could only thrive on the sound intertwining of faith and reason, faith and culture. The meaning of a human being was no longer explainable from a purely rational standpoint as was the case of Greek philosophical anthropology. Moreover, because Christian faith had become an essential feature of the collective and individual self-understanding, there had also emerged a bond between philosophy and Christian theology which gave the West a common world view. This religious-cultural landscape would change with the onset of the Enlightenment, a movement which charted a new course of philosophical anthropology. If Greek Christian philosophers had succeeded in reconciling theology and philosophy, the Enlightenment put them asunder. Recognizing this chasm is essential to the success of contextual theologies, especially with respect to the need to integrate the Western Christian heritages. To better distinguish the true value of the Western social tradition from deviant historical developments requires understanding the impact of the Enlightenment on the Western cultural-religious experience. That said, the historical factors involved in such comprehension are diverse and complex, and therefore exceed the present scope. The following observations simply chart a matter-of-fact course through key events and factors in the effort to bring out the Enlightenment problematic for the Christian mission in general.
Though known as a movement, the Enlightenment generated diverse philosophies with different aims. Regardless of their different agendas and positive contributions to philosophical thought in general, all the Enlightenment-based philosophies have one primary goal: to create a new vision for the world. This goal consists in recognizing the Enlightenment as the ultimate point of reference for social order. Obviously such a basic oriented strategy would naturally require a comprehensive methodology and procedure as the following paragraphs point out. It ought to be remembered that the Enlightenment occurred during the modern era, a period when Christian faith was also being implanted in non-Western cultures. Hence, the drive to create a new vision for the world also meant that the Enlightenment poised itself to supplant Christianity as the emergent moral vision for world order. Because this line of thought is very central to this study’s objective, it is important that one grasps the ways in which the Enlightenment conceived the means for realizing its primary global agenda.

Thomas E. Woods provides a detailed historical analysis of the primary objective and the many factors that shaped the Enlightenment philosophical movement. According to him and evident in modern Western social philosophy, the purpose of the Enlightenment was to wean society from the direct influence of religion.

Beyond [the] Secularization of [Christian] charity and good works, enlightenment opinion sought more generally to evacuate religion of the external ritual and superstition that…not only served no positive good but also created dissention among men and nations…the philosopher alone, setting forth universal principles, could mend what theology and superstition had torn asunder.298

In brief, the movement consisted of philosophies, which purported to be enlightened and free. These people identified Christian practices and beliefs with superstition.
Convinced religion robs people of the very foundations for human existence, freedom, and rationality, the Enlightenment protagonists sought to regain what was “lost.” The philosophers took two steps toward this goal. First, they substituted religion with philosophy as the ultimate epistemological and moral horizon. Second, the philosophers posited the *absolute* value of a human being. The following statement by Immanuel Kant represents this new-fangled anthropological outlook. “Everything over and above a good life which a man thinks he can do, in order to please God, is mere superstition and idolatry.” Implicit in this statement is the loss of faith in the validity of Christian religious knowledge. Only reason, and reason alone, would provide the moral compass for society. Thomas Woods offers further insight into an important event leading to the ongoing hegemony of philosophy. “Bolstered by Isaac Newton’s discovery of the essential order of the universe and the predictability of its operations, the philosophers exalted the role of man in the universe.” The human capacity for rational understanding of the laws of nature meant that human beings could now attain mastery over nature, and by so doing, steer world history in accordance with empirical truths. Woods’ analysis makes it possible to understand the intellectual mechanics leading to the current preference for empirical truths over and above religious truths. Whatever is unverifiable is henceforth considered irrational. It does not need too much analysis to see that this kind of epistemological outlook disqualifies faith as a legitimate path to certain truths not immediately accessible to instrumental reason. The overall impact, also well noted by Thomas Woods, is the “[putting] to an end once for all any search for the *essence* of things and for an ultimate truth that explained and undergirded the phenomena of the physical world.” Put differently, the
Enlightenment created a vacuum of the essential meaning. This vacuum became the actual context in which the Enlightenment philosophers propounded the new meaning of a human being. Not only was the concept of a “person” removed from the sacred sphere in which Christendom had previously explained it, it was situated in a purely secular philosophical horizon foreign even to Greek philosophical anthropology. Stripped of the transcendent horizon, a person became a self-realizing entity.

Everything else is but a means for immediate personal goal and satisfaction. Although the Enlightenment philosophers accentuated the values of liberty and rationality, they evidently propounded an opposing philosophy of human nature irreconcilable with authentic liberty and rationality. Although the accent was put on a “person” as a rational and free being, by unequivocally assigning a central place to instrumental reason, the Enlightenment blurred an important point for self-transcendence. For present purposes, we shall simply take note of the theological implications of this basic idea for contextual theologies.

Either by coincidence or keen insight, the philosophical revolution is built on the same principle as Christianity. Precisely, the philosophers did not simply place the human being at the center of their moral vision; they turned that human being into the absolute point of moral reference thus reinterpreting what it means to be a person. No longer is a human being to be viewed as *imago Dei*. He or she exists as a self-created and therefore a self-defining being. For this fundamental reason, a secular philosophy *per se* would not be such a formidable force for the Christian mission, were it comprised of mere ideas. The abiding strength of the Enlightenment consists in
having furnished society with a *new philosophical anthropology* as the foundation of a
new cultural world view.

The Second Vatican Council evidently understood the depth of this impact on
Western culture and its multifaceted implication for the rest of the world. In terms of
the church’s mission, the stated impact is enormous. It is not, therefore, surprising that
the same Council proceeded by an anthropological approach to theology and mission.
By asserting the meaning and value of the human being, the church rightly sought to
reverse the multifaceted spirals of alienation generated by the Enlightenment (*GS*,
nos.12, 20-22). The Council went further to show that the impact of the Enlightenment
is not confined to the West. Chapter II made reference to the effects of the
Enlightenment on contemporary views of culture vis-à-vis social development in
general. All this is unfolding because the West still maintains a strong influence on the
rest of the world. That influence acts as a conduit through which the pro-Enlightenment
philosophical culture continues to spread, for better or for worse. It is also against this
general background that contextual theologies ought not to overlook the importance of
the West for theological reflection and social development. Africa cannot, for
instance, make the most of the Western social tradition unless it knows how to sort out
the good from the bad: to distinguish the authentic Western social philosophy from the
erroneous ones. Thus, it is no small argument that African contextual theologies need
to take Western influence on the world very seriously, both in its positive and negative
influences. But in doing so that theology ought to make an accurate reading of the
Vatican Council II theology of the church’s mission and discern in it the organizing
principles involved. We have already indicated the human being as the foundation of
Christian theology and mission. Essential to this foundational principle is the anthropological and theological value of faith and reason. Faith and reason, from the theological anthropological standpoint are necessary for exploring cultural anthropologies. To that end, the following sections spell out major anthropological assumptions rooted in the Enlightenment and significant contemporary responses to the same. The expressed concern is not only very important in illustrating the need for critical thought in reading contemporary Western anthropological assumptions, it also sheds light on the lot of issues often taken for granted in theological methodology, especially the relationship between Christology and cultural anthropologies.

Key Christian Concerns about Contemporary Western Philosophical Anthropology

A remarkable element in Second Vatican Council thought is the central significance of a human being for philosophy, theology, and for the church’s mission. Even though the same focus reflects advancement in Catholic theology, there are clear indications that the Council has in mind the pro-Enlightenment view of a person and its implications for theology, global societies and the church’s mission. According to the Council, an increased awareness of the value of a human being today is not necessarily matched with appropriate self-understanding. And so, the Council calls for a deeper reflection on this subject. “But what is man? He has put forward, and continues to put forward, many views about himself, views that are divergent and even contradictory. Often he sets himself as the absolute measure of all things, or debases himself to the point of despair” (GS, no. 12). David Walsh sheds great light on the current subject. He grounds his critique of contemporary anthropological assumptions in Western philosophy in the basic understanding of a human being vis-à-vis God. For Walsh, there are basic
structures of meaning that come into conflict when empirical methods gain an upper hand in the epistemological sphere. For David there is a “contrast between Medieval and Renaissance science.” Walsh points out that distinctive quality.

Nature was a discrete realm, open to empirical investigation, but in no sense an avenue into the inner working of the divine. God ruled the universe through his will, which remained inaccessible to rational speculation. Only through his self-revelation in scripture was access provided into the divinely willed order of things. Nature by itself could not disclose its ultimate structure. Ultimately, whatever rational order is to be discovered empirically falls under the shadow of the impenetrable divine will.

The Post Enlightenment thinkers may not necessarily agree. For instance, Richard Dawkins, “an Oxford University Zoologist and best selling author on evolution and its social implication had this to say in his work entitled, The Selfish Gen.” Convinced that religion is a “virus of the mind,” Dawkins, according to Pamela R. Winnick, “argues that human beings and animals are mere ‘machines,’ repositories for selfish genes whose sole goal is self-replication. It may sometimes appear that we are acting charitably when all we’re doing is protecting our genes.” But it is Francis Crick, “the great scientist who discovered the Double helix nature of DNA”, who epitomizes the temptation by instrumental reason to exceed its epistemological boundaries and define reality in ultimate terms. In his work entitled, The Scientific Search for the Soul, Crick advances even a more debased view of a human being and personality. “Your joys, your memories and ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells.” Clearly, all there is about a person correlates with his or her body mass. It is precisely due to this kind of anthropological
outlook that Pope Paul VI directs his critique of contemporary philosophy, informed and
directed by a scientific reason.

This scientific reduction betrays a dangerous presumption. To give a
privileged position in this way to such an aspect of analysis is to mutilate
man and, under the pretext of scientific procedure, to make it impossible
to understand man in his totality. One must be no less attentive to the
action which human science can instigate; giving rise to the elaboration of
models in society to be subsequently imposed on men as scientifically
tested types of behavior. Man can then become the object of manipulation
directing his desires and needs and modifying his behavior and even his
systems of values. There is no doubt that there exists here a grave danger
for the societies of tomorrow and for man himself. For even if all agree to
build a new society at the service of man, it is still essential to know what
sort of man is in question.309

Dawkins and Crick represent a tip of an iceberg in the growing anthropological
assumptions that mar the essential relation of faith to reason. Against this tide, Vatican
Council II placed emphasis on faith and reason as ontological realities that must precede
and inform the human search for self-understanding. For, if the biological constitution is
all there is about a person, then human beings are amoral animals genetically
programmed to promote the survival of their own genes and, therefore, they assist others
only insofar as this is likely to serve the genetic objective of survival. With no higher end
beyond bodily experiences, persons can only exist by complying with the dictates of
instinctive drives. In sum, Dawkins and Crick exemplify an epistemology that sets a
dichotomy between the spiritual and the concrete dimensions of a person. It subsumes the
notion of ‘truth” under empirical truths, a critique well made by Pope Paul VI.

Methodological necessity and ideological presuppositions too often
lead the human sciences to isolate, in various situations, certain aspects
of man, and yet to give these an explanation which claims to be
complete or at least an interpretation which seems to be all embracing
from a purely quantitative or phenomenological point of view.310
In the same line of thought, the Council Fathers made it clear that the legitimate autonomy of science does not mean absolute separation from theology. Instrumental reason is not the whole of human reason. The task for the Council Fathers, then, was to conceive a method that can speak comprehensively and concretely about a human being. By dismissing the value of religious truths, the pro-Enlightenment movement did away with the transcendent as a major pole in philosophy. The subsequent analyses illustrate the ways in which the Second Vatican Council and Catholic theologians continue to strive to resolve the anthropological and the missionary impasses generated by the pro-Enlightenment philosophers.

**Bridging the Historical and the Transcendent Poles in the Order of Human Existence**

The Enlightenment propounded a fragmenting and self-alienating anthropology. By positing a human being as the beginning and end, and by relegating the sources of knowledge to reason alone, faith becomes irrelevant in the broader scheme of attaining comprehensive knowledge. It is for this basic reason that David Walsh argues rightly that the Enlightenment philosophy was, in essence, the instrumentalization of reason. In the place of a person as “a being” who can commune with a higher being, there emerged a self-contained, self-seeking, and self-realizing person. Walsh goes further to posit that instrumentalized reason is essentially a “truncated rationality.” This is a reason that is basically cut from (God) the transcendent as its true source and end. And it is for this same fundamental reason that the Second Vatican Council realized that the Enlightenment impact on the Western philosophical tradition calls for a major shift in the theological and missionary methodology to facilitate fidelity to the Gospel in the ever-changing cultural situations. After all, much of the Christian traditional heritage is
embodied and transmitted through the medium of Western Christian tradition. The contemporary Catholic theologians cited in these pages think along Conciliar lines and, as they do so, lend great insights to the general objectives of this study as a whole.

In the pre-Enlightenment West, faith and reason were well aligned. The stated alignment corresponds to the bond between theology and philosophy. Hence, as long as an ontological link between faith and reason remained intact in Christendom, theology and philosophy spoke effectively to the concrete and the transcendent dimensions of the human reality. But once the intellectual turn began to advance an epistemology that could no longer provide the medium for the church’s mission, a basic revision in the missionary method became imperative (GS, no. 4-7 & 15). A shift in theological methodology during the Second Vatican Council was also, in essence, an affirmation of the normative value of faith and reason for philosophy, theology, and mission. The above shift is characterized by a specific focus on the ontological relation of Christian faith to culture. Once the link was established, the importance of faith and reason in theological methodology was no longer treated in the purely abstract Thomistic methodology. Since our immediate concern is mission theology, an explanation of how faith and reason feature in the making of specific mission theologies is important at this stage. To that end, the Second Vatican Council specifically linked “faith and culture” as the normative principle in the church’s missionary approach to diverse cultures (GS, nos. 57-59). There are two sides to this basic shift in missiology. First, the Council affirmed the traditional method in theology in these terms:

This sacred Synod, therefore, recalling the teaching of the First Vatican Council, declares that there are ‘two orders of knowledge’ which are distinct, namely faith and reason. It declared that the Church does not indeed forbid that when the human arts and sciences are practiced they use
their own principles and their proper method, each in its own domain. Hence, ‘acknowledging this just liberty,’ this sacred Synod affirms the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially the sciences (GS, no. 59).

It ought to be noted carefully that “legitimate autonomy” mentioned by the Second Council is not the same as absolute autonomy advanced by the Enlightenment philosophers. We have already seen that a human being constitutes the primary principle for theology and mission. But since human beings also define themselves historically, the church has to approach culture by paying attention to the existing self-understandings, and how indigenous philosophies structure rationality. Specific to this task is, therefore, the ways in which cultures structure rationality. As indicated in Chapter IV, structured or indigenous rationality has a great potential to reinforce or impair the transcendent dimension of reason per se. One basic way in which such a transformation occurs is by persons making their respective cultures the ultimate point of self-understanding or identity. Thus, it is not surprising for the Council Fathers to have understood that the prevailing tendency to view a person as “cultural being” applies to all societies without exception. The following critique by Walsh facilitates an understanding of the problematic of a culture-based self-understanding. The substance of his critique in reality is not exceptional to pro-Enlightenment Western self-understanding; it applies to all cultural situations world-wide.

The inability to articulate the sources of the modern self leads to a deeper confusion. Absent a transcendent frame of reference, we are not simply without a ‘sacred canopy’; we become incapable of distinguishing between the immanent and transcendent dimensions of what we do. The differentiation collapses, and mundane reality is made to bear the mystery of all.315

In terms of the traditional Catholic methodology, Walsh’s observations reinforce the Second Vatican Council’s intent to reconcile faith and reason. And also because faith and
reason are definable within the wider framework of theological anthropology, their essential bond demands a clear grasp of the ontological structure of human being and existence. This is an extremely important step which draws attention to the essential meaning of reason beyond the limits of diverse cultural or philosophical experiences. This particular concern is treated in the major section which treats Karl Rahner and John Duns Scotus’ anthropology. In the mean time, David Hollenbach expresses the Second Vatican Council teaching in this particular regard. He says: “Historical existence demands the presence of two poles…: the pole of involvement in the limited conditions on the one hand, and the pole of transcendence into the new and unlimited absolute other.”³¹⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* no. 59 provides a clue to the relation of the historical and the transcendent poles and its importance for the mergence of self-understanding. “There are many links between the message of salvation and culture,” the document states. The entire paragraph goes on to illustrate the fact that the Jesus event and the church’s mission, like philosophical anthropologies, unfold in the context of culture. Seen against the entire schema in the same document, the previous statement simply means that human salvation unfolds by means of Jesus encountering culturally defined (i.e., self-defined) persons.³¹⁷ There is, therefore, no way contextual theologies could realize the primary objective of (inculturation) mission without paying attention to native philosophical anthropologies. This is, in sum, the rationale for positing faith and reason as two major poles in theological and missionary methodology.

There is at once an historical and an evangelical rationale to this major shift in mission methodology. Situating the traditional methodological principle of *faith and reason* in the context of culture meant that Western culture also became the object of
Christian evangelization. In this way the above shift enables theologians to be sensitized to the ways in which diverse cultures exercise rationality and how this corresponds to the Christian reason. On the evangelical level, the church is enabled to challenge humanity and all its cultural projects and in the process discover the deeper dimensions of particular cultural experiences. This also means that the primacy once given to the Western Christian experience and cultures vis-à-vis the young churches and their indigenous cultural philosophies are relativized without dismissing valid elements in the Western heritages, religious and cultural. In the light of this important point, it ought to be clear that even though the problem of “faith and reason” in Conciliar thought is discussed with reference to Western culture, it applies equally to all cultures. To think otherwise is tantamount to a belief that evangelization can truly take place independently of adequate knowledge about native systems of thought and how these directly impact the salvation of the persons involved. Is this not the very reason that pre-Vatican II methodological assumptions are presently failing to touch the cultural consciousness of Western and non-Western cultures alike? The next major section strives to bring out the relation between philosophy and theology or anthropology and Christology. A deeper meaning of the bond between faith and reason (culture) also emerges in the wider context of philosophy and theology. A key topic features prominently in the aforementioned theme; i.e., the nature and function of philosophical knowledge in the wider scheme of attaining ultimate self-realization. A number of theological ideas emerge under the following schema and help to cast more light on the topics covered from Chapter I. Most importantly and essential to this study’s objective is the fundamental limitation of the
ancestor-based philosophical anthropologies. In the place of ancestors and particular cultures, there emerges a human being who is capable of self-transcendence.

SECTION III
THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AS A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PRIMORDIAL SELF-UNDERSTANDING

This is a major section exploring anthropology in relation to Christology as developed by Karl Rahner, John Duns Scotus and others. These sources help us to get to the depth and scope of contemporary Catholic theology of mission. Theological anthropology elaborates on the relationship that contemporary Catholic missiology puts between Christian faith and culture. This relationship translates into the broader theme of the relationship of the human race to Jesus of Nazareth. This last statement comprises the main objective of the present major section. The present objective also embodies two trajectories. The first and basic idea is that theological anthropology (i.e., Christology) is the full expression of cultural anthropological strivings. The first trajectory leads to the second. Theological anthropology is the means by which an ontological link can be established between the historically constituted diverse self-understandings and theological anthropology which culminates in Jesus Christ. These two trajectories provide the philosophical-theological basis for appreciating the universal significance of Jesus Christ for contextual theologies and inculturation. It is in this particular respect where Karl Rahner’s anthropology converges insightfully with that of John Duns Scotus. The following paragraphs introduce the main substance of Karl Rahner’s argument and other Catholic theologians whose anthropological thought rhyme with his.320
Rahner premised his anthropology on the basic theological assumption that cultural anthropologies and Christian theology are concerned about the same object: the human being. But in order that this basic understanding or principle is not blurred in the myriad matrices of diverse and often conflicting anthropologies, Rahner specifies a working framework. He broadens the question regarding what it means to be a person by situating it in a general ontology as the starting point and working framework. For Rahner, then, a meaningful search for a valid concept of a person must take into account the general but basic human quest for self-knowledge and ultimate realization. The acceptance or rejection of God takes place in the experience of self-explanation and the quest for ultimate fulfillment. It is, therefore, in the experience of these basic human needs that we can recognize a basic relationship between cultural anthropologies (philosophy) and Christian anthropology. At the same time, theological anthropology which Rahner propounds turns into a critique of traditional dogmatic theology. For example, Karl Rahner and David Walsh recognize a basic flaw in Catholic dogmatic theology. A succinct statement on the Thomistic anthropology, the focus of Karl Rahner and the context of Duns Scotus, is essential to the current theme. That is, the preeminence which contemporary philosophers give to empirical reason, to a certain degree, originates from a basic loophole in the Thomistic theology of grace, says Walsh. St. Thomas Aquinas somewhat paved the way for the estrangement of reason from faith. In explicating the classical theology of grace, Aquinas worked within the parameters set by dogmatic theology of the time. To illuminate a conceptual distinction between nature and grace, Aquinas assigned “relative independence” to human reason. Walsh is not suggesting that Aquinas had a conscious intention of denying the integral character of
the human intellect. Aquinas sought to establish a conceptual distinction between the human and the divine natures, especially with the purpose of heightening what is humanly possible. Thus, Aquinas put a strong accent on the fact that a human being can arrive at valid truths through the innate functions of reason. Such a synthesis led him to assert that grace builds on nature. The fundamental flaw in this, according to Walsh, “was the failure to ground this in the overall understanding that “nature only flourishes by means of grace and not by its own innate capacities.” In a nutshell, although the Thomistic conceptualizations allowed for a deep understanding and appreciation of the value of reason in philosophy and theology in Christendom, David Walsh maintains that Thomas’ anthropology contains the seminal distancing of reason from faith. The vigorous Protestant contributions to the same phenomenon are also discussed at length by Walsh. Even so, the previous section has already pointed out, albeit briefly, the basic reason the church could no longer rely solely on the scholastic method without fostering the current separation of reason from faith. For, if reason, and reason alone, can define what it means “to be,” then the quest for comprehensive knowledge would be emptied of its primordial meaning. The Second Vatican Council, by its emphasis on faith and reason, says the same thing. The same idea constitutes a central argument in Rahner’s anthropology, of which only certain aspects pertinent to this study are discussed below. The previous summary does not, of course, do justice to Walsh’s eloquent critique of Aquinas’ theology of grace. It, nonetheless, does point out the existence of a loophole in matters of basic theological principles. Rahner’s particular focus brings out the philosophical and theological substance of the stated principle. As a corrective, Rahner maintains that contemporary Christian theology can no longer thrive on the previous
methodological model, because it does not pay attention to the internal structural
(ontological) bond between philosophy and theology. Yet, this is necessary in order to
recognize that philosophy and theology are both concerned about the same subject: the
human being’s existence and ultimate end. As such; philosophy and theology comprise
two sides of the same subject matter: the relationship of a human being to God. This is
the same as the relation of a “being” to the “being of beings.” Structurally, philosophy
and theology share internal metaphysical unity.326 Seen this way, it is understandable,
from Rahner’s point of view, that the recognition of the universal value of the Judeo-
Christian revelation depends on the explicit account of the ontological bond between
philosophy per se and theology. Only then can Christianity sustain its evangelical claim
of embodying a total vision of humanity and its abiding historical relevance.

Hence for Rahner, Thomas Aquinas did not provide an “analysis of the human
person as a being who can listen to a revelation of God…”327 Without this possibility,
there is no way of knowing how and why Jesus Christ is the epitome of the human
journey which includes cultural projects. The same possibility holds true in any attempt
to perceive a basic relationship between cultural anthropologies and Christian
anthropology. Hence for purposes specific to this paper, the reality of a person as “a
being who can listen to the revelation of God” is crucial in coming to grips with the
fundamental relationship between faith and reason and its importance for theology. It is
with the primary objective of clarifying this important idea that Rahner integrates his
anthropology with the Thomistic metaphysics. He makes explicit the point at which
philosophical anthropology opens into theology. The subsequent sections strives to
assemble important dimensions of Rahner’s argument, namely, that human beings
regardless of whether or not they are Christians have a natural inclination to listen to God’s revelation.  

The same Rahnerian structure of analysis also clarifies the ontological necessity for self-transcendence and Christology as the basic springboard for ultimate transcendence. He relies here on specific concepts in philosophical anthropology some of which were developed in the Catholic tradition before him. He presents them from a theological anthropological standpoint peculiar to him.

**The Substance of Karl Rahner’s Anthropology in a Nutshell**

Rahner explicates Christology as the essence of theological anthropology and the fulfillment of the primordial quest for a complete self-understanding. This is to say, Christology is the basis and condition for the ultimate realization of what it means to be a person. The first half of the following section discusses how Karl Rahner explains this important point and its importance for theological methodology. First and foremost, he points out a legitimate “distance” between concrete self-understanding (accidental self-hood), and the meaning of a human being per se (ultimate self-hood). He devotes a lot of space to the *nature of human knowledge* as the basis for understanding the accidental self-hood, the constitutive substantial content for explaining the ultimate self-hoods, and the legitimate distance between what is actually known and objective knowledge. In sum, there is a difference between objective knowledge concerning what it means to be a person *per se* and knowledge as possessed by the subject. In light of this chapter’s objective, this last point is critical for coming to a deeper understanding of the problematic of a general human tendency toward absolute and definitive self-explanation. Against this background, it becomes possible to perceive how the aforementioned tendency hampers the development of true personhood and the realization of the
missionary objective of the Christian faith. In line with the current perspective, Rahner does not stop merely at clarifying the legitimate distance between “actual” and ultimate self-understanding. He also makes it clear that the natural quest for knowledge and self-explanation constitutes a principle by which we can meaningfully relate diverse historical self-explanations to Christology. But this is only realized after we have understood that Christology is the essence of theological anthropology. So to enable us to achieve this goal, Rahner must deal with what he perceives as loopholes in dogmatic theology, particularly the relationship between philosophy and theology. Suffice it to say, most of the issues that Rahner treats exceed the present scope. Nonetheless, he makes medieval thought the context of his analysis. He takes what is positive and enduring in Thomistic anthropology and theology of grace, as well as the medieval formal structure of theologizing.

A line from Stephen J. Duffy on the related subject captures the stated dimension of the medieval form of theologizing. Duffy says, “[T]he medievals concerned themselves with finding a theoretic that could deal with all questions systematically.” And one of the major questions that concerned Aquinas is the “medieval distinction between the natural and the supernatural.” This task required that theologians be clear about a methodology that would distinguish between “the horizon of a naturally known philosophy and that of a supernaturally known theology.” Rahner more or less follows the same procedure to establish the quest for self-understanding as the formal content of philosophy and theology. In an interesting and insightful turn, Rahner shows that the very quest for self-knowledge holds the key for understanding the essential relationship between the “natural” and the “supernatural” spheres of existence; between philosophical
anthropology and Christology. We shall outline briefly the substantial content of Rahner’s second line of thought before highlighting relevant aspects of his work on the relation of philosophy to theology.

Catholic dogmatic theology had on the whole explicated the meaning of the human being in light of the fundamental significance of the Jesus event. Yet according to Karl Rahner, theology tended to create an unnecessary disunity in its accounts of the human being and the meaning of the Christ. Such a state of affairs, according to Rahner, is a result of the theocentric approach with which dogmatic theology has continued to pursue the subject of revelation in the past. A human being seems to be just one among many other subjects that concern theology. This is not so for Karl Rahner. Although, “God is...the formal object of revelation theology,” the latter is equally about the human being. “As soon as Man is understood as the being that is absolutely in respect to God, ‘anthropocentricity’ and ‘theocentricity’ in theology are not opposites, but strictly one and the same thing, seen from two sides.” He goes on to argue that, “The question of man and its answering may not be regarded...as an area of study separate from other theological areas as to its scope and subject matter, but as the whole of dogmatic theology itself.” In succinct terms, Rahner is saying that Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity comes as a real human being who exists in dialogue with human beings in their historical diversity. Christ comes to bring something new; a newness that not only has to be recognized on the basis of historical experience, but also as a newness that has to be claimed and incorporated into the existing self-understandings, because Jesus points beyond accidental self-hoods toward the fullness of self-knowledge in the eschatological future. Important then for Rahner is that the incarnation, a central and dynamic reality at
the heart of Christian faith, constitutes the most important organizing principle. Because Rahner also understands its philosophical implications, he is able to integrate ideas basic to philosophical anthropology as seen in this statement:

…Anthropological focus in theology is not opposed to or in competition with a Christological focus…anthropology and Christology mutually determine each other within Christian dogmatics, if they are both correctly understood. Christian anthropology is only able to fulfill its whole purpose if it understands man as the potentia oboedientialis for the Hypostatic Union.\textsuperscript{335}

So the remaining part of Rahner’s theology presented here clarifies the fundamental relationship between (philosophical) anthropology and Christian anthropology, which is ultimately Christology.

The very fact that the infinite mystery of the Trinity could be expressed in the concrete experience of God-Becoming-Man, then, the meaning of a person and the ways in which one comes to the knowledge of self and the existential realities also have to be explained from a transcendental perspective. Transcendence in itself suggests the existence of an objective order that impresses itself upon an understanding of the human being and his or her innate ability to know any reality. Thus, it is on the basis of this idea of \textit{coming from above} that Rahner rightly perceives theological anthropology as transcendental anthropology and presents the same from a transcendental standpoint. It is also at this point that Christology is properly understood as theological anthropology.

The thought-forms proper to the metaphysics of “being” are the vehicles by which Rahner articulates the relationship between anthropology and Christology. The subsequent subsections now endeavor to expand on the main subject of Rahner’s theological vision outlined here. The immediate section treats the nature of the essential distance between concrete self-understanding and a person per se.
The Unity of Knowledge and Being as the Ground of Human Thought Process

Gerald A. McCool’s editorial note to Karl Rahner’s work cited in this study captures well the basic working principle underlying the latter’s theological anthropological schema. McCool says, “theological anthropology enables the Christian to understand and correlate the Christian mysteries in a way which relates them to the fundamental a priori structures of his own experience.” In Rahner’s own words:

[T]he idea of God-man needs proof of a transcendental orientation in man’s being and history under grace. A purely a posteriori Christology, unable to integrate Christology correctly into an evolutionary total view of the world, would not find it easy to dismiss the suspicion of propounding mythology.

Rahner maintains that knowledge about self does not originate ad extra. The quest for knowledge stems from the basic human constitution known as human nature. It is the basic structure of existence which provides humankind with the structures of meaning by which to understand the self in relation to the environment. That is to say human nature in its totality is ordered to the transcendent. Therefore, the basic set up, a transcendental orientation which Rahner speaks about contains the seminal seed for understanding how philosophical anthropology relates to Christian anthropology. This in turn allows for an understanding of the teleological character of the human quest for knowledge in general. Such knowledge accrues from experience at two levels: the transcendent and the historical levels. Also to ensure that the reflection on the basic human quest for knowledge does not lose sight of the fact that the historical quest springs from the transcendent point, Rahner situates anthropological reflection in the wider framework of a general ontology. That is to say, Rahner posits the metaphysics of “being” as the ground for comprehending the universal quest for knowledge about what it means to be a
person. It will become clear that theological and philosophical considerations about “being” as it relates to the “Being of beings” is a necessary corrective to a historical tendency toward definitive self-explanation.

Rahner contends that the “the nature of being is to know and to be known in original unity.” Although persons are not born [with] any actual knowledge about self, the basic natural inclination is toward complete understanding of any reality (cf. GS, no. 12). And all these take place in the historical process as the proper and formal context for the emergence of the basic quest to know. The next and immediate goal here is to point out the hierarchical manner in which knowledge emerges.

The natural desire to know is neither arbitrary nor disorderly. Man never stops, in his thought or in his activity, at this or that reality taken in isolation. He wants to know what reality is in its unity within which he gets to know whatever he knows. He inquires about the ultimate foundations, about the one ground of all reality. Insofar as he knows every reality as being, he inquires about the being of beings.

The intertwining of the natural inclination to know with the need for differentiating the different levels of meaning and how these relate to each other can be explained with reference to an example from Africa cited earlier on.

Chapter II cited Placide Tempels’ philosophical propositions to colonial governments in Africa. He maintained that every culture has its “foundation for logical and universal systems of human behaviour.” And that a political move to transform the pre-colonial African societies would have first required identifying a “logical system of thought” so as to render the universal behavior in the African societies intelligible. After all, human behavior reflects personal and collective self-understanding as much as it affects the development of social systems. Tempels derived this basic insight from understanding the innate human concern about the basic question of “being.” In other
words, without a primordial quest for comprehensive knowledge, African ancestors would have been incapable of organizing their experiences and accompanying thoughts into some coherent structures of meanings known as cultural values. Tempels thus concurs with Rahner: any “system of thought” is explainable from the standpoint of being as its metaphysical basis. When African traditional ontologies are, for instance, interpreted in light of “being” the ancestor, tribe, clan, family emerge as hierarchical logical systems of thought. Together they comprise different dimensions of the African view of being. They constitute the ontological ground on which the adherents to the traditional religions base their ongoing perceptions of ultimate realities. For an African, then, “to be” is to exist in relationship with the founding ancestor, within a specific concrete setting of a tribe, clan, and family, all bonded by biological ties. Any thing outside that unified (whole) ontology is basically a non-being. Thus, we can further grasp the reason African people, in their ethnic diversity; find it extremely difficult to perceive a basic connection between diverse historical experiences of what it means to be a person or a community. Experiences outside specific logical systems of thought are potentially inimical to one’s own. In sum, each traditional African institution, as cited, constitutes a basic transcendent pole in African anthropologies because each reveals a specific dimension of the total self-understandings within a “particular” tribe.

The African experience summarized above is significant in the understanding of Rahner’s ontology for a specific reason. It exemplifies his argument that individuals and collectivities are constantly involved in the practice of metaphysics; and more so, with respect to a cultural tendency toward definitive self-understanding. In his own words:

Every time man makes of some reality his be-all and his end-all, he makes of it the center of that which is around him and of all that he is. All the rest
is but a means for or an expression of this unique reality. This is the way in which he says what he means and wishes to mean by being. He is practicing metaphysics. Therefore we must practice metaphysics since we are always practicing it. We must ask the question: what is the being of being.343

Thus far, we can see why Rahner speaks about metaphysics in the general terms of the universal historical experiences. The natural or basic structure of human thought process is the same. The thought forms may differ according to the way in which societies (and individuals) formulate and develop ideas, especially ultimate causes and ends. Seen this way, the term philosophical anthropology appropriately describes a total cultural view of “a person” within a specific human grouping. For beneath the veneer of cultural beliefs and customs, there is a recognizable metaphysical base. This recognition is evidently purposeful in Rahner’s concept of theological anthropology as the theological method proper for theology as a sacred discipline. The basic quest for knowledge constitutes a primary working principle by which he relates the universal experience of knowledge to the Christian revelation, particularly Christology as the ultimate expression of Biblical anthropology.

Since metaphysics seeks to explain ultimate causes by means of natural reason, a central subject in metaphysics is the nature of human knowledge. And philosophy approaches this question very specifically by examining the nature of a human person with regard to the First Cause; or precisely the relation of “being” to the “being of beings.” So Rahner takes up this structure of thought to argue that the basic question about “being” neither stops at particular experiences, nor is it fully realized in them. A contrary position would imply that as finite beings, we can know the fullness of being at any one point. Because complete knowledge is untenable, especially by sole human
efforts, Rahner invites us to discern the First Cause and Ends that philosophy discusses in
terms of \textit{being} vis-à-vis the \textit{being of being}. This step is extremely important. We
recognize in it the way in which Rahner builds toward an understanding that metaphysics
is not an end in itself. It leads into theology for the following basic Christian reason.
Human beings originate from God in whose image they are made. Although they possess
a basic natural inclination to know, the processes of human knowledge are rooted in God,
who as the Omniscient is the end of human knowledge. In this way, it becomes clear that
philosophical anthropology (in the Greek sense) is a bridge to Christian anthropology.
For only then can we grasp that natural anthropology is the starting point from which
persons and groups proceed toward an ever deeper understanding and experience of who
they are as finite but spiritual beings.\textsuperscript{344} For the sake of more clarity, there is need to
pursue further Rahner’s point on the relationship between philosophical metaphysics and
theological anthropology.

A human being, according to Rahner, is naturally inclined to \textit{know completely} the
reality of his or her own being. But because this inclination exists both as an actuality
and a possibility that always transcends the knower, self-knowledge is always
“provisional.”\textsuperscript{345} Hence, to identify provisional knowledge about being with its fullness
is tantamount to short-circuiting the very (infinite) possibilities that lie within the range
of knowledge. To know is an actuality and a dynamic orientation to the fullness of
knowledge about being as the point of self-disclosure.\textsuperscript{346} And so Rahner contends that
“being is more than knowledge, it is life and action, decision and execution; but it is all
this…insofar as they are not the fullness. They radiate the reality of a particular being
but differ conceptually from being itself.”\textsuperscript{347} He goes on to describe being in these terms.
“[B]eing is a self presence, an original unity of being and knowledge.” We can thus understand the reason Rahner puts emphasis on knowledge as luminosity, self-presence. Knowledge co-exists with “being” as the primordial structure of human existence. Being cannot be subsumed into concrete knowledge, for there is always more self. Yet, the natural inclination to know reality in its completeness implies the possibility of such knowledge. That possibility lies with Jesus of Nazareth as we shall see shortly. Rahner follows this idea to its logical end by inquiring into the nature of a being that can possess knowledge in its original unity. And as he does so, we soon realize that there has never been such a person among humankind except Jesus of Nazareth!

We shall first take note, in passing, that Rahner does not dwell on the historical concern about the human quest for an ideal human figure or cultural representatives of what it means to be human. But such figures are implied in his ontology. These would include socially revered figures like African ancestors, Buddha in the Buddhist tradition, and so on. Hence, even though Rahner simply refers to it in the passing, the point is made. All societies make explicit references to an ideal figure that represents or epitomizes the collective yearning for the fullness of knowledge and life. This does not require much discussion given the copious examples of such figures in human societies world-wide. Religious founders are typical examples of men and women who in some way embody the highest ideals toward which respective societies aspire. Discernible, therefore, in the societal quest is a legitimate human quest for ideal figures. But there is a problem with this historical quest, legitimate as it may be. Rahner treats this problem at some length. The general human quest for complete knowledge has always tended to envision such ideal cultural figures with the beginning and end of all there is about
knowledge, personal and collective identities. Rahner rightly recognizes that absolute idealization of ideal cultural representatives is an obstacle in the path of ongoing understanding of self. He responds to this at some length. Having given reasons as to why self-knowledge (being) is always provisional, he focuses on whether there is a being that embodies full knowledge about its own being in its primordial unity. Rahner provides the answer himself: “Only the pure act of being is the absolute identity of being and knowing; in the pure act of being, in the absolute being, there remain no more questions to be asked.” In other words, to establish the existence of such an individual requires that we know the basic distinction between “being” associated with individual categories and “the being of beings” as the ground of all beings (or all existence). If “being,” in the singular, is associated with an entity then the ground of being is identifiable with the Absolute mystery known as God. In sum, only in reference to God can we speak about the fullness of being and knowledge, whether in action or in actual existence at any one time. It stands to reason, then, that the internal structure of human life and existence manifests a dynamic orientation to something “ever-more than there is” now. In sum, this is the metaphysical framework for positing God as the ground of being and the goal of human striving expressed concretely in the quest for self-understanding. However, for Rahner this assertion is not without some difficulty.

To posit God as the ground of being and the end of human striving and at the same time underscore the limitations on the ability to know completely poses a philosophical dilemma. But this is exactly the dilemma Rahner strives to overcome by relating absolute finitude to the primordial structure of human knowledge. This further clarifies his compelling argument that anthropology ought to open to Christology as the
full expression of the human quest for the fullness of being in its primordial unity. As the
basic theological-anthropological statement, Rahner’s methodological schema is
grounded in an understanding that the natural propensity to know the complete truth of
one’s being is a formal structure of human nature, but which structure is limited by the
factor of absolute finitude. Now, the tendency in Africa and all cultures is to identify
completely with the originating societal founders and their cultural projects sever the
natural inclination to see beyond the historically crafted self-understanding. Such
tendencies, as we saw in Chapter I and II constitute an obstacle for inculturation, which
in its essence and end calls for ongoing openness toward ever fuller knowledge about self
and the reality around us. In view of developing further this important understanding, the
following subtopic introduces the factor of “finitude.” This factor is at once a means of
critiquing the tendency toward definitive self-understanding and a principle of cultural-
anthropological analysis in contextual theologies.

**Human Finitude in the Scheme of Knowledge**

The relation of absolute finitude to the essential character of human knowledge
has also to be explained with reference to “being” in relation to the “being of Beings.”
Rahner remains within the domain of established metaphysics-a branch of Christian
philosophy which studies the nature of being with the purpose of explaining the nature
and operations of beings. Hence, by situating the primordial structure of human
knowledge in the philosophy of being, Rahner seeks to show the natural laws or
fundamental principles governing the human capacity for knowledge. All human
knowledge, as we have seen, takes its character from the nature of human being in
relation to God. This general principle allows for the specification of the origin and end
of the human inclination to know self in fullness. It follows that human knowledge takes
its character from the nature of a person as a finite being. Finitude, therefore, implies
dependence on the “Being of being” and on the absolute openness to the latter as the
source and end of knowledge. The following paragraph takes a cue from the previous
statements and integrates with Rahner’s main insights so as to relate faith and reason
(discussed earlier) to the reality of finitude.351

The “open-ended character” of human knowledge is a “condition” for the full
emergence of self-hood and ultimate fulfillment. But the combination of “open-
endedness” and “finitude,” though necessary, means that the general human quest for
knowledge does not yield uniform results. Whenever human beings are confronted with
limitations proper to human reason, finitude can be experienced as an obstacle or a
catalyst for self-transcendence. In the latter instance, finitude facilitates recognition of
one’s limits and initiates the quest into the nature of human dependence. This can lead to
faith in a higher being for some people, while others can view it negatively. Note that
faith always co-exists with reason. But the need for faith is more felt with the recognition
of finitude. It is in this light that dependence on the Absolute Mystery can be recognized
more easily. Hence, dependence on the Absolute Mystery can only emerge from having
recognized the limited character of the knowledge already acquired. If, on the contrary,
acquired knowledge is identifiable with absolute fullness, then human finitude can
become an obstacle in the path toward complete knowledge and self-transcendence.
Instead of finitude propelling persons toward the yet-unknown, but knowable reality,
persons can more easily take refuge in the ideals crafted by society, regardless of their
moral validity. The reverse is equally unhelpful since it involves an odd fascination with
the open-ended nature of knowledge without concern for its teleological character. In this case, knowledge takes on a utilitarian meaning. This author agrees totally with Rahner schematic argument. A valid view of human knowledge must incorporate a proper sense of finitude, at the same time steering clear from crippling skepticism and defensiveness which undermine confidence in the human capacity for attaining valid knowledge. Yet a question must still be asked, if knowledge takes its character from the nature of being, how does this principle apply to God?

First, God as the origin and end of human striving implies that only in God there is unity of knowledge and being, as Rahner explains. This as the true nature of God, then, points to the true nature of a human being. Human nature is created and as such, persons are primordially ordered to arrive at valid knowledge by participating in being as a primordial condition of existence. This is a statement of primary principle with profound implications for human existence, Christian theology and mission. As a spirit, a human being is “absolute openness” to the mystery of his or her own being.\footnote{352} And for this same reason, knowledge of self is never identical with concrete self-consciousness or understanding, however, sublime this may appear to be. “True knowledge is a participation in being.”\footnote{353} Second, absolute human finitude is indicative of a basic human need for divine help to foster authentic participation in being. Human finitude is in this way a propellant toward self-transcendence proper to the spiritual nature of a human being. But Rahner also brings the factor of finitude to bear on concrete experience as a means of working toward an understanding of Christology as the fullness of anthropology.
That is, the possibility for complete self-knowledge accompanied by absolute finitude introduces a basic question as to whether or not there exists a human being who is the perfect embodiment of being. The unity of being and knowledge in its primordial state can be recognized in such a being. Such a possibility among us is eliminated by the factor of finitude, because the latter rules out the possibility of arriving at the complete truths about one’s own being by one’s own effort. At the same time, absolute openness to the infinite mystery holds the assurance of attaining such knowledge. Having said that, does finitude not pose a dilemma instead of resolving the question of whether or not a human being can arrive at complete knowledge about self? Since Rahner knows this consideration is critical to the meaning of Christology as theological anthropology, he has to pursue another question regarding the total structure of human existence, imago Dei. This is the basis and condition for understanding the Christian meaning of human nature. In this lies the answer to all considerations pending clarification, especially the relation of anthropology to Christology. It is at this point that the following attempt to relate Rahner’s work to an important tradition before him emerges. That tradition spells out the theology of imago Dei in the manner that enables contextual theology to recognize how the basic working principle outlined above feature in inculturation and contextualization of Christian faith.

SECTION IV

KARL RAHNER THROUGH JOHN DUNS SCOTUS’ ANTHROPOLOGICAL HORIZON

A Human Being as Imago Dei

The following excerpts from the Medieval Christian anthropological thought offer important insights on the relationship between philosophy and theology discussed above.
The relation as discussed is incomplete without reference to the *imago Dei* anthropology in the biblical faith. Karl Rahner puts emphasis on the transcendent anthropology which consists in understanding *imago Dei* as it relates to God and to human beings. Accordingly, the Judeo-Christian faith tradition concerns itself with the essential subject matter of philosophy, namely; the relationship of “being” to the “Being of beings.” At the same time, the Judeo-Christian tradition approaches this subject with thought forms proper to biblical faith as a whole. Needless to say, every thought form carries meaning that is specific to the central subject and objective in view. In the present case, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 12 testifies to *imago Dei* as the proper framework for explaining the teleological nature of “being” in relation to the “Being of beings.” This is because creation theology points to *imago Dei* as the ultimate horizon from which to account for being vis-à-vis the “Being of beings.” This understanding has always been an important element of philosophical and theological thought in the Catholic tradition in its various strands. Rahner’s theological anthropology does not, therefore, spring in a vacuum. It has visible roots in the pre-Vatican II Catholic theological tradition as indicated by his concern about the Thomistic anthropology. Most of Rahner’s seminal insights are closer to the Augustinian theological anthropology as developed by the Medieval Franciscans. Of particular significance is the tradition that begins with St. Bonaventure and later developed by John Duns Scotus. It is not possible to tell from the corpus of Rahner’s writings cited here whether or not he read Scotus’ work. Yet the similarities in their thought forms are evidently unmistakable. The following paragraphs strives to highlight key insights of Scotus’ anthropology in light of the present objective. Scotus represents important developments in the medieval thought on the “meaning of a human being” in
relation to the incarnation. Scotus’ insights, therefore, offer a relevant background for grasping Rahner’s argument that a human being is naturally constituted to listen to God’s revelation. The following discussion casts Rahner’s argument that anthropology ought to open to Christology in the Franciscan anthropology represented here by Duns Scotus and others.

Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ, has done extensive and insightful study of John Duns Scotus’ theological tradition. In one of her writings cited in this paper, Ingham presents Scotus’ moral vision, pointing out its relevancy for the contemporary world. The evident focus of her work is the Enlightenment’s attempt to create a moral vision for the world. In her estimation, which this author also agrees with, Scotus’ central theme that the meaning of a human being as the basis of morality is a needed response to the Enlightenment’s anthropological agenda. However, this chapter only makes use of Scotus’ ideas relevant to the theological anthropological perspective on the transcendent dimension of the human reality. According to Ingham, Scotus’ tradition is understandably “a moral vision of the whole which underpins his optimism about human nature and moral living.” His vision emerges through “rethinking the relationship between philosophy and theology, in light of a deeper understanding of Aristotle, as well as a concern to safeguard the key elements of Christian revelation….” Reiteratively, the previous excerpts from Rahner echo the same theological-methodological trajectory. In this way, the Judeo-Christian vision of humanity forms the core content and method of Scotus’ project, and renders key philosophical concepts understandable without immediate reference to the philosophical technicalities proper to Aristotelian philosophy.
Scotus presents a dynamic view of a person situated in the total context of creation theology. The present moment and the eschatological horizon constitute two poles in his understanding of the Christian view of a human being. This implies that a person in the Judeo-Christian world view is unexplainable outside the historical and the ultimate poles of existence. Scotus is obviously opposed to abstractionist approaches that rely on mere concepts without reference to a common ontology. Thus, Scotus’ concern for the concrete and the transcendent poles is reflected, as we shall see, in the medieval basic understanding that human life is truly a journey toward the future with God. Historical existence is the context and starting point for the journey. Seen this way, the human being constitutes a statement of principle, as well as points to a method to be followed in theological and moral concerns. Therefore for Scotus, “to speak of things human is to enter the domain of the divine.” Scotus is not in any way inventing a new organizing principle for theology. The Judeo-Christian tradition understands a person in relationship to God. His personal merit consists in the emphasis he puts on the value of a human person for theology and faith, and his advance on the traditional understanding of imago Dei. The concept of human life as a journey finds full expression in the imago Dei anthropology. From this vantage point, Scotus anthropology becomes relevant to:

a) the teleological character of knowledge as propounded by Karl Rahner;

b) a universal human ontology as the basis for understanding how the Jesus event relates to persons and their lives in general;

c) the essential relation of philosophy to Christology.
There are two major strands in the traditional Catholic understanding of *Imago Dei*: the Eastern and the Western tradition. According to Ingham, Scotus leans more toward the Eastern tradition while blending in important developments from the Western tradition, especially the Augustinian tradition. However, Scotus follows in the footsteps of St. Bonaventure who is insightfully innovative in developing the Augustinian tradition in light of the Franciscan tradition.

In a nutshell, the Eastern tradition “identifies the human being as image of God (*imago Dei*) on the journey toward more complete resemblance to God.” This basic understanding clearly offered Augustine the spiritual framework in which he also explained the human reality. For Augustine, then, “Transformation into [God’s likeness] constitutes the goal of all human living.” This is an extremely seminal idea put forward by St. Augustine. At the same time, a particular concept of transformation colors Augustine’s interpretation of *imago Dei* to a greater extent. For instance, keeping in mind that *imago Dei* is an ontological reality; Augustine tried to accommodate the reality of original sin, basing himself on the Genesis account, as indicated by the following statement: “The image of God within each person becomes the resemblance of God we are made to be. This resemblance is lost through original sin, but can be regained through baptism and the life of grace.” Notably, both statements contain valid substantive content as well as some basic flaws. One has to take a step back and ask whether it is *imago Dei* (as a potentiality) that is lost, or is it the *imago Dei* as resemblance that is lost due to original sin? The key idea consists in Augustine having closely associated *image* with resemblance. To grasp the subtlety of this matter it is important that we
understand the way in which Augustinian envisions what the image consists in vis-a-vis “transformation into God’s likeness.”

Augustine identifies the God’s image in us as the highest dimension of our soul: the mind (mens intellectus) which is the ‘interior and intelligible eye’...the mind with its faculties and activities is the image of the entire Trinity. The process of conversion takes place within a precise relationship to the second person of the Trinity as Word (verbum), by which the mind is joined to the source of being (principium) and the source of goodness (Spiritus).362

Once again one need to inquire whether identifying the image of God in us with the mind does justice to the meaning of a person as an embodied spirit. No doubt, the mind is essential in the total scheme of human transformation as a journey toward resemblance. Hence, knowing self and reality around us as God knows is essential to the journey toward resemblance with God’s image in us. However, the Franciscans are justified in questioning a view that identifies transformation too closely with the mind, since this is tantamount to equating knowledge with goodness.363 Plenty of knowledge is not the same as goodness or human resemblance to God.364

Therefore for the Franciscans, in order for transformation into resemblance to be truly authentic, it would require love. That is not to suggest that Augustine’s anthropology is devoid of a sense of love. Such consideration is implicit in Augustine having related the mind to the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity. Knowledge of the Word ought to lead to love. Nonetheless, methodological assumptions or principles generally determine the outcome of the subject content. By putting emphasis on the mind as the locus for interpreting imago Dei steers the concept of transformation to an epistemological horizon where human reason becomes the epicenter of the human journey. Where does this leave faith as a human reality integral to rationality and love? We know from experience that people who apparently know a whole lot about God or
By doing so, they help us to recognize the ontological difference between us and God in whose image we are made.

Imago Dei as a Unity of Knowledge and Love

In continuity with St. Augustine, the Franciscan tradition related the intellect with the soul, at the same time incorporating the affective domain for a holistic understanding of the human being as imago Dei. It follows that, “while the cognitive domain gives rise to the image, it is the activity of loving which demonstrates resemblance.”366 Note in passing that this philosophical perspective sets the pace toward understanding Jesus Christ as the “being” in whom the knowledge of God and love are truly united. Ingham explains that “Franciscan writers emphasized the superiority of loving over knowing, since it is by the act of love that we most resemble God’s gracious activity, knowing provides the image, loving transforms us into image of God.”367 “St. Bonaventure would later advance this vision based on the “formula” propounded by John of Rochelle, a Franciscan philosopher.” “Image is to nature, resemblance to grace.”368 Notice that the last statement by St. Bonaventure ought to be seen as a working principle by which Franciscan philosophers sought to rearticulate the relation of nature to grace.369 Bonaventure explains imago Dei as it relates to human nature in terms of “innate gifts.”370 The view seems to have laid the foundation for the important development seen in Scotus’ and Rahner’s anthropological thought. That is, there is a sense in which we cannot separate nature and grace. By the fact that human nature can function the way it
does is in itself grace. At the same time, human nature is limited and as such, stands in need of elevating grace. Thus Bonaventure “identified image with the natural capacity for knowledge of God” as Augustine had done. But the basic difference for Bonaventure is to have identified resemblance with the indwelling of God which does not solely depend on the natural function of the mind. It requires a specific understanding and expression of love, continually supported by God’s grace. There is then a theological nuance Bonaventure introduces: the movement (transformation) from nature to transformation is not a natural given. It requires a dynamic action of grace in the workings of nature and a conscious relationship with God based on explicit revelation as Scotus and Rahner emphasize. Seen this way, the image of God in us is at once a reality and a potentiality. It emerges through transformation; i.e., a dynamic movement from “image” into resemblance. In the latter respect, God’s grace is ordered to loving as an act and a state of being. Knowledge leads to love, which love transforms us into likeness to God in whom the cognitive and the affective domains are also united.

In spite of a subtle loophole in the Augustinian tradition, it offered the leverage on which the Franciscans developed their own understanding of Imago Dei. Ingham sums up the overall pivotal point in the Augustinian tradition. “Augustine offers a systematic presentation of what it means to be a human being both as a metaphysical reality (the way we are) and a dynamic spirituality which points beyond itself toward life with God (what we are meant to be).”371 This basic understanding furnishes John Duns Scotus with conceptual tools for reflecting on the meaning of a human person. “Imago Dei is [an important motif] in Scotus’ thought as he weaves together key elements from medieval philosophy and Christian thought.”372 Let it be clear at this point that Rahner’s
philosophical ontology as previously outlined is reflected in Scotus’ theological anthropology. The following sections throw more light on this point. But before that, it ought to be noted that the above and the subsequent themes clear a lot of dark shadows currently hovering on contextual theologies. Contextual theologians who are bent on absolutizing their cultural religious heritages are simply saying their cultures have it all. But as we continue to explore the theme of humanity’s basic openness and inclination to the transcendent, absolutization of culture is a serious obstacle to Christian faith in its very essence and goal.

**A Human Being viewed in the Light of the Divine Image**

Scotus’ anthropology emerges in the context of his discussions on moral life. In continuity with his predecessors, Scotus believes that human life is truly a moral journey that involves transformation into the image of God. At the same time, he advances further the tradition before him. For him, there are important elements that must be considered in trying to draw a legitimate distinction between a human being and God. These include the limitations accruing from the reciprocal action of the cognitive and the affective domains. Therefore, and in contrast with Augustine, the cognitive and the affective comprise the context for understanding human finitude as it relates to the image of God that we are. In the case of the divine image, cognition and affectivity do not constitute finitude for reason that shall be made clear. The same elements provide the basis on which Scotus re-interprets the meaning of sin and of the incarnation. We shall begin with Scotus’ understanding of *imago Dei* and move toward the place of finitude in the scheme of human existence.
Augustine attributed the primary cause of sin to original sin. Scotus does not dismiss the theological value of original sin. He, however, brings insight into the internal structure of *imago Dei* beyond previous comprehension. The following paragraphs pay attention to the intimate relationship Scotus puts between human finitude and sin, and how these affect the natural ability to know ourselves completely. For Scotus, according to Ingham,

> [T]he image of God within the human soul is not naturally knowable, due to the limitations of human cognition. We can...know our source is God and still not understand the exact relationship that exists between creator and image. This relationship is unknowable because, in order to understand any relationship, we must understand both terms. In the case of our nature as image of God, we fail to grasp God’s nature as infinite being, and therefore are unable to conceive of ourselves ‘for the absolute things that we are.’ We know something about who we are, but we cannot fathom on our own what God is really like....It is not that we cannot know ourselves, rather we cannot grasp the relationship we have to God in the absence of some revelation such as the account of creation in Genesis.

So, the two terms in relationship are a “human being” and a “divine being” known as “God.” Using the language of “paternity and generation,” Augustine defined personhood in the Trinity in relational terms. But for Scotus, individuality and communality are essential to an understanding of God’s image in us. According to Ingham, Scotus leans toward the Eastern tradition to bring into sharp focus a basic relationship between “person” and “being,” as previously discussed. Scotus introduces his position with a clarification paraphrased by Ingham.

> [T]he essence of God involves an incommunicable dimension proper to each Person and a communal dimension which can only be described within a relationship. The dimension is incommunicable because it lies beyond language. It is expressed through language but is not itself reducible to the terms which are used to describe it. Scotus calls this the logical *suppositum* (term) which is necessary prior to any discussion of relationship.
Thus and in contrast with Augustine, “Each person in the Trinity is a person in the absolute sense (per modus essendi) and not relative to others (per relationes).”377 Note that assigning absolute property to divine personhood is not a negation of the relational language of paternity and generation. Absolute personhood and communion can both describe the essential nature of God. Ingham clarifies this point well.

Personality is a result of relationship. I am who I am by virtue of my relationship to others throughout my life. But description of my personality does not exhaust the mystery of my personhood throughout. The deeper mystery of each individual is the ineffable, and only finds expression in relation.378

At any rate, what Ingham is saying is exactly what Karl Rahner’s and Duns Scotus’ anthropology is saying. The emphasis on individuality rightly underscores the uniqueness of each person in the Trinity, but which uniqueness is not self-containment. Rather, it has to be manifested in relationship.379 That is not to say Scotus’ position is free from possible misinterpretation. If, for instance, each divine person is an absolute being, in whose image human beings are made, can we still speak of imago Dei in the singular? The answer is yes.

Scotus understands that the “personal and communal dimensions” give rise to “the dynamic essence which is the fruit of this communion.”380 This has implications for how we understand the image of God as the essence of human nature (GS, no. 14). As human beings, therefore, we embody the two properties in the Trinity: the personal and the dynamic essence or relational property. The personal speaks to our individuality, which for the most part, is not fully accessible to rational knowledge outside revelation, as discussed before. But it unfolds through mutual relationships. So having grounded essential nature in the divine image, Scotus now explains the difference between the divine image and a human person as the image of God. On the whole, his understanding
of divine personhood in the Trinity reaches its height in his discussion of divine freedom
and will, a subject treated briefly in the next subsection.

‘Being’ as the Order of Existence for Human and Divine Persons in Relationship

A general ontology is very basic to Scotus’ anthropology as indicated by Ingham. She says the philosophy of being is very central to Scotus’ moral vision. He presents it from the perspective of the biblical theology of creation. This is an extremely important development because it shows, without any doubt, that the Judeo-Christian world view is at once a theology and a philosophy. Scotus situates the meaning of person, human and divine, in this general context so as to interpret cognition and affectivity as they relate to both parties. Once this basic understanding is laid out he also reinterprets the meaning of divine and human freedom, sin, and the purpose of the incarnation.

Scotus understood that “being” is not imposed on us from outside. Rather it permeates the entire spheres of existence, natural and divine. And for the same reason, a philosophy of being expresses the fundamental relationship between creatures and God and relationships among created beings. Precisely, “[a]s First Principle, God does not exist outside the order of being nor outside of relationship with humanity”381 Hence, “Being” is that which “can be predicated of everything, including God.”382 It is an “essential order” or the “order of essences.” He describes “The essential order [as] a great sweep of being, a unified whole of reality which includes God” (cf. GS, no. 10).383 For instance, although God as the “First Cause” is prior to all other beings…God is not…beyond the realm of being [to the extent that we can leave] being to encounter God: we encounter God in being, in beings, in one another.”384 He makes reference to a notable passage in the Old Testament to make his case, namely; “the divine act of self-
revelation to Moses as ‘I am who I am’…provides the rational basis for a demonstration of God’s existence precisely because God has chosen being as an appropriate description of his essence as it can be known by the human intellect.”

In brief, “being” comprises the “order of essences” which expresses the ontological relatedness among different beings: God, human beings, and lesser creatures. Overall, the biblical view of being comprises an ontological framework by which to account for creation as it relates to the Incarnation. Accordingly, the “essential order means that creation is not only related to God, but that God is related to creation.” But “[t]he relatedness of the essential order does not mean God is equal to creation.” Thus Scotus recognizes different levels of mutuality stemming from inequality among different beings in the order of creation.

According to Ingham, Scotus draws attention to mutuality as the principle by which he explains relationship among divine persons. It suffices to note that in contrast to the relational terminologies of Augustine, mutuality marked by individuality and liberality are essential characteristics of divine personhoods. The factor of individuality serves a distinctive function not only to underscore difference among the divine persons; it also provides the basis for comprehending individuality among human beings. This includes the limitations proper to human cognition and affectivity. This points to the importance nature of the divine freedom in understanding the natural capacity and limitation of human cognition. Freedom bears directly on the natural quest for knowledge.

**Divine Liberality in light of Imago Dei**

According to Ingham, Scotus’ postulations on the absolute character of divine persons were censored on the grounds that they contradicted the theology of the Trinity propounded by St. Augustine. This is no surprise given a static view of revelation that
marked a greater part of the Catholic theological tradition before the Second Vatican Council. For present purposes, Scotus’ line of argument is valid. Augustine, like Scotus, stressed the importance of divine communion in the effort to understand the divine persons. Yet as Scotus maintains, in order for any person to be free, one must make legitimate claim to basic freedom as a condition for any authentic relationship. That claim, by nature, presupposes distinctive individuality of persons in relationship. At the same time, Scotus like Augustine understands that it is only in a free and loving relationship where individuality finds true expression. For instance, I am related to my parents through paternity. But it is neither paternity nor filial relationship that endows me with basic freedom and a sense of being an individual person, distinct from my parents. I am free because I am basically constituted a free person at the time of creation. In other words, my basic freedom and individuality are patterned on the divine freedom and individuality; keeping in mind that only God knows my individuality in its fullness. At the same time, basic freedom by itself does not make me a loving person. Loving evolves in two dimensional relationships: vertical and horizontal. It is in these respects that we recognize that individuality is essential to a Trinitarian theology that speaks to the human being as a free and rational being.

Scotus was convinced that “the freedom that exists among the divine communion is the basis for comprehending how God relates to creation.”389 Ingham explains that the reality of divine freedom provides Scotus with the rationale for asserting the possibility of a moral order. Quote: “The present order is good, not of itself, but because God has chosen to create it out of divine freedom and love, freely willed.” For Scotus, this basic understanding is in itself a valid principle in theology, i.e., “the possibility of free choice
in the will, the contingency of creation and the value of theology as a scientific
discipline.” A strong sense of mutuality emerges from a discussion of relationship
among persons or between God and human persons. This mutuality is stronger because it
is based upon the free choice to enter into relationship, to create relationship or to
establish order and ultimately communion. Communion appears in an exemplary manner
in the Trinity, a union among persons which Scotus calls both necessary and free. He
also stresses that “a relationship of communion characterizes divine life and surpasses
whatever distinction among divine persons in a way that the human mind might
conceive.” All these have implications for *imago Dei* anthropology. If divine image
exemplifies who we are, a Christian view of a human being has to take into consideration
the dialectical tension between individuality and communion. This tension is explainable
in terms of freedom and free will. In this regard, Scotus draws attention to the nature and
operation of the divine will.

Scotus follows the logic of the Efficient Cause as the metaphysical basis for the
operation of all primary principles. “The divine act of creative freedom functions as
exemplar for the perfection of rational loving. God’s choice to create this world was a
free choice, not necessitated by any force other than the divine itself. This world is not
necessary, nor is it impossible that there might be other worlds” So Scotus reasons that
in order to bring about a free created order, God as the First Cause must move freely. It
therefore stands to reason that because creation is a result of God’s free will, such a
movement on the part of God is “an act of will” that is also “free.” Anything otherwise
would not yield self-determination as the internal law in the order of being that includes
God. For instance, “Human action would particularly be the result of determinism” since
“we would have no power” for self-movement. In the same way, Scotus understands that divine freedom by itself does not exhaust the character of the divine will. Mention was made regarding the Franciscan’s intent to advance the Augustinian insights on *imago Dei* by uniting knowledge and love. It is in the context of freedom and free will that the practical and theological implications of the Franciscan’s vision become evident.

God is love and always acts in accordance with love as God’s consummate quality or nature. According to Ingham, Scotus expresses this reality by “uniting” divine willing and divine rationality and the perfection which this implies: justice and liberality. In other words, divine will and freedom are well balanced; there is no disharmony in God’s exercise of freedom and in the execution of the free will. This in principle means that human nature, made in the image of God, has been grounded in individuality as an essential characteristic of divine persons who exist in relationship of freedom. It is thus valid for Scotus to assert divine liberality as a decisive factor in understanding a human person. A brief outline of Scotus’ understanding of the nature and operation of the human will can clarify *imago Dei* as it pertains to the meaning of a human being.

Ingham points out that medieval thinkers put emphasis on God as the basis for understanding the nature of the human will. Scotus’ reflection incorporates important elements in the same tradition. Yet in contrast to medieval thinkers who perceived the “free will [as] distinct from reason,” Scotus unites the two. That is, reason is contained within the will as in the divine will. He wants to show that the will contains the mechanism for internal “self-control.” The will “is able to control itself, it retains the power to refrain from an action, to re-direct, to influence and to execute the deliberative process at any time.” Hence, we can speak of the human will being rational, because it
has the capacity to choose what is good as the order of human nature. Ingham observes that in this Scotus aligns himself “with medieval thinkers [who] defined rational freedom in light of the will’s capacity for reasoning and choosing” what is good. Like in the divine will, “[The human] will has the capacity for self-movement.” It “is the autonomous cause of the free act.” Ingham is striving to show that Scotus makes a nuanced distinction between free will and basic freedom as seen in this paraphrase.

Freedom relates to the end (as necessary) and free will is directed toward a contingent means to that end. In other words, the notion of freedom deals more with the goal of human fulfillment while free will has to do with concrete acts of choice over which I have some control. When I make a choice, I exercise free will not freedom.

Freedom is that power ordered to what is good and is revelatory of that which a person desires most at any one point. Scotus develops this aspect following St. Anselm’s work on the affections of the will. That is, basic "human freedom" and "free will" are very important in the development of moral life consonant with the Judeo-Christian vision of a person as imago Dei. The will as the instrument that actualizes basic freedom contains two basic inclinations known as affections of the will. These realities are experienced in the basic inclination to self-promotion (affection for possession) and to justice (affection for the other). Together, these affections constitute the will as a rational faculty. The affection for justice focuses on others rather than self. It is described as the “liberty innate to the will,” since it involves the internal self-control revealed by reflection upon internal experience.” Ingham further explains that our choices are torn between self-preservation and justice. “The object of the will is the good…” Hence affections of the will underscore “the nature of the good objects and how they ought to be loved.” In sum:
Some objects have value as a means to other, better ends. These objects are useful goods…money and food would be such goods. Their value belongs to their use, not to their intrinsic value…Goods of use can be lost without affecting the value of dignity of the one who possesses them….There exists other objects which possess a type of absolute goodness or intrinsic dignity. These are called…honest goods worthy of love not because of any use we make of them, but because of their internal value. These absolute goods ought to be loved in and for themselves, never to be loved or possessed to further egoistic motives. Scotus identifies God as the primary candidate for this type of good and draws forth moral norms from the primary commandment to love God above all things and for God alone.405

These affections say something about the extent to which a person chooses the highest good, which in essence is a self-constituting action. That is to say, “the two affections deal with the development of character insofar as they relate to self-centeredness or other-centered concerns.”406 For example, concern for personal safety and preservation is a good thing and a natural obligation but can turn evil; if self-preservation is the most decisive principle of one’s life; one becomes very egocentric. Obviously, such a moral stance cuts off the need to enter into dialogue with the Absolute Mystery. The basic human inclination turns to a different object other than God. In summary, basic freedom and free will are essential to understanding how absolute finitude affects the natural human capacity (imago Dei) for God. This is also Scotus’ point of departure from traditional emphasis on original sin. Augustine goes as far as suggesting that the image of God in us has been affected by original sin, as we pointed out before. In interpreting the two affections, St. Anselm followed St. Augustine more closely. According to Ingham,

Scotus departs from Anselm to affirm that the tendency toward loving justly (affection justitiae) was neither lost, nor damaged by original sin. The state of Adam and Eve was not supernatural, but rather preternatural somehow beyond our present condition but not on par with God or the Angels (her emphasis).
While it stands to reason that human nature has “capacity for goodness,” the same nature is also constituted in such a way that we often “[fail] to accomplish the good we intend.” This understanding has to be balanced by another: human relationship with God is free; it can be accepted or rejected. Scotus asserts rightly that the natural human inclination toward the ultimate horizon (God) as the point of human fulfillment is contingent on the freedom of the will to accept or to reject the transformative grace. The fact that we are made in the image of God does not in any way imply the absence of sin. As Scotus understands the realities of free will and freedom automatically impose the possibility of sin. At the same time, *imago Dei* as “natural capacity” for an-ever fuller human being implies that grace also takes on a dynamic meaning. It is not something superimposed on human nature, or something that we can do without. Grace is divine life ordered to increasing the natural capacity (*imago Dei*) for becoming more and fully human. The entire conversation with Scotus transforms the meaning of redemption in the overall all scheme of creation and purpose of the incarnation.

Scotus is obviously consistent in his argument that *imago Dei* cannot be known naturally. “Because the human mind is limited and can only grasp being as being, divine self-revelation is necessary for any qualitative knowledge about God and as a point of departure for any theological science.” Divine assistance is available to make up what is lacking in human effort. But divine assistance does not replace the freedom of the will to choose in accordance with what one considers of utmost importance. All these have implication for the concept of *imago Dei* as a journey of transformation into resemblance to God and for the relation of philosophy to theology, and anthropology to Christology. It is under this theme that all aspects that go into a holistic understanding of
a human being unite. Only in Jesus, the human being per excellence, do the realities of faith and reason, love, freedom, free will and finitude find harmonious expression. The attainment of self-knowledge is limited by divine order as well as the limitations proper to human nature. Humanity can choose or reject God in the very act of choosing freely. These and other details that follow are critical to understanding the seriousness of the issues raised in Chapters I and II. That is to say, there is more to a human being or religion than biological descent and cultural achievements. Contextual theology cannot be grounded in ambiguous cultural concepts of a human being without jeopardizing the salvation of people and the mission of the church.

CONCLUSION: THE PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION

The foregoing discussion is basic to the understanding of the symmetrical relationship Rahner puts between anthropology and Christology and the incarnation as the essence of Christology. His entire theology, like that of Duns Scotus, presupposes understanding human nature as essentially *imago Dei*. The unique contribution of Rahner is to have transformed key elements of the tradition before him into transcendental anthropology which is essentially Christology. Rahner has, by the same act, transformed theological methodology. The reality of humanity’s basic inclination to the transcendent does raise a basic question regarding the purpose of Christ in the total scheme of human existence. If all are ordered to the transcendent, then, why does humanity need Christ? Why can’t everyone just follow their basic inclinations expressed in the cultural projects as inculturation theologians insist? It was to answer this question that the previous themes were selected to provide a philosophical-theological background to the meaning of Christ for the entire human race. Precisely speaking, therefore, a reflection on human
nature is incomplete without the concept of sin and redemption which must have imago Dei as the ultimate reference point. On this subject John Duns Scotus, Karl Rahner, Conciliar and some post Conciliar official teaching propounds exactly the same ideas only that each uses a different language with a different emphasis. We shall note, for present purposes, that the theme of redemption is crucial to an understanding of the purpose of the incarnation with specific reference to sin, human finitude, and the human quest for ultimate knowledge and fulfillment. There are various strands in the Catholic theology of redemption. The following highlights summarize the expressed concerns of this chapter in the light of St. Anselm’s seminal ideas which dominated Catholic theology before the Second Vatican Council.

A theology of the incarnation that is consistent with biblical faith, according to Scotus, does not to begin by inquiring into “whether or not the Word would have become incarnate [had] Adam not sinned.” Rather, we should start by inquiring what the original intent of God was relative to the Incarnation…. As Scotus understands it; if the first perspective constitutes the starting point for soteriological reflection, the meaning of incarnation is more likely than not to embrace St. Anselm’s view. That is, sin becomes the primary causal factor or motivation for Jesus’ coming on the ground that “reparation for so heinous a sin could only be made by a person who was both human and divine.”

Scotus does not dispute the theological validity of the previous idea in itself. He is, however, against making the same idea the basis for the incarnation. When examined against the theology of imago Dei above, we more easily agree with Scotus. St. Anselm’s soteriological schema does not take into account the nature of divine freedom and free will as internal principles permeating all creation. Human beings, like other created
entities, are free beings. Human freedom, however, involves the choice for self-determination; i.e., the choice to follow the path to ultimate fulfillment ordained by the Creator or the choice to a contrary path. The possibility of sin originates with the innate capacity for “self-movement” in the will. The freedom of the will to choose what is good involves the possibility to choose sin. Therefore, every human act embodies a decision to be what one wants to be, here and now, and in the future. If, on the one hand, personal choices conform to God’s design (imago Dei) for us, then, those choices facilitate the process of transformation. The choice to be or not to be participants in God’s designs for humanity is ours to make. Should our choices run contrary to God’s design, we are by the same virtue undermining the possibility of becoming the persons we are meant to be. We shall also note that Jesus’ mission does not change the nature of the basic relationship between God and the human being previously described. Rather he affirms that condition of existence at the same time brings to fulfillment God’s original plan of redemption.

Hence for Scotus, “the summit of creation is the communion of all persons with one another and with God.” Based on this reality as God’s original intention for us, Scotus’ argument is in order:

the predestination of anyone to the glory is prior by nature to the prevision of the sin or damnation of anyone…God intended first glory as ultimate and final end, and the Incarnation as leading to that end…The Incarnation represents not merely divine response to human need for salvation, but rather God’s intention from all eternity to raise human nature to the highest point of glory by uniting with the divine. This intention was freely chosen by God, and never necessitated by any human choice.

In this way, Scotus situates the scheme of redemption or grace within the wider scheme of God’s original plan of creation. He does so, however, without eliminating the reality of original sin. Made in the image of God, who relates to creation in freedom, the freedom
of the will defines the character of human response or cooperation with God’s plan of salvation. We can see evidence of this in biblical faith. The history of salvation from creation to the New Testament moves forward and realizes itself by the dynamic of free choice. Jesus’ public life accentuates the reality of free choice in the self-understanding and in view of personal and collective destiny. We can thus grasp the Christological and soteriological basis for Scotus’ assertion that, “Christ is that very person in whom the human and the divine achieve mutuality.”414 To be human, therefore, is to exist in relationship with God and with one another. “The Trinity is a communion of persons exemplifying the goal of human activity. Union with another or out of love is the key to human fulfillment, because this union is generative and life giving. In its fullness, the human experience of relationship and mutuality images divine life.”415 And for Scotus nothing images divine mutuality and human-divine relationship so perfectly as the Incarnation of Christ. With this background understanding, the following reference to Karl Rahner and John Duns Scotus bring this chapter to a conclusion.

Christian anthropology as outlined above represents an important development in the traditional Catholic understanding of the Judeo-Christian view of the human being. The new developments pinpoint basic structures of meaning by which dogmatic theology can give a holistic view of the human being. That merit withstanding, there is yet another development that brings the same tradition to another level of understanding for contemporary theology. For, it is one thing to grasp *imago Dei* as an ontological account of a human being. It is yet another to realize that a transcendental anthropology holds the key to a more versatile theological methodology in accordance with Revelation in Christ.
This is the contribution that Rahner and Duns Scotus bring to the Catholic theological tradition, a contribution that is very meaningful to mission theologies. In a special way, Rahner makes a synthesis of the previous developments in theological anthropology with Christology and by the same virtue, makes explicit the universal significance of Christ for the human race. Since it is not the intention of this author to present an expose of Rahner’s work, which at most, would be a replication of available sources, the next immediate purpose is to draw some working principles to meet the general objective of this study. Toward that specific objective this now study turns to Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV: THE WAY FORWARD

Given the current theological landscape of African Theology, the first Chapter had to raise a perennial question in the Catholic Theological Tradition. What is the foundation of a Christian theology? For there can be no doubt that, if the Church’s mission in Africa proceeds by the organizing principle(s) of the African traditional world views, then the African ecclesia can end up with a Church structure which is properly rooted in the native cultures, but without being truly Christian in its internal structures of faith, practice, and ultimate redemption. It is, therefore, in view of forestalling the possibility for such ecclesial anomaly that this study puts the primary focus on the need to attain general clarity in understanding of what it means to be a local church and to guide its mission of evangelization in Africa. To that end, the purpose of this chapter is primarily integrative. It seeks, on the basis of the previous chapters, to formulate working principles (and guidelines) for the church’s evangelizing mission in Africa. The principles in view are in the form of specific substantive contents ordered to the specific human and cultural anomalies in the collective African existence. The rationale
behind the current formulations is the expressed need in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council to incorporate human experience (culture) in theological reflection. This task requires that all the various levels of theology uphold fundamental principles in Catholic theology. The general objective of formulating general principles is, therefore, premised on the previously expressed anthropological assumption, namely, that the church’s evangelizing mission always encounters human cultures that have emerged as a result of humanity’s capacity for reflection and synthesis of their historical experiences. Hence, the principles as proposed do not replace the official Church teaching. Rather, they make Church teaching more intelligible and adaptable to the African local church. With specific reference to the African situation, Christology occupies a central place in the theological reflection tailored to inculturation. That is to say, since theology is the language with which the Catholic Church speaks to the world, then Christology is the foundation of the entire speech and life of the church. It, therefore, follows that for the Catholic Church to speak with a language proper to its nature, it must also know the anthropological language of the diverse ethnic groups that make up the Christian population of the African Catholic local Churches. This means that the church must attend to the basic structures of meaning with which native people express who they are in relation to the world around them. So, while the translation of the Gospel into native languages is essential to the mission of the church, such a task is only one step among more important ones. In short, it is on account of this basic understanding that this study proposes a way out of a theological impasse generated by the general contextual theological aversion to the biblical tradition and to the Church’s Western Christian heritage.
The apologetic position taken by African theology on the subject of Christology renders contextualization and inculturation in Africa null and void. The theological claims, presented in Chapter I, regarding the theological integrity of the traditional African religious heritage (in the singular) do not hold. Moreover, this study did not find any moral principles in the African religious heritages that could universalize the diverse cultural world views on the African Continent without sparking off all kinds of moral and human conflicts. Obviously, although the general principles and practical considerations proposed in this chapter are not exhaustive, they offer only one step out of the current cultural and theological impasses. In their theological substance, the principles point to an existential approach to contextual theologies and inculturation in Africa. Such theologies would have the purpose of bringing a Christian philosophy of a person (i.e. human nature) in dialogue with African anthropologies. In other words, redefining the philosophy of human nature is a necessary condition for a more humane cultural civilization in Africa. An existential approach means that African anthropologies are not to be presented in the abstract. The concrete African persons and their ways of viewing the realities that confront their common existence constitute the immediate point of concern. The real African peoples in their diversity are the living testimony of the true value of ancestral traditions. Peoples’ ongoing cultural attitudes, choices, actions and behaviors are in-roads toward a true understanding of the theological and spiritual viability of the traditional African religions. Consequently, the church in its mission presents Africa with a fundamental choice between biological ancestors and Christ. It is also a choice that establishes the way forward for those who profess faith in Jesus of Nazareth. In sum, the principles and guidelines as proposed are concise summaries that
accompany the interpretation and application of Christology. They underscore the basic direction of local theologies by ensuring that the Church’s mission is properly attuned to the basic human\textsuperscript{418} needs of the Africa people in their cultural diversity. In sum, while “general principles” point to the basic direction to be taken, practical guidelines are summaries which unearth the underlying assumptions in Christian faith and cultural world views. Seen as a whole, the principles and guidelines as proposed are mutually interdependent as Christian doctrine and its application.

\textbf{A Statement on Christology as a Principle}

A basic principle by nature presupposes a certain substantive content. For this same reason, this study perceives three specific Christological considerations as necessary in the attainment of general theological clarity required in the task of inculturation. These considerations consist of: what or who is at the center of Christian theology and the evangelizing mission of the Church. Second, contextual theologies need to consider how the Gospel relates to diverse cultures. Finally, what is the organizing principle(s) in the task of relating Christianity to any particular culture? It is the understanding of this author that these three questions have Christology as their basis and subject matter. It follows that each question calls for a specific task in mission and theology as a whole. Clearly, then, the principal statement that Catholic theology and mission are grounded in Christology is one that requires a nuanced interpretation and methodological procedures.

Basing ourselves on Chapter III, Christology is the most basic interpretive framework for contextualization and inculturation.\textsuperscript{419} Christology as the primary principle simply means that contextual theologies have to recognize the Christian view of
a human being as the organizing principle within a faith-culture setting. It is only then that the same theology can discover the fundamental relationship between Christianity and culture and the relationship between multiple contextual theologies in the one Catholic theological enterprise. This structural set up shifts theological premises from a Pan-African political agenda to the Vatican Council II anthropological-Christological schema. This arrangement also reinstates a human being as one who freely looks to Jesus Christ as the fullness of what it means to be a person. In the same vein, the principle relativizes Western Christian experience with regard to the Scriptural tradition ad the tradition of the Church in the quest to safeguard the true substance of the Judeo-Christian vision of humanity. This anthropological-Christological schema is vital for drawing a necessary distinction between the Western cultural experience(s)-past and present-and the biblical tradition itself. In view of the substance covered in Chapters I-III, the present arrangement implies that Christian anthropology is necessary for bringing out the essential relationship between Christianity and the Western cultural experience(s) as well as the limitations of the latter. In other words, contextual theological reflection is not self-referent; it must appeal to the transcendent horizon which Christology provides.

The second principle is derived from the anthropological-Christological schema. It consists in striving to understand such a schema in terms of faith and culture. The purpose is to allow for differentiations to emerge with regard to the cultural and the theological anthropological structures of meaning (GS, no. 57). That is, Christology has to be perceived through the lenses of a theological anthropological view of a human being for the reasons already discussed but only reiterated here. A general ontology is necessary for clarifying the basic commonalities in the diverse self-understandings and in
the building of conceptual and moral bridges so that African peoples, in their ethnic
diversity, can recognize their ultimate origin and identity. It is toward the realization of
this noble goal that the following sections present practical considerations as the starting
points for contextual theological reflections. The following presentation also presupposes
substantive knowledge of (Chapters 1-3) the theological links between the different
structures of meaning subsumed under the term principles and practical guidelines. In
other words, there is little, if any, introductions accompanying subsequent formulations.
Whether or not each heading and subheading represents a principle or working guideline
can be established from the respective substantive contents.

SECTION I

IMPLICATIONS OF IMAGO DEI FOR METHOD IN MISSION THEOLOGY

*Imago Dei* is the cutting edge in the missionary attempt to relate peoples and their
cultures to the Christian world view. *Imago Dei* is therefore a central working principle in
contextualization and inculturation. The methodological technicalities involved require
that we understand the relationship between philosophical anthropology and Christian
anthropology. This is the starting point toward recognizing the relationship between
Christian faith and cultural philosophies and the primacy of the former over the latter. To
that end, we need to apply Karl Rahner’s and John Duns Scotus’ ideas because of their
consistency with the Second Vatican Council teaching.

When Rahner asserts “a genuine anthropology *must* open into Christology,” he is
making a statement of principle for contemporary Catholic theological methodology. Its
substance consists in understanding the relationship of philosophy to theology as one that
centers on the meaning of a human being’s natural capacity to come to the knowledge of self and of reality. Like his prominent predecessor, Duns Scotus, Rahner draws attention to a general ontology as a domain common to philosophy and theology and the basis for comprehending the link between the two. So to speak of the natural bond between philosophy and theology is to indicate that both disciplines present a “scientific” account of a human being. But, lest we settle for their formal similarity or structural similarity at the expense of their teleological value, Rahner subordinates philosophy to theology and by the same virtue philosophical anthropology to Christology so as to reveal humanity’s need for Jesus of Nazareth. We are, henceforth, impelled to consider more carefully the philosophical and the theological contents in light of their ultimate origins, subject matter, purpose, and ends. This manner of proceeding translates into a “transcendental method” for reasons which Rahner and Duns Scotus provide: matters discussed in Chapter III. This chapter provides a summary outline of how Rahner presents Christology as the essence of philosophical anthropology.

A transcendental anthropology or Christology seeks to account for a human being based on his or her concrete experiences, but explained from the standpoint of the Judeo-Christian revelation. The heart of the aforementioned revelation consists in the statement that a human being is made in the image of God and Jesus Christ is its definitive expression. It cannot, therefore, be emphasized enough that “person and human nature” are central to the Christology of the incarnation and consequently to the mission theology of inculturation. In a forceful way that speaks to historical self-explanations, Scotus asserts that “The possibility of relationship depends upon the existence of persons who are capable of being related. No relationship can exist where there are not two terms
which are joined together." This is in reference to an ontological relationship such as that existing between a human being and the Trinity. That is, since human nature is patterned on the divine image, God must be recognized as the source and end of life. Rahner is emphatic in showing that Jesus exemplifies this reality fully. That Jesus expresses fully the human and the divine realities points back to *imago Dei*. The following Rahnerian underlying premises are very important if contextual theologians are to appreciate the basic need for cultural world views to open into Christology.

In accordance with the *imago Dei* anthropology, Rahner reaffirms the medieval view of transformation as the essence of the human journey. But he filters the same understanding through the Johannine transcendental Christology of the incarnation. The Eternal Word became Man in Jesus (Jn.1.1-14). By so doing, Rahner accentuates Jesus’ life as the explicit revelation and the definitive expression of human life. By implication, a concrete human being is always in need of *becoming more human*: “…since [an ordinary person] is not the fullness which can repose contentedly in itself, he is found by the infinite and so becomes what he is: one who never succeeds in encompassing himself because the finite can only be surpassed by moving out into the unfathomable fullness of God.” For Rahner, therefore, the mode of becoming human is epitomized in the incarnation. Rahner is not pointing to something outside of Christian human experience. Had Jesus, for instance, died as a baby at the hands of Herod’s assassins, Christianity would never have been. The physical birth had to lead to an adult human being; otherwise, no one would have known the kind of person Jesus is. All in all, the condition of “becoming human” finds full expression in Rahner’s emphasis on “surrendering,” passion, and death as its culmination. The resurrection testifies to the fact of Jesus
having accomplished the task of becoming fully human. These four elements of Jesus’ life are basic to comprehending the primacy of a transcendental approach to theology over Christologies from below. The logic is already set by Scotus: the divine is the proper horizon from which to understand the human reality. The resurrection expresses *imago Dei* at its best. For this very reason, the human being as God’s image is not a finished reality. It is a possibility or potentiality-always pointing to the goal.428 It is against this background that Rahner’s transcendental anthropology can be understood as a theological method.

In an introduction to this particular aspect in Rahner’s thought, Gerald McCool gives a succinct definition of transcendental anthropology. He says, “Transcendental anthropology is not only a method. It is the method of theology as well.”429 Precisely, it is at the level of anthropology as a method that a legitimate transition from anthropology (in general) to Christology can be recognized. The transition, however, requires that one understands the primordial structure of knowledge as consisting in relation of “being” to the “Being of beings.” In sum, the primordial structure of knowledge constitutes a metaphysical principle by which to recognize the basic relationship between the human being and God. The same principle is also necessary for reorienting the tendency in cultural anthropologies to focus on the human being in a way that undermines the basic orientation to the infinite mystery of God and of each person.430 However, the fact that a human being is naturally inclined to a transcendent end is not in itself a guarantee of self-actualization consistent with human nature as *imago Dei*. So Rahner rightly cites finitude as a philosophical and theological principle by which a line can be drawn between the basic human inclination expressed historically by ordinary human beings and Jesus of
Nazareth. He says, “The philosophical question as to a particular object is necessarily the question as to the knowing subject, because a priori the subject must carry with it the limits of the possibility of that knowledge.” Thus radical human finitude is an integral element to an understanding of Christology as transcendental anthropology, as well as the inherent limitation of cultural anthropologies. For Rahner, therefore, it is not enough to recognize that philosophy is concerned about the transcendental character of a person, given its focus on the subject of human knowledge. Theology is also concerned about the same subject, but in ultimate terms. Rahner is obviously striving to eliminate the subtle danger of collapsing theology into philosophy or equating them on account of having the same internal structure. So he accentuates the essential subject matter for theology in these terms. “It is only a theological question as long as it sees the individual object with its origin in and orientation towards God…God is not one object among others in the realm of man’s posteriori knowledge but the fundamental ground and the absolute future of all reality.” So the purpose of imago Dei, among other things, is to show that “the transcendental structures of the object are already determined.” Even though beings embody a natural impulse toward complete self-knowledge, they are not creators of that impulse. Rather, the impulse originates from a higher source but is discovered in the encounter with the world. The world is the context of self-discovery but not the ultimate horizon or source of their functioning power. As a corrective to a human tendency to self-preoccupation, theological anthropological methodology sharpens the nature of a human being as an embodied spirit.

In conclusion, Rahner concurs with medieval anthropological thought when he contends that a genuine anthropology can only emerge in the context of biblical
Revelation regarding the meaning of a person. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment, the anchor for, and the mirror of the primordial self-understanding that the Book of Genesis proclaims. Thornhill applying Rahner’s ideas expresses the same idea well. “The Christ even at once canonizes anthropocentrism and subordinates it to theocentrism: the intelligibility and values of human existence are safeguarded by their subordination to the divine reality, through Christ.”435 “Revealed theology has human spirit’s transcendental and limitless horizon as its inner motive and as the precondition of its existence.”436 This is Thornhill’s way of saying philosophical and theological knowledge are all concerned about the same subject content; i.e., the actual existence and the end of human life. In Rahner’s own words: “As soon as man is understood as the being who is absolutely transcendent in respect of God, ‘anthropocentricity’ and ‘theocentricity’ are not opposites but strictly one and the same thing, seen from two sides.”437 These statements are not only directed at obliterating a dichotomy between philosophy and theology. They also point out the basic human inclination to the infinite mystery as the key to grasping the common bond between philosophy and theology as well as their legitimate differences.

THE NEED FOR A SOTERIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE APPLICATION OF CHRISTOLOGY

The present consideration requires that we recognize the interrelationship between Christological foundations as a basic principle in relation to its actual application. For, it is essential that belief in the Christian mystery, Jesus Christ, is translated into pastoral action. That is to say, Christology is a doctrine about the person of Jesus Christ, expressed by his entire life. It therefore follows that Christology is a doctrine that forever presupposes concrete application, because the total meaning it embodies must become
incarnate in people’s lives. Because the incarnation presupposes the reality of actual saving grace, there is need for accurate knowledge regarding the person of Christ and the consequent assimilation of that knowledge. Contemporary Catholic thought is very consistent, creative, and nuanced in this regard as evident in all Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents and writings. For instance, the church’s teaching on theological foundations for mission generally consists in stipulating general principles and guidelines. There is, however, a shift in the Catholic theological method. In pre-Vatican Council II thought, for instance, it was taken for granted that non-Western local churches would benefit from the Christian faith by reflecting on and applying Christology on the basis of general doctrinal principles and guidelines. This way of applying Christology did not affect peoples’ lives meaningfully. The dominant trend was an increasing but notional understanding of Jesus Christ and all that he stands for. This would change with the theological momentum toward contextualization informed by Vatican Council II theology of the Church’s “mission in the world.” Now Christology has to be interpreted and applied while taking into account the native mindsets and actual needs of the respective local churches. This in no way means that contextualization transforms the practice of theology. Contrary to that assumption, Christology is a normative principle in the task of Christianity entering into dialogue with native cultures. It is on this account that interpretation must precede the actual application of doctrinal principles. But even at the stage of application, it is equally important to draw up general principles suited to the perceived needs of the church, whether local or universal. Such general principles are spelt out well in the many Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents.
The primacy of Christology, therefore, means that theological reflection has to take seriously the subjects of the purification and the ultimate redemption of culture. In other words, soteriology is significant in the interpretation and application of theological foundations. As the core of Christology, it constitutes the end to which contextualization and inculturation are ordered. The practical considerations as proposed, therefore, have to be seen as hermeneutic tools of social analysis, pinpointing the path by which African ontologies could open to the Christian world view. The next consideration expands on soteriology a basic principle in the Catholic missionary methodology.

The Notion of a World View is Essential to the Contextualization Process

The Judeo-Christian view encounters people who already have their own world views in place. That is to say, they have a moral horizon that provides them with the basic structures of meaning they hold as valid. By those values, people define who they are and how they ought to structure their existence. So when the biblical view enters a social milieu, it offers new elements as well as the ultimate horizon of meaning, but not without some familiarity with which a culture can identify.439 A question which must be addressed, however, is whether traditional African cultures are always morally pre-disposed to embrace the horizon of meaning Christianity offers to Africa. Contrary to the fact, the predominant voice in African theology suggests that this is indeed the case. Technically, the dominant African theological voice ignores the complexities underlying the meeting of Christianity with African local cultures. For many, if not most African Christians, Christianity is embraced alongside a strong attachment to the ancestral philosophies and values. It is, therefore, not surprising that the majority of African
theologians also opt for ancestrology rather than Christology as the valid foundation of the church’s mission and theology.

For present purposes, the basic presumption that the ancestor Christology would lead to the same end as Christology proper is utterly false. Basing ourselves on the substance of Chapters II & III, there are four major and related considerations that must inform the selection and application of theological foundations for contextual theology. The first consists in the discernment of the basic needs of the local cultures. The second consists in a proper grasp of the ultimate purpose of Christianity in general. Third, those concerned must have a good grasp of the organizing principles in Christian faith and in the native cultures concerned. The last consideration constitutes an organizing principle to facilitate Christian-cultural encounter. Otherwise, if the world view and the purpose of Christianity are presumed to be of the same substantial content as those of the native cultural religions, then, a theological posture such as that expressed by African theology is bound to emerge. The ancestor as the organizing principle of the native cultures is easily transposed into Christian theology. Consequently, biological ancestry replaces Jesus Christ on the presumption that the two frames of reference have the same substance, purpose and goal. It is in view of countering this simplification that Chapters II and III focused on the critical analysis of the African traditional cultures and the transcendent value of a human being, respectively. It is also in view of facilitating effective dialogue between Christianity and native cultures that the thesis of this study aims at generating principles for truly inculturated theologies in Africa. But in doing so, the task has been to meet the challenges presented by both African theology and traditional anthropologies, namely, the intent to center all reflection on the African
cultural experiences around the ancestral world view. For reasons given in Chapter III, the following considerations seek to ground anthropological consideration in the meaning of Jesus Christ. In this way the true meaning and value of ancestors would emerge.

**Translating “Person” and “Jesus” into a Soteriological Working Principle**

The subject of theological foundations for mission theology ought to be at the center of the church’s mission in Africa. At the core of this subject also lie basic soteriological questions: what is the nature of Christian salvation, who is being saved and who does the saving? These are basic and interrelated questions often presented separately for technical purposes. Nonetheless, it is in light of these questions that the meaning of “Jesus” and of a “person” emerges as a soteriological principle. The theological basis for the last statement of principle is already provided in Chapter III with respect to Christology as the essence of theological anthropology. For our present purposes, the true meanings of mission and theology have to be ultimately understood in light of soteriology. The purpose of this arrangement ought to be obvious at this point. The Church’s mission is basically ordered to engaging “persons” in dialogue with Christ with salvation as the goal of dialogue. It is from this experience that Africa can truly recognize the need for dialogue among its own myriad traditions and with the (traditional) Western social system. What is crucial is that the principles governing the stated dialogue have to be very clear. To this end Chapter III specifically pointed out that philosophical anthropology is a path to Christology as its end. This is because philosophical anthropology expresses historically constituted anthropologies. Christology as theological anthropology offers the philosophical and theological horizon for transcending the historical self-explanations. In brief, the need to relate the concept
of person to Jesus Christ is an urgent task for the church in Africa. For there are not only multiple concepts of what it means to be a human being, but traditional anthropologies are also set in a finite horizon, the natural sphere of concrete existence. To say, therefore, that the concept of the church’s mission and theology ought to revolve around a soteriology as a “principle” is to point to the Christian view of the human being per se as the most important factor for resolving basic obstacles in inculturation. The above statements imply that there is an essential relationship between a concept of a human being and theological foundations.

The human being as a theological principle culminating in the person of Jesus Christ allows theological reflection to be more practical yet focused on important matters amidst a multitude of cultural ideas and concerns. An immediate and practical example is how to lead an African person to the transcendental meaning of a human being. For reasons already provided, a “person” as a basic theological principle is the means by which ATR can enter into dialogue with the Judeo-Christian world views and the Western social system. It is for this same basic reason that Chapter III narrowed the scope of theological discernment to the meaning of a human being. In this way a general human ontology becomes necessary for spelling out the basic commonalities in the diverse self-understandings and in the building of conceptual bridges so that African peoples in their ethnic diversity can recognize their common but authentic identity and destiny with the rest of the world. Such advancement in knowledge is not only necessitated by anthropological poverty in the traditional African thought; it is also called for by a globalizing world which stands in critical need of moral imperatives to define the collective direction of human history. A right direction is not possible if something other
than the true meaning and value of a human being becomes the organizing principle of a
common history. Also for reasons already given in Chapter III, the Jesus event emerges
as the explicit answer to the common quest for the ultimate view of the human being. By
implication the question regarding the 
meaning of Jesus Christ for Africa is, therefore,
the most important theological question facing the local Church in Africa. It signals the
fundamental need to come to grips with the traditional experiences and how these relate
to changed conditions, local and global. The question cannot, however, be answered
through the means envisioned by the ancestral theological thought.

In conclusion, the meaning of Jesus Christ for the Catholic theology and its
mission is very basic and, as such, a valid answer must get to its core by inquiring into
the nature of the Person at the center of the Christian mystery of salvation. At one level,
this study affirms the centrality of Jesus Christ; at another level, its structural
methodology draws attention to soteriology as an integral aspect of theological
foundations without which theological reflection can become an abstract and meaningless
enterprise. In other words, Christology and soteriology have to be seen as one and the
same reality. The soteriological trajectory here not only draws attention to Jesus Christ as
a foundational principle but also to his redemptive role. Both are essential to the structure
of theological foundations. For while the nature of Christian theology allows the use of
“cultural structures of meaning,” the Christian world view does not validate culture for its
own sake (Chapter II). It therefore follows that a Catholic theological methodology that
is consistent with Vatican Council II thought must subordinate culture anthropologies to
Christology for reasons laid out in this study. Otherwise, indiscriminate use of cultural
ideas may “ultimately” hinder the intended goal of the Church’s mission. As a means of
safeguarding the evangelical integrity, this chapter presents the basic principles alongside some guidelines. Both terms generally have to do with the “internal alignment” of contextual theologies within the overall structure of Catholic theological thought, past, present, and future. The following major sections are a moderate illustration of the aforementioned technicalities. The following major section is, however, different in its substance and presentation in order to provide an important background to Section III-VI.

SECTION II
THE NEED FOR A BASIC SHIFT IN AFRICAN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

With reference to the concerns raised in Chapter I, there is not only inadequate use of scripture in many African contextual theologies, there is also a general lack of awareness of the fundamental conflict between internal controls in African theology and the nature and purpose of Christian mission. Therefore, as a corrective, the present considerations strive to show that the Christian principles governing (inculturation) evangelization can become pastorally effective only when preceded by a clear understanding of the conceptual and methodological obstacles in African theology. The obstacles broadly include, but not limited to, the structural set up of African theology, its soteriological assumptions and goals. To this end, the following paragraphs explain the aforementioned obstacles in terms of “internal controls.” These are controlling factors governing the substance and basic direction of African theology. For this same reason, “internal controls” stand in competition with the general principles in Catholic theological methodology as a whole.
The Need to Dismantle Internal Controls in African Theology

The task of reaffirming the centrality of Christology must start from a clear grasp of the methodological structure in African theological thought. Methods in contextual theology tend to focus on a narrowly defined historical approach as discussed in Chapter I. The narrowness consists in viewing history in the literal sense. History is defined exclusively in terms of the African religious and social political context. That this form of historical analysis is foreign to Catholic theology and to the nature of the Church is a matter treated in Chapter V. Thus, current mention of a historical approach is limited to the nature and practical consequences for the church’s mission in Africa.

Precisely, the first structural control consists in a global theology known as African theology. This is the global working framework for a contextual theology. The second consists in the goals pursued by African theology, namely: liberation, empowerment, unification, and restoration of African culture (in the singular). Together these make up the substantive content and theological rationales for the Church’s evangelizing mission. The same components imbue a “global theology” with a unified agenda realized through a historical method. A unified agenda draws together the many voices and concerns in African theology with a single purpose: to liberate, empower, unify, and restore Africa to its ancestral roots. The essence of these statements is clearly indicated by Emmanuel Martey when he says the “Second General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians” reaffirmed what has become an official statement of the criterion for articulating the African reality and for formulating a method by which African theology can address the issue of domination.

Africans emphasized history as the first methodological approach to African contextual analysis and to African theological interpretation. ‘For the Africans
there is no liberation without their historical presence, since they have been expelled from the field of history by their oppressors. Liberation, if true, must be historical liberation; if not there is no liberation.441

Clearly, Africa’s history of suffering is the justification for pursuing the ideals of liberation, empowerment, unification, and restoration of African culture. These define, shape, and determine how Christology is interpreted and applied.442 For our purposes, the combination of these factors reinforces the prevailing perception of:

(a) the concept of “culture” and of the soteriological significance of African Traditional Religions;

(b) the concept of African context;

(c) the method to be used therein;

(d) the meaning and the scope of a local theology;

(e) the problems and the needs of African people and,

(f) the use of scripture and tradition.

These six factors give a definite form to the character of African theology. That said, it is important that we understand the extent to which the African theological concept of liberation is in harmony with the Christian view of liberation and inculturation.

Internal controls in African theology are, in summary, more concerned with restoring the Continent to the grandeur of the more ancient ancestral cultures than with allowing Christian liberation to transform Africa. At the utmost, a pure historical approach has led to a basic shift from Christology to the ancestor as the unifying principle for a Christian Catholic theology. But as Chapter I indicated, the combination of the specified brand of a historical approach with a global African theology ignores the actual contexts of the people and their real needs. African theology, like traditional
African cultures, is basically orientated to the past rather than the future. So in its basic substance and direction, the current historical approach puts a wedge between liberation and inculturation. Internal controls dictate how the Christian mission ought to proceed by setting a limit of what Christianity can or cannot do in the African context. But since it is only proper that the Christian mission proceeds by its own internal dynamism, bridging the chasm between liberation and inculturation is integral to the proposed guidelines. The next remaining guidelines of the present section are proposed to meet this expressed need, namely; to reaffirm the essential relationship between liberation and inculturation. Here too, Martey’s views illustrate well the main objective pursued here.

**The Need to Bridge the Chasm between Liberation and Inculturation in African Theology Requires a Non-Ecumenical Approach to Catholic Contextual Theology**

From a biblical standpoint, inculturation is basically liberation. For this same reason, African liberation ought to draw its substantive content and pastoral significance from Christology rather than the political events that have marked Africa’s history. Only when it is perceived and applied as such can Africa’s liberation take on true and permanent significance. It is thus in light of the stated focus that the existing chasm between liberation and inculturation can be bridged. The intent to bridge the existing chasm requires a clear grasp of the African theological view of liberation in relationship to inculturation. This will in turn cast further light on the basic character and function of internal controls in African theology.

African theology maintains that the Continent’s “present condition has come about as a result of five centuries of [its] history that has been largely caused by contact with Western capitalist imperialism.” But while Martey upholds this common belief, he also recognizes a dichotomy in the way African theology presents inculturation and
liberation. He illustrates his viewpoint with a critique of Black South Africa and Sub-Saharan approaches to liberation and inculturation, respectively. The concern he raises in this regard is legitimate. According to Martey, Black South African theology places emphasis on political liberation while Sub-Saharan Africa is mainly concerned with inculturation. He further observes that South African theology excludes cultural considerations just as Sub-Saharan Africa generally ignores socio-economic and political liberation. Regardless of the fact that Martey views inculturation and liberation as separate realities, the following observation he makes stands to reason, some basic flaws notwithstanding. Martey insists that in articulating the African reality one should get beyond the narrow confines of political liberation to

the totality of African existence - politics, economics, religion, language, culture, ethnicity, music, art, sexuality, and changes brought about by modern science and technology that have had impact on African people. These are not separate parts of the whole existence, but rather, are intersecting dimensions of the African experience and African cultures.

However, other than a historical approach, Martey does not suggest a new methodology by which the elements he proposes would be systematically tied together. As in other instances, the previous points are simply stated as a matter of fact. Although this brief analysis does not do justice to Martey’s overall insights, the concerns he raise are legitimate in themselves. But does Martey get beyond the blind spots which pose great obstacles in the path of theological discernment? To give a concise answer to this question, we have to understand his view on the relationship between liberation and inculturation. A dichotomy which Martey points out is fundamentally accurate. His Christological underpinnings are, however, inadequate and misleading. For instance, his critique of Black South African preoccupation with political liberation without regard for
culture as a whole is justified. But his critique of Sub-Saharan preoccupation with inculturation without liberation is accurate insofar as inculturation is seen as a means for a wholesale endorsement of African cultures. Apart from that, Martey misunderstands the fact that liberation is the substance of inculturation and the latter is essentially Christology.

Take, for instance, Martey’s own view that liberation and inculturation are two dimensions in the overall task of liberating Africa. For him, they constitute two Christologies as in his sub-topic indicates: “Christologies of Inculturation and Liberation.” Referring to the importance of Scripture and tradition for African theology, he goes on to state clearly that, “no single theology, certainly not the inculturationist or the liberationist…can present us complete theological knowledge in Africa.” This is obviously a dichotomous view, which ultimately undermines his legitimate intent to link inculturation to liberation. Martey’s interpretation demonstrates a basic lack of understanding that liberation is the core substance of inculturation. At the same time, it is in this kind of misinterpretation that we ought to appreciate the extent to which the ecumenical factor can be a disservice to inculturation.

The re-evangelization of Africa needs a concerted collaboration among different Christian denominations. To that end, African theology has, since its inception, been an ecumenical project. However, this has to go on without leveling the substantive and methodological technicalities in Catholic theology and mission. So, let it be outright clear that the issue raised here is not about whether or not ecumenical collaboration is important to a contextual theology. Rather, the point is that a contextual theology in Africa that is a product of ecumenical efforts at the very initial stage is too premature and
ill-conceived. Emmanuel Martey, like many of African theologians, hails from a Presbyterian Protestant background and like Protestant African theologians, speaks for inculturation.\textsuperscript{451} It ought to be recalled that the theology of inculturation was crafted in the context of the Catholic Church’s self-understanding (ecclesiology). Needless to say, the Catholic self-understanding as a Church has direct bearing on Catholic theology and methodology. Hence, an ecumenical approach to theology, from the very start, ignores the realities of diverse ecclesiology which in effect propose a different perspective on the method in theology, mission and in the confession of the one Christian faith, to say the least. To mention but one example, non-African Catholic theologians maintain a disregard for a unified theological view and the role of the Magisterium in the structure of Catholic theological thought. This position requires no further argument to recognize that a local theology which is a product of an ecumenical project at this point in time, not only poses a problem to the emergence of a genuine Catholic contextual theology; it also ignores that diverse ecclesiological perspectives by nature resist the full and integral application of the Vatican Council II teaching in its complexity. As a result, \textit{African theology} operates by either compromising or conforming to predetermined philosophical-political ideals which are blended with Christological and ancestrological assumptions. The whole wealth of the Second Vatican Council teachings that would add clarity to many vexed issues in contemporary African history are, as a result, not effectively applied.\textsuperscript{452} The following paragraphs further illustrate the misunderstanding of the essential relationship between inculturation and liberation.
A Précis of Iniobong Udoidem’s Interpretation of John Paul II’s Teaching on Inculturation

The ongoing failure to comprehend inculturation as liberation stems from defining inculturation as incarnation, and in doing so, the latter is explained solely in reference to the mere taking on of flesh by the Word of God. In addition, the incarnation is perceived as an event that happened simultaneously in all cultures. This erroneous view is literally translated into a method of inculturation which consists in finding similarities between the African and the Judeo-Christian religious external expressions. Martey’s own position illustrates the previous point. Explaining the shift in pastoral theology from “adaptation” to incarnation, Martey has this to say. The “theology of incarnation”…was open to the aspiration of African people. Incarnation was preferable because it involved “immersing Christianity in African culture [so that] just as Jesus became man, so must Christ become African.” But as the next principle illustrates, the notion of Christ becoming African is completely different from that expressed in Catholic theology of mission. John Paul II’s teachings cited below is a fitting example.

The Second Vatican Council teaching on the significance of God’s general self-communication prior to the Jesus event was generally received with theological optimism by Catholics and others. The teaching stirred a new theological consciousness in African Catholicism in particular. African theologians have since sought to make explicit and applicable the Conciliar teaching. Be as that may, inculturation became merely the means for resolving the longstanding problem for African theology: Western cultural hegemony. Similarly, inculturation is continually seen as a tool for remedying the harm done by colonialism. It provides ancestral theologians with the needed leverage to validate their argument concerning God’s presence and activity in African traditions prior to Christian
mission in Africa. Accordingly, the incarnation of Christ is increasingly viewed as an affirmation of all that God had already begun prior to the historical incarnation. Thus African theology often appeals to the idea of cultural preparedness to argue for the comparative significance of the ATR to Revelation in Israel. Indigenous cultures have been equally prepared to receive the Gospel of Christ and consequently to shape their independent destinies, the argument goes. It is important to note that the previous perspective places all cultures on an equal footing with the Revelation in Israel. God’s universal self-communication is a reality ante-dating the New Testament event. Consequently, they say the African Traditional Religions ought to be seen as a preparation for the New Testament just as in the case of the Old Testament. This dominant view must be noted for what it seeks to achieve. That is, only by re-rooting itself in the ancestral cultural heritages can Black Africa rediscover its “humanity” and function in accordance with its own cultural and religious inclinations. However, questions must be raised as to the extent of the stated preparation and whether general revelation is synonymous with explicit Revelation in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The following précis of Iniobong Udoidem’s interpretation of John Paul II’s teaching on the essential relationship between incarnation and inculturation offers insight into the absence of true Christian liberation in African theology.

In his address to the University Community in Portugal, John Paul II said:

It is through the providence of God that the divine message is made incarnate and is communicated through the culture of each people. It is forever true that the path of culture is the path of man, and it is on this path that man encounters the one who embodies the values of all cultures and fully reveals the man of each culture to himself. The Gospel of Christ, the incarnate word finds its home along the path of culture and from this path it continues to offer its message of salvation and eternal life \(^{455}\) (my emphasis).
Here John Paul clearly acknowledges the essential value of culture in the total scheme of human existence. But this he does without subordinating a human being to culture. Very remarkable is the strong emphasis on culture, not as an end in itself, but as a “path” through which humanity encounters God in Christ. Iniobong puts the same statements into the perspective of his reflection and makes notable deductions. He begins by situating inculturation in its proper theological and historical context in these words: “Inculturation is the new concept of Evangelization which takes into consideration the whole of salvation history, beginning from creation to the present day evangelization mission. The whole concept is rooted in the missiological character of God’s salvific activity.” This particular perception is the main thrust of his argument. His interpretation of the essential relationship between inculturation and the incarnation of the Word is also made against the same backdrop. He says, “The notion of incarnation as inculturation is that there is no one culture which is the embodiment of the message of Christ. Rather, all cultures were and are affected simultaneously by the incarnation event and thus all cultures are immanently transformed. To spell out its methodological implications for mission, Iniobong makes the following conclusion. “This implies a seeing of the incarnation event as having affected all cultures, thus, making the function of the evangelizer, a matter of going about identifying and proclaiming Christ who is already present in a given culture.” Obviously, this is a fundamentally flawed perception of John Paul II’s teaching on inculturation.

Iniobong does not simply misinterpret the core of John Paul II’s teaching. His position also begs a lot of questions regarding the essential relationship between Christianity and culture. According to Iniobong, the saving manifestation of Jesus Christ
in the world is something that happened apart from Jesus’ Person, his public preaching within a specific cultural context, his passion, death and resurrection, with the necessary free cooperation of the believer; to say nothing about the Church’s evangelizing mission. Moreover, “grace” is a static reality rather than something that is at once concrete and dynamic, signaling a unique invitation to enter into an ever-deepening and enlightening communion with God and with one another. The consequence of Iniobong’s view can only breed a moral stance that curtails the recognition of God’s freedom to be God, insisting as he does on indiscriminate conservation of traditional values and customs. In brief, it is for reasons such as these that the future of contextual theology in Africa must proceed from a clear understanding of the true Christological character of inculturation.

John Paul II’s teaching offers an immediate point of reference.

**A Christocentric Method is the Way Forward: John Paul II on Inculturation in Africa**

The Pope’s teachings, which Iniobong also cites, are consistent with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the theology of mission. Accordingly, transformation, collective and individual, is the mode and goal of inculturation. John Paul does not envision transformation in abstract terms. Rather, he grounds it in the meaning of a human being in light of which the true value of African cultures can be established and safeguarded. This in turn means that “cultural transformation” takes place via the human moral agent. For John Paul, then, a human being is fundamental to a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the incarnation relates to God’s general self-communication outside the Judeo-Christian faith. John Paul makes this clear as he strives to expound the relationship between incarnation and inculturation. Discernible in his teaching is the necessity for mutual interchange between theological reflection and
methodology, or the concurrence of “technical” and “expository” procedures. Such a procedure, if well carried out, can facilitate a deeper understanding of culture in a way that inspires the need for transformation toward a Christian world view. We shall comment in passing on the stated technical trajectory.

Convinced that theological and educational technicalities must go into any inculturation processes, John Paul II points out the following:

You are aware that inculturation commits the Church to a path that is difficult but necessary. Pastors, theologians and specialists in the human sciences must also collaborate closely, so that this vital process may come about in a way that benefits both the evangelized and the evangelizers, in order to avoid undue haste that would end in syncretism or secular reduction of the proclamation of the Gospel.459

It ought to be noted that nothing in these two citations suggests that inculturation consists in a matter of identifying Christ who is already present in native cultures as Iniobong claims. On the contrary, the Pope recommends a perspectival study so as to reinforce clarity and commitment to a well integrated study of culture. By implications, the theological elucidations that ensue depend then on the proper alignment of the various perspectives and the constant incorporation of new findings so that different but often subtle structures of meaning in any one culture can be brought to light. Needless to emphasize, the success of such alignment depends on the coherent understanding of the fundamental Christian principles involved. This requires no further argument in this chapter, given the substance covered in the previous chapters. It suffices to say, Vatican Council II documents and post-Conciliar teachings reaffirm the primacy of Jesus Christ in all aspects of the Christian faith expressed through the Church’s life. Important to note is the creative tensions between Christ and the concrete human being, a topic treated in Chapter III. These are two facets in the comprehensive understanding of the relationship
between Christianity and culture, inculturation and liberation. Such a relationship can hardly be termed Christian, if it does not elicit a measure of the need for transformation, be it individual or collective.

In brief, the Christocentric view of transformation in the contemporary church’s teaching can be grasped from recognizing that a human being exists in an ontological relationship to Jesus Christ. Christianity does not, therefore, present Christ as a past reality or an “optional factor” that can be dismissed by those who confess salvation through him. There can be no doubt that John Paul II was aware of this basic contradiction in the African theological thought. Hence, his obvious concerns for theological technicalities should not overshadow the Christocentric character of his message. For, it is from that standpoint that we can really comprehend the ways in which the incarnation of Christ relates to God’s general self-communication. For instance, in one of his several addresses to the Church in Africa, John Paul II made an unequivocal affirmation of the purpose of the Gospel mission in relation to traditional African cultures.

Inculturation, which you rightly promote, will truly be a reflection of the incarnation of the Word, when a culture, transformed and regenerated by the gospel, brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life….there is no question of adulterating the Word of God or emptying the cross of its power (1Cor.1:17) but rather of bringing Christ to the very center of African life and lifting up African life to Christ. Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ in the members of his body is himself African (emphases mine).

Yet when Iniobong interprets the same statements he lays emphasis, not on the history of salvation and the Judaic tradition as the context of the incarnation, but on God’s general self-communication which he makes the interpretive framework for everything. In the
end, God’s general self-revelation in cultures becomes the reference point for the incarnation and the redemption by Christ. It becomes possible to understand why Iniobong’s interpretation implies that the Jesus event adds nothing new to what has been revealed in cultures. All in all, the incarnation is then seen as a tool for validating the theological integrity and autonomy of local theologies. This is neither the position of John Paul II nor of Second Vatican Council theology of mission. On the contrary, the Pope puts strong emphasis on the person of Christ as the primary “principle” in the “transformation” and “regeneration” of African cultures.

Based, therefore, on John Paul’s interpretation, the conclusion must be, Christ “can” become African, not by virtue of being cloaked in the traditional cultural forms, even when the latter are diametrically opposed to what Christ stands for. Rather, Christ can become African only when people are freely willing to be transformed into his likeness. This likeness is not one of external forms but of substance: a communion with God through the Spirit of Jesus (Lk 4:14-30; Jn. 14). The reality of this communion too has to be manifest in tangible attitudes, actions, and relationships. The transformation the Pope points to demands, therefore, a courageous and honest look into the diverse African cultures with a view of uprooting values and attitudes that are not in tune with the biblical view of human nature and existence. Indeed, cultures do not transform themselves; only human beings can bring about transformation. Seen this way, liberation and inculturation are not simply “two dimensions” of Christology as Martey and others may want us to perceive. Inculturation is always about liberation. So unless contextual theologies express clearly the essential relationship between them beyond the current positions, the existing dichotomy will continue to cloud theological debates and missionary work.
SECTION III

A Religious Memory as the distinguishing Mark between the African Religions and the Judeo-Christian Faith Tradition

An obvious characteristic of African Traditional Religions is a felt need to remember and pass on shared and lived memories from the past. In reality, this is a universal human need, without which human traditions and values die away. Therefore, seen in itself, the two dimensional act of remembering and passing on is integral to human life and existence. However, Chapter III raised a concern indispensable to the human need to remember and pass on shared and lived experiences. Does a felt need to remember and pass on lived memories preclude an ongoing openness to the mystery of self in relation to God? Many contextual theologies and African Christians in general have a tendency to posit a basic commonality between African religions and biblical revelation. Such assertions do not hold for reasons given in the previous chapters. In view of discerning that which is theologically valid and that which is not from a Christian point of view, the current sections propose the basic freedom to choose one’s destiny and a religious memory as interrelated principles for contextualizing biblical revelation in the diverse African context. The two principles are especially significant for bringing out the fundamental differences between ATRs and biblical revelation.

Memory is an important element of human nature. It is like the air we need in order to breathe and live. Human life disintegretates without integral memory. But what is memory? Memory is a generic term describing two dimensional and interdependent functions of the intellect. The first function, which can be called instrumental memory, accompanies everyday action and decision making that goes on at every minute of one’s life. It is functional because through it, the intellect is engaged in and at the ongoing
service of every human decision and action. Because of the spontaneous character of the instrumental memory, we are hardly conscious that we are exercising it until we forget something. Obviously, religion needs this kind of memory. But, as an organized system of values and beliefs, religion moves its adherents to exercise memory at a much deeper level of the intellect. This level consists in the second function of the intellect described below.

The second function consists in the intellect making a selective and ongoing synthesis of the past experiences. This then is a function of the rational intellect or rational memory. That is to say, memory is an integral function of the intellect, because the human intellect has the natural ability to “recall or re-member” events in the past and organize them according to recognized hierarchies of values. Value per se is by nature moral and religious at the same time, because it speaks to the core of a person as a transcendent “being.” Since every action is at once moral and religious, every human being can be considered to exist as a basically religious person, even outside a religious creed. Furthermore, because value is tied in with the basic freedom to choose, recognized hierarchies of values are crucial to whether or not persons will fully embrace the ongoing journey of transformation and self-transcendence. Hence, in order to function as an authentic human being, one needs to develop in body and in spirit. This basic need is served by the rational intellect finding fresh meaning in what one remembers. That is to say, the instrumental memory and the rational memory ought to establish meaningful connections in what one remembers and passes on. It is in this process that certain meanings and values are dropped in favor of others. This is not to imply that every new meaning and value is always good. In fact, it is due to the possibility of bad choices that
all religions present what they consider to be their highest hierarchy of values. The latter comprise the means by which religious adherents realize themselves and their collective destinies. In short, the two functions of the intellect described above are collectively termed here as religious memory. The following paragraphs offer only a brief summary, highlighting the importance of the religious memory in understanding a basic difference between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the African Traditional Religions (ATRs). A detailed account of memory as a creative dynamic discernible in all religious traditions is not possible within the present scope. It suffices to mention that the universality of a religious memory in all religious experiences does not presuppose uniformity in religious experience, usage and substantive content. The implied difference is the primary reason for employing a concept of religious memory to bring out the fundamental differences between the biblical faith and the African Traditional Religions.

This author currently identifies two major ways in which a religious memory is used in religion. The first consists in a distorted use of the instrumental memory. In this instance, persons religious adherents choose not to live by a recognized value system. Rather, prevailing circumstances and needs determine the value and nature of decisions to be made. This is a depraved form of memory because it does not take the past and the authentic future into the present life considerations. Obviously, this kind of religious memory is alien to African Traditional Religions and to biblical faith.

A true religious memory is consistent with the two functions of the human intellect as described above. However, active memory (instrumental memory) has to be accompanied with some form of synthesis, which by nature presupposes the need to pass on values from past experiences. There is, however, a basic difference in the way ATRs
and biblical faith utilize a religious memory. In biblical faith, religious memory is a self-transcending dynamic imbuing its adherents with “a living faith creed” which ensures that the biblical tradition does not ossify. In this way, the biblical tradition is able to adapt and meet new historical challenges, while simultaneously opening its adherents to ever-new horizons of meaning. This goes on without the tradition changing its core-substance and basic direction toward the infinite mystery of God. In brief, the Judeo-Christian religious tradition is as self-sustaining as it is self-validating. It is always within the reach of a practicing Jew or Christian to recognize that the God of Abraham is unequivocally present, in command, and involved in the sphere of human existence. So when a faithful Jew or Christian remembers, he or she does so with an understanding that he or she exists in a living relationship of mutuality with God. Such a believer does not emerge unchanged from the experience of remembering the past and handing it on to future generations. Rather, one believes that he or she has been “touched” by God and therefore stands in need of a continuous transformation by the same God. Hence, this kind of faith is not ethereal; it is concrete in the sense that the believers feel moved by grace to change his or her limited value system on the basis of ongoing encounter with God. The past experiences, good or bad, become the basis and motive for future encounters with the living God. It is in this intertwining of memory and increased moral sensitivity that biblical revelation is depicted as a journey of faith and reason from creation to resurrection. The major but interim events are but necessary steps for future developments. Each phase contains the seed for a developed understanding of the personal mystery in relationship to God. Hence, just as memory is pivotal in the maturation of a person, so it is in the development of the religious truths within a
tradition. Also, in order to sustain a basic human openness as a condition for transformation as the end of human life, one has to exercise a religious memory.

Religious memory according to biblical revelation is, therefore, a point at which God called Israel from Egypt and recreated their past in light of their present situation of slavery. God refocused Israel on the future horizon: the Promised Land. In the event of a crisis; i.e., when the changes in Israel’s “present memory” deviated from the pattern of God’s self-revelation, the past became the guarantee of the future, while the latter became a motive for further creativity. The dialectical tension between the past, present, and future was always a necessary decisive moment from which the Judaic tradition developed from a crude perception of the deity to a sublime understanding and experience of God reflected in the Hebrew prophets and culminating in the Jesus event. In sum, a religious memory is comparable to a needle and thread with which Israel weaved together their religious experience into a unique mosaic. With a back and forward loop, Judaism and New Testament writers did what political empires of their time could not do. In the words of my New Testament Professor, Fr. Sean Kealy, C. S. Sp., “Israel experienced everything but forgot nothing.” They did not conceal their failures in order to find fulfillment in their transitory achievements. Instead, everything had meaning, because everything belongs to one religious memory that has its origin in God’s self-revelation. But, how does the Judaic religious memory differ from that evidenced in the ATRs?

The texts used in Chapter I clearly indicate that the act of remembering the past is integral to Black African religious consciousness in general. A religious memory finds elaborate expression in the traditional ritual celebrations. While a few aspects of the
Judeo-Christian faith are similar in form and substance to those found in ATRs, there are basic technical and substantive discrepancies in the latter traditions. To date, the act of remembering in the ATRs involves recycling the values systems designed from the remote past. This kind of remembering transforms the intellect to see the past as a “paradise to be recaptured” and relived at all costs. Change in “form and substance” is seen as a detriment to a religious memory. This kind of resistance carries with it very basic problems. Authentic religious memory acts as a catalyst for the development of faith. It impels the believer toward the transcendent. Therefore, a religious memory that basically consists in a mere passing on of values from the past impels persons toward self-preservation and pre-occupation, at the same time stifling the natural impetus toward the infinite mystery and self-transcendence. Consequently, the possibility for ongoing encounter with the living God is equally hampered. A defensive moral stance is the lot of religious traditions bent on the scrupulous preservation of their traditions. The respective adherents are less willing to reinterpret their originating religious experiences in the light of the present in order to guarantee further development in the understanding of God’s nature, presence, and activities in their midst and in the world. Under such circumstances, there emerges a possibility of worshipping a past religious event in itself, rather than God.

In conclusion, the need for contextual theologians to understand the relationship between native traditions and the Judeo-Christian tradition is valid. However, such an effort is not simply a matter of linking the two traditions according to their formal expressions, a move that ignores what is really at work in historical revelation. Moreover, such hermeneutics ignore that the inner character of biblical faith is a journey
of ongoing development in understanding God’s self-revelation and that memory as authentic creativity can only be maintained by putting God first and self second. Without ontological ordering of a religious memory, religion and culture can degenerate into a dehumanized self-preservation. This in turn triggers off a dynamic of self-depreciation.

**The Problematic of Structuring Basic Human Freedom in African Traditional Cultures**

When native religious structures of meaning ossify, basic freedom becomes the possession of cultures rather than of individual persons. In order for the group to ensure that their religious memory is passed on from generation to generation, individual liberties are curtailed to a greater extent. This phenomenon is evident in African cultures and religions. Basic freedom is limited in the sense that individuals are free to live and order their lives in the way they want, provided their freedom to choose who they want to be remains within the norms of the tribal mores. To put it slightly different, when a person is subordinated to culture, such one exists in a state of uncompromising obedience to the cultural world view. That this is a serious obstacle to Christian faith and practice and to the building of harmonious African nation-states is the primary objective of the current and the subsequent sections.

It must be emphasized that the choice for or against God is always contained in the freedom to choose. Basic freedom constitutes one of the primaries principle by which we can establish whether or not a particular anthropology is oriented toward the transcendent or otherwise. In the freedom to choose lies the possibility for the survival or demise of African cultures. The way contextual theologies examine how basic freedom is socially structured not only helps the local church to comprehend the basic orientation of African cultures and religions; it is also indicative of the extent to which contemporary
African Christians are disposed toward Christianity in its radicalness. T. M. McFadden’s position lends itself well to the present consideration. “Man is a being of finite resources oriented to the infinite.”\textsuperscript{467} He elaborates on the substance of that orientation in these compelling terms:

Man is radically free to respond to or reject God. The unique supernatural existential order wherein God draws all men to himself does not forestall the sin of unbelief or the acceptance of this divine self communication as totally gratuitous. Only insofar as man’s free response to God’s word is recognized as self-realization can this response be fully human.\textsuperscript{468}

Implied here is the view that culture is an essential yet unfinished reality which always stands in need of redemption. The incompleteness of culture always implies the incompleteness of the cultural subjects. Here too McFadden offers a point for development and transition into Rahner’s Christology via theological anthropology. “Within the theological enterprise, anthropology would be a study of human beings insofar as they are related to God.”\textsuperscript{469} Christian anthropology does not simply assume that the incarnation event is already immanent in all cultures. Rather, it “seeks to explain man in the light of revelation, particularly the Christ event. It asks how man relates to God’s world and hence inquires into his understanding of the world and himself.”\textsuperscript{470} Christian anthropology then turns human finitude into a necessary good, not a curse. For the

Absolute is perceived as the metaphysical ground of man’s limitless receptivity toward being itself…The acknowledgement of this tension [between person and God] and its implication for man as both limited and transcendent is the foundation for the open-ended anthropology without which religion and revelation become totally extrinsic to the human spirit. The fulfillment of this tendency becomes explicit for the Christian in the mystery of the Incarnate Word, the ultimate union of God and man who is the paradigm for all humankind. Christology becomes, therefore, the culmination of theological anthropology.\textsuperscript{471}
Thus the corollary which is a corrective of a depreciating focus on self can be put into proper perspective through cultures entering into dialogue with Christianity.

SECTION IV

PRINCIPLES AS TOOLS FOR MEDIATING CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE WITH TRADITIONAL CULTURES

In the previous sections, we pointed out the tendency to separate theology of liberation from transformation, in theory and in method. It goes without saying that the objective of liberation, which only has Western domination or African political leaders as its raison d'être, falls far short of the Catholic teaching on inculturation. Contextual theology has to strive to establish a measure of proportionality between the past, present, and the future history of the Continent. Even then, the “present African history” comprises the vantage point for evaluating the significance of the past and for setting the direction of the Continent through the contextualization process. In this same regard, an honest articulation of the African reality is a necessary critical step. It is, therefore, because of the need to move contextual theologies toward the Christological horizon that working principles are necessary for emptying a monolithic theology of its “rigid poles” or internal controls. This must be if Christology is to serve its real purpose in the church’s mission and theology. Part of the church’s mission is to gather into one all that is morally valid in every culture and to universalize it, thus transforming it into the patrimony of all humanity even beyond Africa. The act of gathering is a necessary step for recovering the sense of a “common reason” as the energy driving forward a common human history. The question, however, is: can a common reason evolve and thrive in the context of multiple philosophies of human nature?
The preceding analyses set the stage for recognizing a general human ontology as the working framework for Christian-cultural and inter-cultural dialogues. With reference to Chapters II and III, the last statement simply means that Christianity offers a philosophical framework in which persons situated in diverse cultural settings can recognize their common ontological identity. Without the aforementioned framework, it is very difficult to appreciate the rationale for positing a human being as the foundation of Catholic theology and mission. Therefore, as a working principle, human ontology is the backdrop against which individual cultural anthropologies are evaluated. For instance, the African traditions, the Western social system, and Christianity, are all framed within a specific world view. Each has a unique set of underlying principles. Also because world views embody organizing principles that govern collective existence within a respective social setting, social or religious world views are critical to any form of dialogue. It is on account of these concrete realities that a human being constitutes a an essential working principle in contextual theologies and inculturation. Further explanation is necessary to clarify the way in which the terminology of “principle” is used in the present regard.

A “principle” is generally defined in two general but related ways. In one instance, it refers to an underlying law or assumption required in a system of thought. For example, the moral value of a human being is the most basic principle governing the Western social system. In another instance, a principle is also defined as the primary source of a specific reality. This implies that a human being is the ethical standard of
decision-making and morality. When the two levels of meaning are viewed as a whole, a human being constitutes a primary principle because it offers a way of working out social and individual existence within and outside the boundaries of a particular world view. Therefore, the proposal to situate contextual theology in a general human ontology sets the task of dialogue at a different level. Precisely, human dignity, rather than culture, constitutes a criterion by which the church in Africa can determine what to take and what not to take from Western culture. This basically implies distinguishing that which is morally good from that which is not. This is a general criterion and consists in whether established values promote or undermine human dignity. This is only a first step in the long process of discernment.

One other principal factor in human ontology is the role of Christianity in the African-Western cultural dialogue. Important elements of the Judeo-Christian view of human nature and a person are deeply ingrained in the Western social philosophy. At the same time, Western culture is not the full embodiment of the Judeo-Christian view of humanity and all that it stands for. The Word of God, Jesus of Nazareth, made forever visible in the New Testament, is the full embodiment of human nature in its transcendence and in its corporeal diversity. In light of this, the African stance toward the Western religious heritage and culture has to be two-pronged. On the one hand, Western culture stands, not as the fullness, but nonetheless, a concrete demonstration of the inherent potential of the Judeo-Christian vision of humanity. On the other hand, Western culture, like all societies, also stands in need of redemption. In sum, African-Western cultural dialogue calls for a critical selection of values and cultural goods from the Western culture. At the same time, limitations inherent in culture call for the
recognition of Christian anthropology (Christology) as the ultimate point of reference in inter-cultural dialogue. Christianity not only acts as a corrective of deviant developments in both cultures, but it also offers the moral impetus to delve into the mystery of Jesus Christ, incarnate and risen. This is necessary to prevent the dialogue from crystallizing into mere abstractions or violent engagement. All in all, inculturation puts Christianity in dialogue with culture. At the same time, inculturation is also a means toward recognizing the transcendence of Christianity over and above any culture. The present procedure also shifts the focus on cultural and religious hegemony to another level. Unless we recognize these nuances in this study as a whole, the temptation of identifying Christianity with any one culture will continue to dog contextual theologies. No Western government today can impose its culture on Africa without the consent and choice of African governments and peoples. As a matter of fact, the ordinary African person is more eager and quicker to imitate the Western life styles than any African government would have them do. This goes without an equal attempt to evaluate what is being assimilated from the West.

In his recent book entitled, Jesus of Nazareth, Benedict XVI was cited by Pittsburgh Catholic weekly report to have expressed concern about the nature of Western involvement in Africa: “Foreign aid to Third World Countries, for example, has imposed a materialistic technical solution on populations, ignoring their religious beliefs….Africa in particular has been ‘robbed and looted’…and like a man on the roadside in Christ’s parable, is in need of a good Samaritan.” The Pope went on to indicate the primary cause of all the aforementioned evils. “Instead of giving these populations God…”we have brought them the cynicism of a world without God, in which the only things that count are power and profit.” This is an extremely important observation which bears on the
proposed structure of dialogue. Since the Christian vision of humanity is the moral
foundation of the Western social system, there is no way African nations can succeed in
inculcating the moral values of the Western social philosophy without reference to
Christianity as its ultimate frame of reference. Precisely, this means that the Western
involvement in Africa must not be accompanied by a rigid separation of Christian faith
and reason from parliamentary actions. To do otherwise is to cut the tree at its roots.
Africa will end up in the same scenario that David Walsh speaks about with regard to
nations that have acquired the rational tools of Western civilization without its Christian
frame of reference. An immediate example is China, which is going through rapid
technological advancement but while remaining insensitive to human rights. Even
when nations like China speak about human rights, they do so with a different
understanding of human nature than the one integral to Christianity. The conclusion
Walsh makes in this regard is not only timely, but it is also of extreme significance. By
abandoning a Christian consciousness, the West automatically loses the very tools it has
for advancing the true value of political freedom and liberty through dialogue. It is for
reasons such as these that the African governments and local churches must strive to
comprehend the moral frame of reference in the Western social system without which
ecclesial and political life in African states builds on a flimsy foundation. Only then can
Christianity accomplish something meaningful and long lasting in Africa which is
situated irreversibly in the Western social system. A critical view of Western cultural
influence must be accompanied by similar regard for traditional social philosophies.
Chapters II to III already treated the fundamental limitations in ancestral world views.
The latter comprise an important horizon in any attempt to understand the implications of
a historical method in African theological thought. The next set of practical
considerations seeks to clarify, although without being exhaustive, the proposal made in
this study that contextual theology be “critical of traditional social philosophies.”

The Need to Recognize the Power of Ethnocentrism to Empty Biblical Faith of Its
Soteriological Substance

Keeping in focus the previous statements on the significance of “a world view”
vis-à-vis a person in the structure of dialogue, the present concern treats the implications
of ancestral foundations as a theological method. When ancestry as the organizing
principle, with all its basic assumptions about person and human nature are transposed
into Christianity, the end theological content is bound to be very different. In short, the
traditional African anthropologies are not compatible with the Christian vision of
humanity. As a result, consanguineous socio-ethical standards and human behaviors are
in diametric conflict with the Christian moral horizon. It ought to be understood that this
is not a naïve disregard of the wealth of values in the African traditional cultures. Yet, the
existence of positive values is not a license to make an uncritical application of the
formative principles of African cultures in the making of contextual theologies. While
such a move purports to safeguard cultural integrity, it does in fact ignore basic moral
assumptions underlying the consanguineous world view. An ethnocentric moral stance
impedes the Judeo-Christian saving dynamism to re-orient the African world views
toward the universal (Jn 17: 20-21). The internal constitution of traditional African
ontology (ancestrology) does not foster total commitment and fidelity to the Christian
truths. People confess faith in Jesus Christ but naturally fall back on their cultural values
in the decision making process. Given this ethical scenario, a primary factor in
contextual theological discernment is the reality of the universal human nature as a
common good, over and above ethnic and biological particularities. Christians are not bonded to Christ by ties of biological descent. On the contrary, the true bond is an ontological one because every human being is created in the image of God. From this vantage point, what hinders or promotes the common good in African society becomes obvious.

There is yet another level of concern in contextualizing biblical faith. The need to place the factor of the essential human nature at the center of theological reflection does not preclude the reality of diverse historical expressions. Rather, the reality of essential human nature safeguards diverse historical expressions from collapsing into multiple human natures which then gives birth to a negative principle of social fragmentation and alienation of all forms. A critical discernment procedure ought to lead to the understanding that a general human ontology provides the basis for grasping the fundamental connectedness among all peoples. But the moment one proceeds from a finite reality such as biological ancestry, one ends up with the basic temptation that continues to mark historical human existence: that of perceiving the human reality in exclusively temporal terms. These limited propositions are then transposed into the practice of theology and given absolute and autonomous theological expressions. Autonomous theologies tend to identify Catholicism with the local theologies and end up rejecting the theological patrimony of the Church, either on the basis of multiple conceptions of human nature or on the account of hegemonic realities. These trends of thought serve to alienate rather than achieve theological unity. An instance of this is the theological mindset that sees no need for exchange of ideas between different cultural blocks. For example, the terminologies of race, ethnicity, tribe, and clan, are concepts
which historical humanity uses to project collective self-understanding within a particular experience and history of a group. The terms, however, share a common denominator. For, in spite of the many sublime values with which cultures are suffused, societies have, more often than not, resorted to the aforementioned finite horizons to delimit the ultimate view of a human being. The result is human and social alienations such as those that plague the African Continent. So, placing a human being at the center of Christian-guided dialogue is an invitation to break through the historical sphere as the decisive anthropological horizon. Jesus’ life in its totality offers Africa a compelling testimony to the infinite horizon, which alone can be seen as the valid and ultimate point of reference in the historical quest for self-understanding and existence.

In conclusion, Christianity offers all cultures the opportunity to break through those social structures of meaning that foster fundamental human and cultural alienations. Dianne Bergant accurately describes racism as the “preference of one representation of a human being to another.” The same is true for tribalism. Physical differences ought to be seen as representation of form, not of substance. Contrary arguments would have to account for how all peoples in their historical diversity can be considered true human beings made in the one image of God, yet at the same time, possessing different basic human natures. If that is the case, then, different human groupings have reason to wait for the respective “Incarnations of the Word” in conformity with their true human natures. This is an obviously ridiculous argument at most. Chapter III highlighted the meaning of Christ for the universal humanity and so need not be repeated here. For this same reason, the following practical considerations simply make explicit some of the key
themes that ought to shape African dialogue with Christianity and Western religious and social heritages.

The Dynamics of Contemporary Social Change Comprise the Immediate Context for Theological Reflection.

In order for inculturation to be truly liberating, there has to be a direct link between basic needs of contemporary Africa and the perceived means for meeting those needs. The fact of social change requires that the local church situate theological reflection in the context of contemporary social change in African societies. Inculturation demands assiduous study of tribal mindsets that make up the local churches. Equally important is the need to admit the obvious that Africa is no longer governed by autonomous tribal socio-political systems. The presence of Christianity and the Western social system not only exert real influence on the entire continent, but they also offer the religious and the philosophical horizons for a constructive evaluation of Africa’s history, past and present. But since African theology generally views the aforementioned presence in terms of religious and cultural hegemony, the following sub-principle points to the need to look at the signs of the time. These can lend insight into the question of whether or not Christianity and the Western social system ought to be perceived in the terms envisioned by African theology.

The Concrete African Persons Constitute the Signs of the Time and the Starting Points for Theological Reflection

African peoples who have embraced the Christian faith do so because they recognize it as a distinctive creed from their own religious traditions. It is also important to acknowledge that almost the entire continent, regardless of religious creed, recognizes and aspires to the social benefits accrued from the Western social system. This is evident
in the whole-hearted commitment to literacy as a condition for the improvement of material and living conditions. Given the present historical realities, a valid response to the presence of Christianity and Western social systems requires that Africa “opens its traditional consciousness” to a transcendent anthropological horizon to promote an ethos of solidarity among diverse ethnic groups comprising the present day African nations. Otherwise, Africa cannot sustain the aspiration for a life rooted in Christian faith and Western social philosophy on the terms dictated by the ancestral visions of humanity. Those visions, as Chapters II & III strived to illustrate, are basically opposed to a common vision of humanity. Needless to say, Africa still prefers fragmented existence stemming from a consanguineous social philosophy in a totally changed socio-political setting. It is with this mindset that African theology, consciously or not, tends toward unconditional preservation of the ancestral world views. The following practical consideration develops the current consideration by offering a corrective to the existing theological and pastoral anomaly. It does so by drawing attention to the dynamic of self-contradiction in the ancestral theological perspective.

The Need to Recognize a Fundamental Contradiction between the Basic Aspirations of Contemporary African Nation-States and the Tenacious Hold onto Tribal Ontologies

The fact that contemporary Africa continues to aspire to Christian faith and to social systems rooted in Western social philosophy needs no further argument here. But while this goes on, contextual theologies see little, if any, need to unearth the theological and evangelical significance of human aspirations characteristic of contemporary Africa. New choices and experiences among Africans signify providential moments inviting Africa to reexamine the strength and limitations of its traditional ethos. Present day
African nation-states cannot adopt the Western social system without a commitment to embrace the moral/organizing principles on which the system is based. In brief, the proposal that Africa learns from the Western cultural experience does not consist in turning African nations into copy-cats. Rather, the proposal consists in understanding and implementing the underlying moral principles that govern the social system in which African tribes are now situated. At the same time, modern Western culture in itself cannot provide Africa with a comprehensive understanding of the full substance of moral values that underpin its social systems. It is here that an authentic and lively dialogue with Christianity is a necessary condition for coming to grips with the church’s mission in Africa. Such dialogue automatically takes into account the negative changes in the Western societies: changes that would have an adverse impact on peoples and their societies. The reverse yields contrary results. When learning from another culture consists in surface imitation of external structural forms, a cultural crisis such as the one pervading Africa today becomes the norm rather than the exception. A question can still be raised at this point regarding the right to fashion one’s own identity. Is the call to step out of traditional cultural consciousness not identical to losing one’s identity? The following paragraphs present a major principle, which in essence is a summary of key ideas from the previous chapter. The purpose is to underscore the importance of identity in African traditional social consciousness in a way that facilitates the process of opening African Christians to Christian faith in its radicalness.
SECTION V

CONCERNS WITH THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE REQUIRES REDEFINING THE AFRICAN PROBLEM

The current principle shifts the focus of reflection from Western cultural hegemony to the fundamental subject of human nature. The issue which is going to determine the future of Africa hinges on the need to redefine the philosophy of nature in the traditional but diverse African views of a person. The present consideration does not repeat the subject matter of Chapters I-III. Rather, the selected principles and working guidelines attempt to clarify what is involved in an anthropological dialogue in a diversely constituted cultural context. In general terms, the present focus calls for a basic shift from “cultural hegemony” as the basic problem and in light of which liberation is perceived, to a philosophy of human nature as the most fundamental problem confronting Africa. Such an approach does not disregard the reality of hegemonic forces. Rather, it helps us to understand hegemonic forces as symptoms of cultural malaise rather than the primary cause of the present cultural crisis.

The Need to Clarify a Basic Question: In What Does Identity Consist?

Basing ourselves on Chapter III, the quest for identity is a universal experience. Yet, it is not enough to search for identity or to be conscious of its concrete significance. Underlying any notion of identity is the deeper question concerning what it means to be a person. This in itself presupposes a philosophy of human nature. The three elements; i.e., a person, identity, and human nature are, therefore, decisive with regard to whether or not: (a) the African local Church truly seeks to “embrace and sustain” the Christian faith; (b) whether the Continent will be able to muster a level of development that can withstand the whirlwinds of social change being ushered in by globalization.
A big concern in African theology has to do with the denigrating attitude of colonizers toward African peoples and cultures. By questioning whether or not the African cultural world views constitute cultural systems, the colonizers were, in essence, questioning whether or not Black Africans were human beings. That inquiry has a strong emotive quality as seen from the repugnance reflected in the reactionary approach to contextual theologies. But while self-defense or the defense of one’s culture is a moral duty, the current principle draws attention to two major limitations of a reactionary method presented in Chapter I. First, when reaction becomes the theological rationale for the church’s mission and theology, the tasks of contextualization and inculturation are henceforth turned into the means for self-defense rather than the basis for Christian liberation. Second, there is a need to question the philosophical-theological justification with respect to a direct correspondence which African tribal views set between collective and personal identities. The following analysis situates the aforementioned concerns in the context of historical experience.

Identity generally denotes a set of (essential) characteristics by which an entity can be recognized in comparison with another within the same category of beings. The notion of identity carries the connotations of uniqueness. We are presently concerned with two general levels of identity: personal and collective identities both of which are experienced historically as discussed in Chapter III. The historical and the relational character of human life impart a sense of belonging to the experience of a specific group. The sense of belonging develops from a shared or communal experience and by virtue of adhering to a common ethos. In short, communality imparts a sense of sameness or a sense of being alike. Hence, interrelated hierarchies of meanings (italicized above) come
to the fore in the attempt to understand the intertwining of personal and collective identities in the historical experience. More precisely, *history, relationality, communality, sense of belonging,* and *sameness* are essential characteristics of a collective identity. These also suggest that collective identities are not established theoretically; i.e., independent of a person’s historical existence. Otherwise, it would not be possible to understand the reason a person’s sense of identity is *also* linked to a particular group. Yet all in all, this is not to say that a collective identity is the basic constitution of personal identities.

Every person belongs to a community by virtue of which they can be recognized as unique persons. The question for African theology and Black Africa in general is whether *collective identity* can be *equated* with *personal identity* and what it means to be a person. For reasons provided in Chapters II and III, a host of intractable problems in contemporary Africa are rooted in an undifferentiated sense of identity. The transcendent aspects of identity are compactly intertwined with the collective identities. It is from recognizing this anthropological anomaly that an argument is rightly made here that the success of Christianity and the attainment of sustainable development in Africa greatly depend on accurate understanding and an honest attempt to examine the problem of identity, to say nothing of its moral ramifications today. And as indicated in Chapters II-III, the meaning of identity cannot be tackled apart from the traditional African sense of *being.*

The Need to Understand the Traditional African View of “Being”

In the realm of ontology, “being” is the metaphysical basis for understanding all reality-historical and transcendental. It is, therefore, the appropriate philosophical
context in which to account for the historical sense of identity as it relates to a person as a transcendent principle. “To be” a person in traditional African anthropologies is to be in close bonds of relationship with one’s immediate family, clan, and tribal community.

This is a widely shared experience and, therefore, not limited to Africa. There is a unique historical development in the case of tribal ontologies. For want of communal identities, tribal ancestors sought to “legitimize” splintered tribal communities by providing alternative sources of ultimate origin. They set ancestry as the ultimate point of reference. Tribal ancestors consequently re-interpreted the ultimate origin and destiny of their respective tribes. But by doing so, the founding ancestors confined the meaning of a person vis-à-vis identity in a self-realizing horizon: biological descent. Henceforth, “community or communality” originates with biological ancestors. The transcendence of communality is emptied in a historical community. It does not, therefore, require great imagination to realize that self-understanding, personal and collective, is channeled through consanguineous social and moral horizons. A tribe in its diverse expressions of family units and clans epitomizes and recapitulates the ancestor as the origin and ideal of human nature and personhood. Out of this ontological structure derives a “communitarian” view of a person, with a consanguineous slant as the norm. In a similar fashion, individual destinies are closely tied up with the tribal communities. It ought to be clear at this point that the African concept of identity takes on a sense of physical resemblance or “sameness” or “generic” meaning as an essential characteristic of human nature and identity. All in all, the historical horizon imparts a differently nuanced “communitarian view of a person.” That is to say, the traditional African communitarian philosophy is not synonymous with the biblical view of community, which is ultimately
Trinitarian and transcendent and therefore, inclusive. It is thus safe to conclude that culture is the core of personal and collective identities in traditional Africa. This explains the reason a Black African hardly recognizes the humanity of others outside one’s own tribe! These are serious anthropological anomalies that must be recognized to pave the way for the seeding of the Christian Gospel.

Because the concept of “being” is fashioned from an historical-existential horizon rather than a transcendent pole, the conceptual distinction between an identity and a person per se is blurred. Having collapsed the meaning of a person into a historical sphere of existence, certain reversals in the basic structure of being became inevitable. For instance, the transcendent horizon imposes itself as the necessary point at which human beings come to recognize “universality” as an indispensable structure of meaning in human existence. Without a good sense of the universal, the meaning of person, community, history, and culture lose the transcendent meaning proper to each. Similarly, although human nature is oriented toward communality within the context of historical existence, human beings do not originate the meaning of history, community, relationship, identity and so on. The human task is to discover and represent collective experiences while maintaining a basic openness to the future with its promise for unity through historical convergences. A contrary view leads to definitive self-explanations that consist in the “reversal” of a basic human orientation to the transcendent horizon and as a necessary point of reference in the effort to realize ultimate personal identity. A basic cultural orientation toward definitive self-explanation can only perpetuate itself by means of self-preservation. There can be no doubt that this is the basic direction of traditional African ontologies. Difficult as this problem may appear to be, authentic
liberation of Africa is contingent on redefining traditional African philosophy of human nature. Everything else flows from this main issue. In line with the present theme, the following principle illustrates two principal aspects in the Christian view of human nature and how a poorly structured sense of identity impacts the day-to-day operations of faith and reason.

The Need to Recognize the Importance of Faith and Reason in the Development of Persons and Culture

Chapter III drew general attention to the configuration of “faith and culture” in contemporary Catholic theological methodology. It was further pointed out that this methodological structure allows Christianity to enter into dialogue with “native reason.” The notion of native reason as used in this paper is not intended to validate the colonial myth that each “race” has a different structure of intellect. Such propositions can only derive from a terrible lack of understanding of the potential influence of historical realities on the exercise of reason. The colonial assumption simply flies in the face of John Duns Scotus’ and Karl Rahner’s theological anthropology. Both theologians offer philosophical and moral grounds on which to speak about diverse expressions of reason without creating hierarchies in the basic human nature. Even when culture imposes its conditioning and colonizing influences, individual persons within the same culture maintain a good measure of self-determination. Very often, many can transcend native cultural trappings to a greater degree. The many revolutionaries in the past histories of human cultures were people groomed by their respective cultures. They, however, managed to rise above their cultures and to found a different moral horizon toward which they steered their collective social history. The Old Testament prophets are typical examples of what it means to live in a culture and yet be ahead of it.
A notion of native reason is thus used here to bring out important and observable characteristics of historical human existence. Although human nature is the same, native cultures do exert influence on the evolution of human reason. Culture can either foster the natural impetus of reason toward the transcendent or it can impose conditions that re-orient rationality in the opposite direction. In the latter instance, persons become focused on finite realities as the most important sources of knowledge. Where this kind of rational impetus is recognized, it is necessary to pay attention to the cultural world view because it plays a central role in shaping patterns of thought. Also because each culture offers an ultimate moral frame of reference, persons tend to work out their existence within set or acceptable limits. By doing so, individuals actualize and reinforce the basic direction of their native philosophies, whether good or bad. It is in this light that the power of African ontologies on the development of the human intellect can be understood. In other words, a notion of native reason is essential to understanding the reason why the mechanisms of self-preservation are deeply ingrained in tribal societies, although with varying degrees of intensity. Importantly, the mechanism of self-preservation poses serious obstacles to evangelization and to social political development. Since personal and collective identities (tribe, clan, and nuclear family) are intertwined, then, the well-being of one’s community is deemed indispensable to the survival of the individual.

In brief, traditional African societies, like all cultures, have values and customs by which individual and collective well-being is guaranteed, now and in the future. But in a special way, African ontologies propound uncompromising loyalty to “set traditions” of the tribes. These are important for individual and communal identities. As a result, free
thought and personal creativity are permissible provided these do not compromise or undermine the established traditional moral order. Given this arrangement, an individual grows up with the mind focused on how to adapt his or her rational attitude to set philosophical and moral horizons rather than on creating something entirely new, or even radically improving on what already exists. These observations need not be stretched to appreciate the negative consequences of superimposing unwholesome structures of meaning on individual and collective perceptions. With time, persons become accustomed to being content with taking responsibility for and passing on what they have acquired from their forbearers. In other words, persons become the very embodiment of their cultures to the extent of being totally blind to its unwholesome values. In the event of encountering a new reality such as Christian faith, the need to preserve a common identity can motivate cultural partners in dialogue to seek indiscriminate legitimization of cultural values by means of false religious reinterpretation. It is much easier to empty “newness” into the “old” than the reverse, a posture Jesus found impracticable and reminded his followers that new wine cannot be poured into old skin wines. The latter might not have the capacity to contain the newness with its promise of surprise and absolute surrender. At this point, it is important to consider another dimension of the present theme, namely; how structured rationality impacts the development of innate spiritual capacities. These broadly include the capacity to reason, to love, hope, believe, trust, and engage in positive imagination. The following statements follow the explanations provided in Chapter III regarding the basic human inclination toward the transcendent and fulfillment in God as the highest point of any belief.
Faith is generally associated with a set of beliefs found in a specific religious creed. Faith in this case is a personal assent to a distinctive religious creed. This understanding withstanding, faith can also be explained from the perspective of natural law. That is to say, faith is synonymous with belief in the ordinary sense of the word. For this same reason, faith and belief are interchangeable: only the context determines the nuanced differences. Hence, faith as currently perceived is experienced as a natural principle of life before it is directed toward a specific religious creed. One may say that “belief” forms a necessary background for the experience of faith as an assent to specific religious beliefs. Hence as indicated in Chapter III, human nature is constituted in such a way that a normal person has a natural ability to make decisions based on reason. In reality, to believe, hope, trust, imagine, and love give expression to the natural capacities for reasoning and believing in something. In fact, faith without reason turns religion into a fantasy as a bed rock for all forms of violence. A normal development of a person is contingent upon proper integration of the natural capacity to reason and to believe. All religions draw upon these innate spiritual resources and the sustenance of any faith creed depends on the same. The following paragraphs seek to show the negative impact of culture on the development of the natural capacity to believe and to reason. It is the understanding of this author that the greatest hindrance to technological development in Africa, for instance, has less to do with a natural lack of intelligence than with the ongoing choice to exist within a finite horizon, informed by fixed value systems passed on from the distant past. It is much easier to believe and exist by the traditional world views because they provide certain knowledge from collective experiences. However, the present emphasis is on the fact that the personal capacity for making the most of the
natural capacities for believing and reasoning can be weakened or become dysfunctional. Confining innate functions of the soul within a finite ontological horizon can have a damaging impact on the development of faith and reason as the following explanations strive to show.

Outside the sphere of any religious creed, a person must love or be drawn to something, let us say a project as an object of one’s love. One must somehow believe in the validity of whatever decisions are reached, either individually or collectively. One must also trust and hope that the project will be realized. And in all these experiences, faith and reason are at work because they are natural preconditions for embarking on and completing any project. Because decisions have a futuristic impetus, the natural experiences of belief, trust, love, and hope are necessary for perseverance and transcendence at whatever level of existence this may be. So what is likely to happen when faith without reason is based on unchangeable value systems as their driving motive? This is an extremely important point because it helps us to comprehend the potential influence of society on the development of the human spiritual capacities.

Culture or religion can either elevate faith and reason by ordering them to their natural end, or deform some, if not all, depending on the basic moral assumptions involved in a particular religion.

All human beings need faith to act, but especially to step out of oneself into the unknown. Where the natural impulse to believe is impaired, fear (even moral recklessness) becomes the norm thus making it difficult to follow the positive leads of reason. One is only able to perform acts about which one is certain of the outcome. In the case of Africa, the choice to confine the intellect within the historical sphere of existence
continues to play a big role in the intellection processes. Under finite existential conditions, reason is conditioned to conform to tribal mores. While a certain mindset becomes habitual, common sense and instinctive response replace the need to ask new questions and follow them through. One tends to avoid difficult or novel decisions by “playing it safe.” After all, contrary choices might not only incur punishment; they might cause ostracizing by the group and eventual loss of identity. But while all this goes on, it ought to be remembered that nature cannot be cheated. What is not properly claimed or developed can either come back with vengeance or it can find an outlet in deviant expressions. One such example, which has direct relevance to this chapter, is the practice of superstition. The following paragraphs seek to show that the prevalence of superstition is a means of coping with a dysfunctional intellect. We shall only cite briefly the nature and expression of superstition among its victims.

As the Catholic hierarchy gathered at the Vatican to await the solemn interment of John Paul II, Raymond Arroyo and Richard John Neuhaus interviewed the now retired Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala of the Kampala Archdiocese, Uganda. On the statement regarding Africa as the new cradle of Christianity, Cardinal Wamala responded in his characteristic manner. He acknowledged the growing number of African Christians, at the same time underscoring the fact that increase in numbers is not yet matched with growth in mature faith. For the most part, faith is still superficial and he cited parts of West Africa where voodoo remains very attractive. On the whole, many people are Christians during daytime and sorcerers and witches at night, although this reality is present in different degrees among the different tribes. Cardinal Wamala’s cautioning remarks were recently echoed at Koenigstein, Germany, by Bishop Peter Marzinkowski.
of Alindao, Central African Republic. The Bishop was “speaking with the group from a charitable organization known as “Aid to the Church in Need.” The Bishop notes poignantly that “many of the people [in Africa] have no natural explanation for death, sickness, or natural disasters. The people always look for a scapegoat who must, in their view, have caused the misfortune through witchcraft....” Given the prevalent religious climate, there can be no doubt that African Christianity stands in great need of continued evangelization.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of Congo, at the conclusion of their 2006 ad limina visit gives concise guidelines on what needs to be done. He told the Bishops,

You have highlighted the need to work for a profound evangelization of the faithful. The living and vibrant ecclesiastical communities in all your dioceses well reflect this 'hands-on' evangelization which makes the faithful ever more mature in their faith, in a spirit of evangelical fraternity that brings them to reflect together on the various aspects of ecclesiastical life.

The relation of this statement to the problem of superstition is not immediately clear. The expressed relation is evident in the Pope’s concern about the underlying “fear” which breeds “rancor” in African society. The Pope’s concern echoes those of John Paul II about Ecclesia in Africa. For present purposes, the following sections seek to show, in a limited way, the direct outcome of superstition.

**The Need to Distinguish Valid Cultural and Religious Expressions from Superstitions in African Traditional Heritages**

Not every African person is superstitious even among tribes where this phenomenon is the hallmark of collective existence as in the case of voodoo practitioners. Put simply, superstition is not the norm of African traditional societies, although it features in certain tribes more prominently than in others. Generally speaking, however,
even the least superstitious persons can harbor a measure of superstitious traits due to the general lack of a holistic philosophy of human nature. Those who wallow in superstition do so simply because they do not know any better. Others are cunning enough to make a living out of it. The effects of superstition are undeniably damaging with respect to the development of faith and reason. The negative effects of superstition are so many and as such, they cannot be covered in a study of this scope. What is important is that superstition must be recognized for what it is: a deep-seated anthropological malaise, because it directs the capacity to reason and to believe towards falsehood. In the end, a person’s intellect becomes so impaired that one can hardly recognize and abide by valid moral (or rational) truths. It is from recognizing this malady that it can be possible to understand the extreme importance of developing a new anthropology with a focus on a transcendental anthropology (imago Dei). Understanding the root and nature of superstition is the key to drawing up effective pastoral strategies that can help individuals transcend their personal fears and insecurities that undermine their journeys toward authentic personhood.

Early Christian missionaries in Africa did not know how to distinguish between valid cultural-religious expressions in their numerous forms from real superstition. To the early missionaries, everything African was superstition. For present purposes, superstition cannot be truly grasped outside the framework of “faith and reason.” In the past as in the present, there were men and women in African societies endowed with the medicinal (herbal) healing. There were authentic and well reputed psychics and herbal medicine healers. There was nothing phony about these healers and, as such, their practices lie outside the category of superstition: those who deliberately camouflage as
authentic healers. For while authentic healers construct and sustain life, the superstitious persons undermine its very essence.

There are many levels of superstition. In the following paragraphs the phenomenon of superstition is presented in two general categories; i.e., low level and high level superstition. The magicians, diviners, witch doctors, and those who put their wholehearted trust in what superstition can offer are true examples of high level superstition. They believe that success in life comes from some esoteric power that can be controlled and manipulated to one’s advantage. There are also people whose basic life direction is not driven by superstition but, nonetheless, harbor elements of it. This last group often becomes victim of highly superstitious persons who exploit their fears and insecurities. Low level superstition can be easily reversed as compared to their counterparts. Low level superstition could be the result of external influences rather than the consequence of a dysfunctional intellect that eventually turns self-indulgent. In the latter instance, a person is obsessed with the object of desire to the point of subduing reason. For instance, a superstitious person sees a neighbor with a new car, and without contemplating what might have gone into its procurement, he or she not only begins to envy the neighbor, he or she also makes it a point to obtain one. If one does not go to sorcerers to seek the means of getting into quick fortune, one will resort to other equally devious means. The obsession to be like another person -without an attempt to consider that everything lies within the individual’s capacity, God’s plans, hard work, and often a favorable environment- opens the door to superstition and often pushes persons to the edge of foolhardiness. People go to sorcerers hoping to get some supernatural powers by which others can be destroyed. This mindset is obviously inimical to personal and
collective development, to say nothing about the harm it does to the capacity to reason and believe. In sum, diviners and witchdoctors are highly superstitious individuals who exert strong influence on those who are vulnerable. They often draw the undivided trust and commitment of the less superstitious.

As previously noted, the primary cause of superstition is the absence of a sound philosophy of nature. Such knowledge or awareness would enable individuals and communities to understand the true meaning of experiences such as death, sickness, natural disasters, prosperity, and many more. Confronted with the reality of not being able to change their situations, frustrations set in often leading to destructive envy and jealousy. In this state of mind, destroying those more successful becomes more believable than improving on one’s condition through emulating the other. “If I cannot get what you have, then you are better off dead so that there is no one around to remind me of my own limitations.” Rather than commit oneself to hard work and creativity through active love, trust and hope in one’s own ability, the need for immediate gains becomes the order of the day. Under these circumstances, success consists in the desire to excel by not sharing knowledge. This is a more aggressive expression of perverted reason. When intellectual perversion combines with the absence of real faith in God, persons are consumed by jealousy, which for the most part gains control of the person.

The more serious effects of superstition were hidden in traditional societies for obvious reasons. In the past societies encouraged sharing life and good neighborliness. Moreover, life was less sophisticated owing to the little diversity in the means of livelihood. But with the onset of Western education with its inner impetus toward a measure of material independence, the effects of the suppressed intellection are easily
exposed in the forms discussed in Chapter II & III. Thus, it is in view of transforming this intellectual climate that a valid account of superstition has to take into consideration the fact of self-determination as treated in Chapter III. This must be, because superstition is indicative of the ways in which two major principles of the intellect can be redirected toward the opposite direction. Perversion of the intellect manifests itself in two different ways. In one instance, the intellect can develop a false sense of confidence in the human capacity for attaining complete truths about reality. This is partly expressed in the endless spinning of ideologies that appear reasonable yet point to contrary moral paths of life and existence. This is the most subtle and elusive form of superstition but very damaging, nonetheless. The sorcerers, diviners and magicians comprise this group.

In brief, superstition is indicative of a regressive condition and, therefore, should not be limited to a belief in something other than God. As rational capacities become increasingly dominated by a predominant orientation to the past or present only as the true reference points, a false thought pattern of trust, of belief, hope and love emerges to compensate for free thought that is always open to the future. For the extremely superstitious persons, the mind creates an imaginary divine space or horizon as an independent reference point. Persons “reformulate” questions about “being” around the self; or around natural objects like trees, animals, etc. These are then associated with divinity or transcendent realities. And all the while, persons concerned truly believe in the validity of these experiences. We shall take note of the effects of such a stance in the daily expression of one’s life.

A highly superstitious individual does not only subject his or her self and all reality to an imaginary philosophical horizon, he or she also draws from such a horizon
new meaning by which he or she *redefines* the self. Self-redefinition means that such a one begins to define self apart from the tribal identity; the persona or self-image society has carved for one. One becomes a new person, a recognizable authority such as diviners. He or she begins to speak on the basis of new experiences that do not square with human reality but, nonetheless, sets him or her apart from the rest of the tribe. This new mode of existence is social alienation and spiritual alienation for the obvious reason that superstition makes claims on moral truth based on falsehood. For example, a woman faced with infertility can be advised to poison a specific individual. Very often the target is someone vulnerable, wealthy or with great potential for abundant life. Now, any rational being can see that destroying human life is not a cure for anything.

In sum, highly superstitious individuals existed and continue to exist in African societies. They make up the majority of caricatured diviners, healers, sorcerers, magicians, visionaries and even the common masses.\(^{486}\) They exude a magical aura. Against the background of undifferentiated philosophy of nature, we can grasp the reasons persons with a low level superstition easily succumb to diviners and the like in times of need. Immersed in poverty and other challenges, and possessing little knowledge of the eternal laws that govern nature, people easily become victims of the ingenious ones who exploit the situation to their advantage. The highly superstitious individuals offer the prospect of magical solutions out of an experienced dilemma. But the more one makes falsehood the means and end of one’s life, the more one’s ability for independent thought and genuine reflection is impaired. Under such imaginary spheres of existence, the natural orientation of the intellect to valid knowledge or “truth” is hence subverted. Based on the above analysis, one has to inquire whether superstitious minds
can really attain to genuine creativity as the lot of human nature. Does creativity not turn into a negative human drive? Faith as a principle which reinforces and supplements rational capacity is replaced by fear. The result is a general lack of confidence in one’s innate capacity. This in turn undermines the natural ability to trust and hope in what one loves and believes in, and to imagine in order to create something new. The falsification of natural impulses makes people easily succumb to all forms of skepticism and violence. Persons become paralyzed by the fear to embrace the unknown. Christian faith can hardly mature in situations of fear. Ultimately, superstition is a deadly form of egotism which chokes the human potential.

It goes without saying that the subject of faith and reason is central in the effort to unravel the not-so-obvious realities underlying the material and the spiritual aspirations of African nations today. It is not enough to recognize the primary role of ancestry in any understanding of African ontologies. All effort must be accompanied by a courageous commitment to grow in the understanding of the way in which the natural ability to reason, to believe, to trust, and to love is conditioned by consanguineous ontologies. Confining individuals within the natural or historical sphere gradually renders them incapable of entering fully into the Judeo-Christian world view whose purpose is to lead all persons toward their true identities and ultimate fulfillment. Christianity is capable of elevating the natural capacities for rational thought and reflection; for sound belief, trust, and love. A pastoral theology that ignores the reality of a superstitious mindset in today’s world is bound to fail miserably. With the preceding reflection on major obstacles to the proper development of faith and reason, this chapter arrives at the concluding section of this chapter.
SECTION VI

CONCLUSION

Lasting development, the rule of law, and peace in Africa are untenable without a general human ontology. For that matter, contextual theology can no longer define a person in exclusively experiential terms of African communitarianism without regard to the ontological basis of a person vis-a-vis community. The concept of community, be it nuclear or extended, is an ontological reality and therefore transcends experiential categories. Historical community, like a human being, is always a concrete and a not-yet finished reality. Human beings always aspire to a perfect community. Such a yearning must be in order not to turn temporary structural means into the ultimate ends. At the same time and relevant to Africa, a communitarian view of a person does not override individuality, nor does the latter exist independently of the former. That a person is at once communitarian and a distinctive entity stems from the transcendent character of human nature as \textit{imago Dei}. Hence, contextualization ought to proceed with a clear and firm purpose of bringing individuality in dialectical relationship with communality. Once again a dialectical tension ensures that experience does not become the measure of anything validly human. To that end, tribes provide indispensable contexts for theological reflection tailored to inculturation

\textbf{The Tribe as an immediate Social Context for Theological Reflections}

Theological reflections on tribal cultures ought to be carried out in relation to the meaning of African Nation States today. The reason is obvious: tribal mindsets ought to be properly aligned with the national interests that concern all. This must be so because the true end of contextualization is not a local theology for its own sake but a means
toward the transformation of peoples and their cultures with a view of cultivating a common social consciousness. Also, given the complex matrices of tribal philosophies and the values they propound, the first phase of Africa’s transformation ought to consist in enabling tribal communities to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of their total world views. It is only then that persons can come to grips with who they are in relation to other ethnic groups within and without Africa. Obviously, it is for teleological reasons that theological reflection has to have the Judeo-Christian vision of humanity as the ultimate point of reference. It is also the criterion for establishing what is genuinely good in the diverse African cultures.

Christian dialogue with individual tribes is a critical condition for inter-ethnic dialogue and peaceful co-existence among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. There can be no authentic contextual theology without dialogue with one’s own culture, and with all the cultures that any Christian encounters. Dialogue is not about making people feel good about themselves or their cultures, even as cultural affirmation is essential to the task. Rather, the purpose of dialogue or inculturation is to come to a deeper understanding of one’s own reality through truthful speech and receptive listening. Dialogue, therefore, commands an honest intent and the will to recognize all that is enduringly good and supportive of the true nature of the human spirit. What is good may be temporal or otherwise, provided all are ordered to the ongoing enrichment of human life. In brief, the key factor in contextualization and inculturation is the need to formulate reasonable and effective pastoral strategies to help people relate their experiences/world view to Christianity and ultimately to the person of Jesus Christ. Tribal cultures are, therefore indispensable loci in the development of a universal contextual theology suited
to the local Church in Africa. They must therefore the primary locus for social analysis and theological reflection. The following final consideration sums up the essence of the last statement.

**African Theology or Theologies? Contextualization and inculturation as a Dynamic Interchange**

There is no doubt that the African local church needs a contextual theology of a global nature. Basing ourselves on the content of this study as a whole, an African theology, in the singular, can hardly be termed Christian as long as there exists the cultural dynamic of turning one’s back to the future by focusing on past and localized experiences. This dynamic has the power of suffocating *philosophical inquiry* and forestalling transformation at all levels. Hence, contextualization must be seen as the means toward a deeper appreciation and recovery of the person’s natural capacity for an on-going philosophical inquiry. This is the true spring board for human creativity and holistic development, personal and collective. This particular outlook gives form and direction to an African Christian theology. It means that the terminologies of African *theology* and *theologies* are both appropriate forms of envisioning the nature, content, and direction of contextual theological reflection in Africa. Precisely, the need for intense and critical-ongoing reflection on the individual tribal world views is the basis for African *theologies*. These are important in the *long term goal* of formulating a more *universal* African theology. That is, tribal contextual theologies are the constitutive basis for the development of an *African theology*. The latter will be a product of integrating positive findings from the multitudes of African tribal cultures. In sum, the concept of *African theology* implies that a universal local theology befitting individual local churches in Africa is a consequence of gradual but sustained commitment to a critical
examination of tribal world views. African theology is, in other words, a point of integration—the outcome of localized theologies. Similarly, contextualization is a precondition for inculturation just as the latter would constantly open new horizons of meaning for re-examining the previous findings in the theological reflection processes. All in all, contextualization and inculturation comprise a dynamic interchange which must be sustained to guarantee a local theology the substance it needs to face new or emerging situations without ossifying. The interchange is a needed process for recovering a religious memory that forever seeks to unite the past, present, and future. In that case, inculturation is neither a one-time event, nor is it simply a task that only involves translating the Christian message in the linguistic and customary expressions of native cultures as is frequently construed. It is in essence an ongoing philosophical inquiry which forever acts as bridge between emergent but potentially alienating historical conditions. Seen this way, contextualization and inculturation are processes of incarnating the Spirit of the Gospel so that the Risen Christ can become the life force in the lives of African peoples. In this way, persons can encounter Jesus in each other and in the social structures that mediate communal lives. Hence, in the early stages, inculturation acts as a bridge by connecting diverse tribal experiences in the lived hope of coming to a point when people can recognize and embrace a common ontology as the ground of true identity, individual and collective.

A local theology is, however, at the service of the church from which it emerges to speak to the surrounding culture(s) and to which it returns to be rejuvenated or invigorated. For this same reason, a local theology ought to embody a method that reflects an “image of the local Church” and which it seeks to actualize or make a reality
through inculturation. In view of ecclesiological concerns, there are two important questions that must be answered. First, what is the image of a local church which is appropriate to the present African situation in its cultural diversity vis-à-vis the Christian mission? This study proposes that the imagery of a gatherer is a fitting image of the Catholic Church of Africa. The image of gathering in turn raises a second question regarding the model of inculturation suitable to the African cultural situation. Since inculturation takes its character from the nature of the Church, the principles and guidelines related to the task of gathering are set in the framework of what it means to be a Catholic Church. These are interrelated concerns that must be treated together. This is the task of the final chapter which is at once a continuation of the present chapter and a conclusion to this study as a whole.

CHAPTER V: THE CHURCH AS A GATHERING COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION: The Concept of “Church” in the Mission of a Local Church and in the Making of a local Theology

The immediate goal of the previous chapters has been twofold: to present the African reality from the standpoint of the contemporary global situation and by so doing, to establish a realistic philosophical framework in which to discuss issues that affect contextualization of the Christian message and inculturation. This is also the perspective from which to assess the real problems in Africa that the local Church aught to be looking at. For almost six decades, African theology has expressed concern about Western domination in Africa. But the same theology has generally tended to respond to the aforementioned problem in ways that instead embolden it. Convinced of the soteriological integrity of African Traditional Religions, African theology generally tends
toward theological and ecclesial autonomy. There is no doubt that such an approach to
inculturation undercuts Gospel Mission. The search for autonomy is by nature a negation
of Christian-cultural dialogue at all levels of the church’s life and of human life.490 The
end result is a theological stance that is harmful to the Christian mission in the African
Continent as a whole. It is, therefore, no small issue that the conclusion of this study
should draw attention to the essential relationship of the local churches to the Universal
Catholic Communion. Only then can the efforts aimed at contextual theology come to a
deeper and comprehensive understanding of the direction to be taken, now and in the
future. There are basic reasons for this recommendation.

The basic tendency toward autonomy reinforces the domination of Africa by any
emerging power player in the world. For instance, European domination in Africa is
significantly giving way to China and India as emerging global powers in social
economic matters. But while European domination was largely mitigated by Christian
missionary activities, and from which Africa has benefited greatly, the growing influence
of India and China is not likely to have the same outcome. India and China mainly see
Africa as the source of raw material and a market base for manufactured goods. It is not
far-fetched, then, to maintain that the reluctance to embrace self-scrutiny makes Africa
forever vulnerable to random changes and influences from outside. Over-reliance on
external means of survival is indicative of a deeply seated cultural malaise. Perennial
political and economic underdevelopment subjects Africa to the whirlwind of un-ending
social changes and the poverty this brings. When socio-economic and political
circumstances change in the West, for instance, Africa is simultaneously affected. For
this and many reasons presented in the previous chapters, the logical conclusion must be
that the existing developments in Africa are very superficial. They do not emerge from
the native potential latent in the diverse peoples of Africa or from genuine understanding
of the Western social system which Africa has embraced. Yet, it is only by tapping into
one’s human potential that there can emerge an expedient culture capable of withstanding
every wind of social change.

The meeting points between the general reluctance to critique the traditional
African world views, on one hand, and external domination on the other, is where this
study has situated and discussed the causes of the existing cultural crisis in Africa. The
conclusion was reached that the limitations in the diverse African cultures forever serve
as inroads for any kind of domination from within and from without. Toward deepening
this awareness, Chapter II not only pointed to the need to examine cultural hegemony
from the standpoint of changed conditions in Africa and in the world as a whole, it also
underscored the need to examine native anthropologies. These are the two angles from
which one can properly comprehend the how and the why of the new forms of domination
in Africa, past and present. Given these realities, this author felt justified in taking a
different position from African theology. Finally, the substance of Chapter III
specifically forms the basis for understanding the organic relationship of the local to the
universal Catholic Church. Precisely, the same (Christological) theological
anthropological assumptions presented in Chapter III apply to the task of understanding
the relationship of the local to the universal Church. The present chapter has a more
moderate purpose, namely; to offer a statement on the image or the self-understanding
best suited to the local Catholic Church of Africa and its mission therein.
SECTION I

THE PRIMACY OF ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, clearly indicates the pontiff’s deep concern regarding the theological tendencies that undermine the integrity of the Gospel and of the Universal Catholic Communion. The tendencies are characteristic of those that were discussed in Chapter I. The Pope says, “If any individual Church, of its own volition cuts itself off from the Universal Church, it breaks its connection with God’s plan and its ecclesial status is impoverished.” Such conditions need not be a result of deliberate and conscious severance from the Universal Ecclesial Communion. Organic communion can be broken by the distortion of revealed truths or theological models rooted in something other than Christology. The result is the eventual loss of the “core theological and soteriological substance”, be it in theory or practice.

The disregard for ontology at any one level of theological reflection can easily lead to either arbitrary or a fundamentalist biblical hermeneutic. Christian-cultural dialogue can disintegrate into some kind of ideology that passes for a contextual theology at the service of inculturation. It is, therefore, important to realize that formulating a valid local ecclesiology is integral to contextualization and inculturation. Contextual theologians must examine, reflect on, and utilize cultural factors in a manner that allows particular churches to be truly local without losing the universality characteristic of a Catholic Church. This kind of theological orientation will not fail to recognize certain basic but general cultural elements which Christianity encounters in every social milieu. Since these were discussed in Chapter III, the remaining part of this conclusion will simply summarize what is meant here by an image of the church and some key
considerations that go into an understanding of a local church in Catholic theological thought.

Towards a Living Communion of the local with the Universal Church

Christological concerns in the local mission of the church and in the making of theology are incomplete without considering the image of the Church which is consonant with the biblical world view. There are two reasons behind the last statement: one Christological and the other arises from the “nature of culture.” The first reason centers on the fact that because all Catholic theology is grounded in Christology, the making of a local theology, the mission of a local church and the self-understanding (ecclesiology) of a local church form an inseparable triad. Inseparability implies that the concept of church always underlies and, therefore, accompanies any form of contextualization and missionary activities. The second reason concerning the “nature of culture” takes us back to the reflections presented in the previous Chapters. African cultures, like all cultures, embody certain fundamental flaws. Of particular concern to this study is the basic cultural orientation toward social fragmentation and political autonomy. Hence, should the basic foundations of African tribal cultures be transposed into ecclesiology, the Catholic Church in Africa would imbibe the same dynamics of fragmentation and autonomy among the many ecclesial communities (dioceses) that make up the one local Catholic Church of Africa. It is toward staving off fragmentation in the self-understanding of the African local church that a working image or model of the Church becomes truly imperative.

Therefore, contextual methodology must put the Catholic Church’s self-understanding at the forefront of theological reflection and inculturation. The Catholic
theological tradition contains many images or models grounded in Scripture, all of which speak to the totality of the church’s self-understanding and how it ought to exist among different cultures through the passing ages. The models include, but not limited to; the Church as a mystery, a sacrament of salvation, the body of Christ, and so on. These and all other traditional *images* particularly indicate the relationship between the church’s self-understanding (its nature) and its mission in the world. It is thus safe to conclude that contextual theologians can use one or more of these images to articulate the experience of being a particular local Church, or it may come up with a suitable image for the same purpose.\footnote{497} Either way, the choice of any model ought to accomplish two things: it must *speak* to, as well as express pastoral realities in the local church without detracting from the Universal Catholic Communion. There are, of course, many realities; however, one that remains normative is the relationship of a particular local church to the universal Catholic Church. This understanding has practical implications.

Given the argument in this study that particular churches are mostly marked by cultural self-understandings as discussed in Chapter III, the following conclusion has to be drawn. All local churches exist in the state of “being truly Catholic” and “becoming fully Catholic” both in faith and in practice. The degree of authentic catholicity depends on the extent to which the Spirit of Christ is incarnate in the faith and life of the believing community. The scope of cultural diversity in the Church is extensive and complex. We saw in Chapter II, for instance, that the situation of cultural diversity in Africa is expressive of exclusion rather than inclusion. Chapter III sought to provide some insights toward resolving this dynamic of exclusion. By showing the essential relationship between philosophical anthropologies and theological anthropology, this study affirms
the foundational significance of Jesus Christ for Catholic theology and mission among diverse cultural contexts -local and global. It also became clear in the same Chapter that the subject of Christological foundations is ultimately bound up with the redeeming and the unifying role of Jesus Christ for the entire human race. This, in many ways, underscores the point made earlier that particular churches, of which Africa is part, are in the state of “becoming” fully Catholic. Such a state does not make any particular local Church any less Catholic than another. It simply means that catholicity is both a reality and a dynamic state of “becoming” with a basic orientation to the future with God. But because local churches are concrete realities, the condition of “becoming” imposes responsibility upon all particular local Catholic Churches not to succumb to false contentment. Rather, they must always be disposed to seek continuous transformation as the essence of Gospel Mission. In this way, the Catholic Church can truly become and reflect its essential nature as a Universal Communion in the diversity of expressions. On the contrary, when a local church exists only in name, when the self-understanding of a local church is not properly attuned to the basic orientation of Catholic theology and mission, the evangelical effectiveness of the universal church is weakened. The quality and extent of communion with the universal church are also weakened. In a nutshell, finding an appropriate working model for a local church is an extremely important practical consideration for a contextual theology at the service of inculturation. At the same time, in order that such a model is not selected in isolation from existential realities, both in the church and the world, the following subsection incorporates certain key realities already pointed out in the previous chapters.
Why a Working Image or Model of the Church?

An effective model ought to add clarity to pastoral discernment in view of contextualization and inculturation. Although this is a statement of principle, the primary aim is not to provide a detailed account of how any pastoral scheme should evolve. Rather, the purpose is to point out practical considerations that go into the selection of a working model for a particular local church. Since Chapters I-III more or less treated specific practical concerns in the African ecclesial milieu, the present objective is more general. That is, an image of the Church that can speak effectively and comprehensively to the African local church must take into account the continent’s dire need to foster mutual dialogue at many levels of existence. For, if the purpose of the church’s universal mission is to bring all people into a living communion that extends to the future with God, then, fostering co-existence among cultures in which the local church is situated is essential to contextual theology and inculturation.

As presented in Chapter III, co-existence within the church and among diverse cultures is not possible without a transcendent anthropological horizon. This horizon is necessary for “[finding] a new orientation for the church, the world, and mankind,” wrote Pope Benedict XVI, by then, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. The theological, missiological, and ecclesiological basis for the church is also clearly expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in his intent to lay the foundation for a fundamental theology. Writing about the “formal principles of Catholicism,” the Pope puts primacy on “Scripture and tradition.” At the same time, he points to “anthropology” as the legitimate foundation of the concept of tradition. The following citation concisely spells out the extreme
significance of relating well the human and the ecclesiological elements in theological
reflection. He says:

For a long time now, we have no longer been able to
distinguish...between those problems that pertain to the Church and those
that pertain to mankind. Although there are, of course, questions that are
specifically Christian and specifically ecclesial, they must, nevertheless,
always be seen in the human perspective. Should the Church ignore this
fact, she would fail to recognize the central principle on which she is
founded, by which she is ordered to universality, that is, to the service of
man, of the humanity of man.501

Note that Pope Benedict XVI points out that the universal mission of the Church is not
compact and abstract such that it is concerned about people in a general and ambiguous
way. The Church is at the service “of the humanity of man.” In other words, the Church’s
universal mission is directed to the different levels of a person’s being and existence-
historical and transcendent.502 This involves the corporeal, the moral, and the spiritual
aspects of any person.

It follows that the self-understanding of the African local Church ought to derive
from a theological anthropological vision of which some basic aspects were articulated in
III. The vision calls African Catholicism to exist in dialogue with everything good and
human--everything truly life-giving. In sum, the current position demands critical
evaluation of what is foreign but good, from that which is not. In this case, dialogue
presupposes that the primary intent of theology is to discover the universal truths, even in
those realities that appear opposed to one another. This kind of dialogue is ultimately a
dynamic process of making sense of the historical experiences of humanity and seeking
to reconcile them according to the universal (transcendent anthropological) “principles.”
One can hardly envision a common vision of humanity that is not rooted in a general
ontology. Only in the latter context can dialogue be rightly perceived as a necessary
means for fostering a better quality of moral and spiritual life and for creating justice, a condition of co-existence among all peoples. In light of this analysis, a fitting model of the local church should be able to speak to the human as well as the material aspects of the local and the global histories of humankind. It is another way of saying that an ecclesial model ought to lead a particular church out of preoccupation with itself. A working church model accomplishes this by providing a formal structure of meaning that sets a local church toward genuine and fuller communion with the Universal Catholic Church and otherwise. The very notion of a Universal Catholic Church presupposes a certain understanding of history. It is an understanding which must impact the self-understanding of a local church in relationship to the Universal Communion. It should be noted, in passing, that an authentic ecclesial model helps to connect particular human histories with the universal human history in a way that helps people to relate their faith experience and aspirations with the rest of the Catholic Church. For the same reason, contextual theology, inculturation and the self-understanding of a local church must thrive on the concept of history which is in tune with Gospel mission. This is a very rich topic and has been treated by many prominent theologians and others. Consequently, the following section in no way explores in depth important dimensions that go into a valid concept of history or its hermeneutical implications for a Christian theology. The goal is more limited to pointing out the place of history in the making of contextual theology and in the task of inculturation.
SECTION II

THE CONCEPT OF HISTORY AND ITS PLACE IN THE MAKING OF A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Thus, a certain concept of history is necessary for a legitimate and fruitful application of theological foundations in the making of a contextual theology and in the task of inculturation. But since the notion history in the church is experienced and conceived at two levels, the particular and the universal, which of these constitutes the interpretive framework for theological reflection? With respect to contextual theology, does a concept of history derive from a general ontology or ethnological experience?

We shall begin by observing that just as a particular self-understanding influences the development of native anthropologies, the same holds true in the experience and conception of history among native cultures. That is, because the notion of history is immediately identified with the collective tribal experiences, for instance, these experiences are likely to affect the ways in which a local church conceives its relationship with the universal church. This experience as it relates to African theology was discussed at length in Chapters I and III and, therefore, need not be repeated here. It thus suffices to point out here the essential relationship of the particular and universal history in the making of a local theology, especially the self-understanding of a local church.

On one hand, if race, tribe, or ethnicity is made the ultimate frame of reference for a human ontology, then, it equally follows that the concept of history is more likely than not to be subsumed into the finite horizon of particular experiences of history. Similarly, it becomes difficult to even contemplate that certain valid human values or structures of meaning transcend particular historical experiences. Instead, transcendent meanings not only take on the limitations of particular experiences, they are also viewed
in ultimate terms by the group concerned. On the other hand, to post ontology as the basis for understanding history implies that the universal rather than particular cultural experiences provide the context for theological reflection at the local and the universal levels of church life. This is also the pathway to which biblical faith points by means of theological anthropological method.

Rather than indulge in mere abstract ontological discussions, the Judeo-Christian world view situates ontology and anthropology in the concrete context of human origin and existence (Gen.1). Because this context comprises of a common origin, a common human nature, a common human history, and a common destiny, it is rightly termed salvation history. The latter is, therefore, the basis for positing a universal concept of history for theological reflection and for inculturation. Precisely, the experience of what it means to be human is always impacted by the above (italicized) structures of meaning. And although the same structures translate into the specificity of racial and ethnic identities, the latter do not constitute the ultimate frame of reference for a truly theological concept of history. For, if ontological discussions are limited to race and ethnicity, one has to inquire as to whether the concept of history the latter engenders is also not limited to particular experiences. Whether or not discussions on human ontology can be open-ended depends on the response to the last inquiry. In brief, Catholic theology of mission can be freed from a dehumanized particularity by situating theological reflection in the context of a general ontology or salvation history. This ecclesiological and missionary trajectory is evident in the Second Vatican II documents. Thus, situating theological reflections in the context of salvation history allows the church to speak in terms of the human race in general. The church is also able to appeal
to the universal structures of meanings and frameworks within its own world view, so as to speak to the whole humanity without reducing human nature to the historically limited realm of experience, i.e., race or ethnic origin. This is one of the biggest temptations among contextual theologians in general. For each of these factors (humanity, history, and destiny) contain a deeper meaning that points beyond itself. So how do we arrive at these conclusions?

To underscore the importance of ontological referents in the perception of history, this chapter has to reiterate what was stated in Chapter IV on the subject of inter-racial and inter-ethnic dialogue. It was emphasized that the historical experiences of culture impact diverse self-understanding and eventual perception of what it means to be human. It is here where ontological consideration necessarily ought to lead any local church outside the bounds of particular history. Once the human being takes center stage, everything else becomes relative, including collective tribal histories. It is also in light of historical transcendence that any fruitful dialogue between Africa and the West can ensue, for instance. The conclusion, then, must be that even though valid truths about human existence acquire an aura of particularity, truths are realities that bind and transcend historical particularities. It is here that we ought to discern in Christian scriptures or the tradition of the church imperative structures of meaning with which to explicate a concept of history that transcends racial and ethnic histories. Without rooting a concept of history in a transcendent ontology (salvation history), contextual theology can be easily mired in the cloud of endless confusion.
History as Salvation History is the Proper Context for Theology and Mission

Formally conceived, epistemology (metaphysics) lies within the speculative ambit of reason. But because theology seeks to account for the definitive origin and end of created reality, theology is the end to which epistemology tends. For this same reason, epistemology is not simply a theoretical speculation without specific purpose and focus, but a study concerned with meaning and, therefore, real issues affecting real people. Thus any body of human knowledge has impact on people’s lives, for better or for worse. It is not enough, then, to have good epistemological assumptions or theories concerning reality. Knowledge is valid when it is able to say something meaningful to the human condition within the context of the universal history. The following statements are a summary of the sphere of knowledge in which history has to be defined. Considerations regarding the meaning of history are as vital as any of the basic concerns in Catholic theology. There are theological and practical reasons which intertwine here as we attempt to provide a concise explanation of salvation history.

Contextual theologies are constantly involved in the task of articulating the “traditional” experiences of peoples who are always marked by particular histories. It goes without saying that the church’s mission transverses particular histories. For this same reason, a local church ought to work with a concept of history that affirms particular histories at the same time opening them to an understanding of human history as salvation history. Such a task does not simply consist in a linear movement of the mind from a particular to a religious understanding of history. Rather, interpretation of particular histories ought to be explained in the context of biblical revelation. History has to be viewed as salvation history. This historical consciousness is evident in the Second
Vatican Council teaching on the development of culture. In seeking to expound Catholic theology of mission, Vatican II linked closely the meaning of “person,” “history,” and “salvation” in ways that enable us to be critical about non-biblical assumptions about the same. In the theology of *Lumen Gentium*, no.13, for instance, the essential mission of the Catholic Church is to unite all people into one human family. “…though there are many nations there is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than an earthly nature.” The same paragraph also notes that “the Church or People of God in establishing that kingdom takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people.” In other words, organic communion within the church does not detract from the human responsibility for self-direction and self-determination. However, because the church is concerned with ultimate realities, represented in the evangelical teaching and liturgical life, the same paragraphs also underscore the fact that maintaining organic unity among “particular churches” is impossible without central leadership in the church. In light of the immediate objective, all these pronouncements in *Lumen Gentium*, must have salvation history as their interpretive context.

Salvation history is the interpretive context for presenting a notion of history that speaks meaningfully to all diverse cultural civilizations. It also forms the background for conciliar theology as a whole. It is thus impossible for the Judeo-Christian tradition to speak concretely about the meaning of a “person” without reference to the idea of *Imago-Dei*. Nor can we comprehend the true meaning and nature of the church’s abiding mission to the nations without a clear theology of *Imago-Dei*. Created by God, human beings share one common history and destiny. It is thus right to conclude that an
appropriate sense of historical unity is essential for the peaceful flow of global human history. Hence, by teaching that human salvation is worked out within earthly realities, the Second Vatican Council linked the human being, culture, and history. The stated link is not simply essential to a healthy evolution of global history: the church’s mission can hardly progress without it. Pope Paul VI put it clearly, “[t]he kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human…cultures.” In fulfilling its missions, the church borrows concepts and tangible cultural expressions from cultures to proclaim the Gospel message. Basic language patterns are indispensable vehicles for preserving and for the coherent transmission of a Christian world view.

Chapter II barely treated the pros and cons of a globalized history. But in light of Pope Paul VI’s teaching and of the present concern, globalization confounds the already limited concept of history vis-à-vis salvation history, as much as it endangers the church’s mission. Felix Wilfred lends insight into how this is enacted.

He says,

Implicit in the philosophy and practice of globalization is the assumption that it is a movement towards unity of the whole human family. It claims to represent the infallible future historical trajectory of humankind, its ultimate unity and universality. Even more, with the supposed triumph of capitalism, the drive force behind globalization, ‘The end of History and the Last Man’ are being proclaimed. But we know that there is a deep contradiction between such claims and the actuality. The greatest harm globalization does is to delude us with the make believe pseudo-unity and universality of humankind.

Needless to say, globalization is being accompanied with the emptying of language patterns of their original coherent meaning. The result is the eventual collapse of basic moral content and a systematic riding of linguistic traditional patterns of meanings that
were once the vehicle for transmitting the Gospel truth. Christianity’s power and genius to impart coherence to the flow and direction of human history is thereby rendered difficult. These are partly the reasons why historical unity ought to comprise an essential aspect of contextual theology and inculturation because a concept of history has a place in the making of human civilization. Above all, it is a necessary step toward an appreciation that all peoples share a common origin, history and destiny. In sum, it is with this background understanding that the following model of the Church is proposed for the African reality. This being the case, this model speaks to the expressed realities within a local church and beyond.

SECTION III

THE CHURCH AS A GATHERING COMMUNITY

The concept of the Catholic Church as a gathering community has deep biblical premises. The aim of this section is not to discuss the church’s theological underpinnings. In fact, Lumen Gentium, no. 13 lays down the biblical assumptions behind the image of the church as a gathering community. It thus suffices to say that this image speaks well to biblical faith as the most viable solution to a Continent whose people are divided on account of diverse genetic formulae and historical traditions. The image, as proposed, does not replace those that the Catholic Church has put forward to denote its self-understanding in the course of history. A close look at each of those images, however, shows that each of them is contained within the aspect of gathering. For example, the Church as body of Christ or a mystery expresses the same doctrinal realities found in Lumen Gentium, no. 13 and elsewhere. It has to be presumed, on this basis, that each traditional image expresses different dimensions of the church’s missionary activity of gathering peoples and creation into one. One way the Church does this is through the
Eucharistic with its specific genetic formula, i.e., the one Jesus inherited from the Jewish People and turned it into a spiritual food and bonding principle for the ‘People of God.’ Therefore, since Christian faith and life presupposes the involvement of God in the world, the image of gathering particularly lends itself well to God’s active presence, especially as experienced through the life of the church (Jn. 17: 21).

We have also seen, particularly in Chapter II, that African communal configurations are more basically oriented toward fragmentation and alienation than toward unity in diversity. It is precisely due to this basic obstacle to integration at the different levels of existence that we can appreciate the proposal that the local church in Africa is less suited to a self-understanding that takes after consanguineous structures of meaning such as a clan. This is not to suggest that the Judeo-Christian world view is opposed to the value of natural descent. Consanguinity is not an absolute biblical moral imperative such that it can constitute an absolute basis of social order and working concept of history. The moral value of consanguinity is dependent on the other hierarchies of meaning in the overall Christian world view. That the fragmentary nature of the African tribal worldviews stand in need of basic rehabilitation requires no further persuasive argument. The Catholic Church is capable of bringing Africa to authentic unity without doing damage to the good values which are inherent in diverse tribal cultures. But change cannot be realized without explicit willingness and determination on the part of Africa to re-orient the cultural direction of the Continent. Only a contextual theology that has the transformation of people and their culture as its subject matter and object stands the chance of playing a valid role in the church’s missionary task of gathering the goods of humanity and their diverse histories into a single history. Having
said that, however, a question ought to be raised at this point: does the mere fact of having a model such as the one proposed here have any impact on the pastoral realities of fashioning a local theology or inculturation?

The response to the question has to go back to Chapters III and IV. A brief explanation is needed as to how the model of the Church as gathering community translates into appropriate theological methodology. A model is the tool with which the church reflects and implements its pastoral findings. It is also the tool with which all things are gathered into one. The model, then, as proposed, is the most effective way by which to describe the essential relationship between different local missions in the One Catholic Church. In the case of Africa, the image facilitates an understanding of how the African local Church is theologically and pastorally linked to the Universal Ecclesial Communion. Such understanding is not an end in itself. The notion of gathering ought to lead to a theological methodology capable of giving full and valid expression to the nature of the Church, its theology, and mission. Chapter III enunciated such a methodology in terms of theological anthropology or transcendent anthropology. That is, by putting “a human being” at the center of a theological methodology, Chapter III “pointed toward” the moral criterion and basic principle by which the church gathers everything into one. On the basis of this fundamental principle, ecclesial models must be reflected in theological methodologies for a local theology and for inculturation. This structural arrangement in methodology guarantees the integrity of the church’s nature and mission in human history. Otherwise, the lack of harmony between contextual theology, inculturation, and the self-understanding of the local church spells conflict in the basic direction of the church’s mission. That the stated conflict constitutes the main problem in
African theology was a matter discussed at length in the previous Chapters. The following summaries only briefly clarify what it means to say an ecclesiological model ought to say something about theological methodologies. But this means that we have to establish a link between the present concerns with the theme of Christological foundations.

**Ecclesiological Implications for a Theological Model**

The notions of “gathering” and of “history” ought to be linked to that of theological foundations to appreciate the necessity to uphold ecclesial integrity in the tasks of contextualization and inculturation. As pointed out in the previous chapters, theological foundations set the basic direction of theology at all levels of church life and structures. It is on the same account that this study sustains the argument that ancestral foundations or models impede the possibility of opening up native cultures to the unifying function and saving power of the Gospel. It is, therefore, urgent that the Catholic church of Africa be clear about the fundamental distinction between Christology and ancestrology. The distinction is necessary in order not to collapse the saving mission of Jesus Christ, of salvation history into cultural enterprises or agenda. Such an instance would imply that the mission of the Catholic Church is to merge with existing cultures according to their philosophical modes of operation. Under such ecclesial conditions, theological methodology would merely consist in a synthesis such as the one proposed by Benezet Bujo and others, in Chapter I. But that the synthesis he proposes leads to a complete theological and ecclesial autonomy was also treated in the previous chapters. Thus, the following summary of Avery Dulles’ insights casts light on the subject of a theological model most suited to the self-understanding of the Catholic Church in the
world today. His basic concerns lend themselves well to the image of the church as a gathering community and the need to link this with a theological methodology. We shall begin with a passing review of the main theme in Chapter I.

**The Basic Problem with Benezet Bujo’s Synthesis Model**

Avery Dulles has mainly delved into specific challenges which inculturation poses to catholicity; i.e., the nature of the Church, mission, and theology. His particular work cited here clarifies the inseparable relationship between ecclesiology, mission, and local theologies. Dulles rightly maintains that in order for the aforementioned elements to hold together in a fruitful way, the choice of a theological model matters. He exemplifies his position by discussing, at some length, three main models often used by inculturationists. They include an autonomist, a synthesis, and a transformationist model of inculturation. Dulles underscores a transformation model as the one which is consistent with the Second Vatican Council theology of the church and its mission in the world today. But before recommending a transformation model, he first brings out the limitations inherent in the theological models often used by contextual theologians. The following concluding statements more or less follow Dulles’ pattern of thought to show that a synthesis proposed by Benezet Bujo is, in essence, an autonomist model. The Christological reasons are already provided in the previous chapters and in the preceding sections of this chapter.

Dulles’ overall thought is that, although inculturation is at the service of particular local churches, the latter are not meant to exist in opposition to universality as the norm and basic direction of catholicity. Therefore, and as a corrective, he draws attention to the essential relationship between the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and
inculturation. Accordingly, the nature and objective of Vatican Council II ecclesiology is bound up with inculturation. Inculturationists have, however, not yet been able to relate the two in the spirit of Vatican Council II theology of the Church and its mission in the world. This theology tends toward the transformation of peoples and their cultures. Dulles ascribes the above-mentioned theological impasse to certain brands of transcendental theologies, of which he cites Bernard Lonergan, whose philosophical and theological position in this regard has given a particularly autonomist slant to inculturationists.516

Lonergan, according to Dulles, “rejects, a normative view of culture, [because] he identifies it as classicist view [in favor of an empirical concept of culture].”517 By implication, Lonergan rejects a general (ontological) concept of culture as a basis for understanding diverse cultures. In sum, if Lonergan’s overall position is followed to its logical end, it negates the intent by the Vatican Council II to arrive at a normative view of culture, as a necessary step in the self-understanding of the Catholic Church today.518 For by imparting equal importance to every cultural tradition, Lonergan is obviously working outside a common ontology as the absolute philosophical basis for comprehending humanity and its cultural experiences.519 Lonergan consequently envisioned the future of dialogue as being grounded in the universal experience of “divine love…which is “not dependent on the prior preaching of the gospel.”520 Divine love is accessible to all, the argument goes. Contextual theologians often use this frame of reference to attribute relative evangelical significance to the Gospel. Hindu theologians have, according to Dulles, taken Lonergan’s position to raise the argument that, “Jesus is not the only one, albeit the most important, of many epiphanies of Christ.”521 Consequently, the traditions
of native peoples are seen, “at least in an analogous way, as an Old Testament, pointing to Christ as much as the Hebrew Bible did for the early Christians.” Indigenous peoples need not convert to Christianity, because it “has assumed Western cultural norms.” All cultures come closer to God through their own religions. In brief, given the basic theological assumptions from which a synthesis and an autonomist models proceed, Dulles is right in raising the following questions. “[U]nder what conditions can the church appropriate a particular human culture without impairing its fidelity to Christ and the gospel?” Since this particular question has been the particular focus of the previous chapters, the following citations from Dulles only serve the purpose of underscoring the ongoing but wide spread significance of Catholic theology and mission.

This author is in complete agreement with Avery Dulles in arguing that Lonergan’s transcendental theology is being used to justify cultural and theological relativism. Notably, while inculcationists are right in perceiving that faith, love, reason and justice are transcendent principles and, as such, essential to the transformative character of Christianity, Dulles is more theologically and methodologically accurate in pointing out the following. “The source and center [of Christianity] is not some abstract metaphysical principle or virtue but a concrete universal, Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity, as a historical religion, cannot escape from what has been called the scandal of particularity.” So what does Dulles propose as a corrective to the current misapplication of the Second Vatican Council theology of the church and its mission? The following paragraphs outline some key aspects of Dulles’ main arguments which tie in with the main position of this study.
Dulles’ argument is thoroughly compelling. The Catholic Church has a purpose, which must correspond with its self-understanding and manner of being in the world. Rooted in the Judeo-Christian worldview as a dynamic movement toward the unity of all peoples, the post Vatican II Catholicism is an “emerging World Church.” Its nature and missionary character basically tend to unity in faith and diversity in cultural expressions. Given this missionary landscape, Dulles rightly examines how “multiple inculturations in the face of divergent models of inculturation…can benefit the universal Church.” The right response lies in aligning native anthropologies with Christology. Thus Dulles is accurate in pointing out that “there are qualitative differences among cultures.” In light of the church’s mission, the conclusion has to be made that Christology and transcendent anthropology is the most fundamental principle by which Catholic theology can “[discriminate] among cultures in light of their harmony or lack of harmony with the divinely established order.” Chapter III strived to clarify important aspects of this critical point. It suffices to say with Dulles that, although Christianity has an essential relationship to all culture, it cannot be equated with the latter. In all these, Dulles is trying to show the limitations of models of inculturation that sees no difference between Jesus Christ and the rest of humanity. The Church would end up being no different from any secular society.

An autonomist model does not lead to a transformation as the essence and goal of the Christian mission. Instead, it creates deep alienation among local churches and diverse cultures. It asserts and widens differences instead of establishing a common framework in which historically crafted differences can be resolved. The model also closes up avenues for dialogue, positive criticism, and mutual enrichment. It views
Christianity as a mere stimulant for indigenous religious impulses. Dulles is thus right in concluding that an autonomist model leads to the “[loss] of the church’s capacity to bring Jews and gentiles into a single people.” The question is how this “loss” is expressed by a synthesis model.

A synthesis model, according to Dulles, “holds that Christianity must embody itself in appropriate cultural forms.” There is nothing immediately wrong with this position, granted that the official Catholic Church teaching holds this to be the case. However, general statements of this kind not only ought to be weighed against an anthropological model, but also that the latter must accommodate a valid concept of church and of history. Hence, because a synthesis model is premised on the basic assumption that, “Culture is regarded as good in its own order and as perfective of the human,” it undercuts the very essence of catholicity. The uniquely Christian meanings and symbols become bound up with specific cultures. A synthesis identifies the actual dynamic of human transformation with culture, as in the case of ancestrology-based synthesis. Seen this way, the only viable strategy on the part of inculturation is to conserve most, if not, all things deemed valuable by particular cultures. It follows that cultures are to “[provide] Christianity with a suitable base for the Gospel.” The possibility of any culture being transformed by Christianity does not, therefore, arise. After all cultures already embody the essence of the Christian transformative dynamism and, as such, are oriented toward the same end. It is on these accounts that Dulles rightly refutes an autonomist and a synthesis model. In their place he reasserts a transformation model as the one intended and, therefore, in character with the Second Vatican Council theology of the Church and mission. Let it be clear that the theoretical basis for
inculturation as transformation, which Dulles points to, is already established in Chapter III. It is, nonetheless, important that we mention his argument because it opens up practical dimensions which are important to the task of inculturation.

Transformation, according to Dulles, has to be understood in terms of reciprocity. The latter term has to be grasped against the background of theological anthropological discussions provided in Chapter III. In light of that, Dulles clearly makes practical observations which enable us to see that reciprocity holds particularity and Universal Ecclesial Communion in a right balance. First and foremost, he strongly and clearly argues that, “When the Bible, dogmas, sacraments and ecclesial structures are branded as culture bound, the sources of continuity and communion in the universal church are weakened.” As a corrective to autonomous tendencies, transformation as reciprocity means that a local theology has the moral obligation to “[discriminate] among cultures in light of their harmony or lack of harmony with the divinely established order.” This has to be because Christianity offers criteria by which we can recognize that “there is qualitative difference among cultures.” It is then that we can validly speak of mutual enrichment among cultures, and between the latter and Christianity.

In sum, Catholic contextual theologies have the obligation to link Christology, ecclesiology, and native anthropologies in a meaningful way. A pure synthesis is in conflict with transformation as the missionary character of the Gospel and, therefore, of the church’s mission in the world. Dulles does not see conflict simply as departing from the Gospel or missionary imperatives of Vatican II theology. Rather, the models in question reflect a distorted perception of the historical revelation for the meaning of the church and its universal mission situated in human history. The proponents of
unwholesome models, according to Dulles, “lack a clear understanding of where the transformative power of Christianity comes from.” With that, we come to the final conclusion of this study.

V. THE CONCLUSION

The changes ushered into Africa through Western missionary and political influence require a critical appraisal of the many existing cultural traditions in the entire history of Africa. This task demands free and decisive action on the part of the Catholic Church of Africa. Either African Catholicism spearheads the process of human and cultural transformation to which the Continent is being invited by Divine Providence or abandon this in favor of the ethnocentric worldviews. On the contrary, that latter choice works against the new modes of aspirations and behavior and the emerging patterns of social life in Africa. However, the new modes of behavior are evolving alongside an unfaltering will to stay rooted in the ancestral philosophical mold. But can *ecclesia in Africa* continue to thrive on the simple assumption that it is possible to embrace the new changes and at the same time maintain traditional anthropologies and ontologies intact? The cultural and human crises already unfolding in Africa are bound to shatter the previously held beliefs with a certain ferocity. The socio-economic and political dynamics in the world have changed to the point where Africa is confronted with two clear choices: to embrace radical transformation in the traditional philosophies and become a viable partner in the emerging historical processes, or to cling uncritically to all traditional values and consequently condemn the helpless masses to a condition of despair. Ironically, the synthesis and the autonomist models favored by ancestral theologians do just that! But ought things to remain that way? There is a way out of the
current situation and it is offered by the Second Vatican Council teaching on the mission of the church in the modern world.

Hence, if African theologians truly seek to make Christianity relevant to Africa, the methods of proceeding must relate church teaching to the concrete historical realities therein. The preference for the pre-colonial social context only helps to distance the tasks of theological reflections and inculturation from the church’s mission in general. It is not only the African social setting that has changed over the years; people’s aspirations and needs are changing daily in favor of external values. These new situations are largely a result of Western missionary and cultural influences. It is not farfetched, then, to conclude that the peoples of Africa, in their diversity, recognize the new conditions and aspirations as a welcome change. Today, Black Africa show signs of wanting to know and live by the Christian Gospel. They also see the need for socioeconomic and political changes and the benefits directly associated with them. These and many other changes should be helping the African local church to recognize the potential as well as the limitations of the tribal world views. But in doing so, theological reflection cannot proceed blindly, remaining content in theological abstractions. It is here where this study can particularly offer some, albeit, limited insight into what needs to be done, especially what to make of the rich theological heritage of the Second Vatican Council and many sound theological writings in Catholic theology.

END NOTES

1 It is very important that we understand from the outset the basic distinction between the following phraseologies, because contextual theologies tend to use them synonymously. From a human and a Christian theological standpoint, there is a philosophical distinction between “valid cultural experience” and “valid cultural values.” Valid cultural experiences denote the inherent ability in every human being to create culture. It affirms the universality of a common human nature. Valid cultural values, on the other hand, have to do with the transcendent truths contained in a culture and are at the service of people. Both
expressions have ontology as an indispensable point of reference. The dissertation as a whole treats their significance in Catholic missiology.

2 Benezet bujo is a Catholic theologian hailing from Congo. At the time of writing his proposal in question, he was heading a department of moral theology in a Catholic universal in Belgium.


6 Ibid., 13.

7 Ibid., 23.

8 See M. L Daneel on these specific aspects.

9 “EA” denotes John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation known as *Ecclesia in Africa*.


11 Notice that the concept of culture in Africa is expressed in the singular.

12 Emmanuel Martey, 8.


14 Ibid., 3.

15 Emmanuel Martey, 8.

16 M. L Daneel, 26.

17 Ibid., 27.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.


21 Ibid., 29.

22 Emmanuel Martey, 11.
23 Ibid., 10.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 13.

27 Ibid.

28 M. L. Daneel, 29.

29 Ibid, 27.

30 Emmanuel Martey, 122-128.


32 Ibid., 66. Negritude is the coming to consciousness about African identity and the oppression of the people of African origin both in Africa and in the Diaspora. The movement culminated into the Pan-Africanism and later in African theology. There are many nuances in Bujo’s work on the different themes developed under the idea of negritude. Those pertinent to this study are treated under the “historical-theological background.”

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 6. Schreiter gives an impression of having read only the introduction and conclusion to Bujo’s work and on the basis of which he gives high-sounding appraisals.

38 Ibid., 12.

39 Ibid., 38-39.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 ATR is the abbreviated form of African Traditional Religions.

43 Benezet Bujo, 17ff.

44 Ibid., 75.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.
The idea of *praeparatio evangelico* speaks to the degree to which a particular culture is prepared by God’s general self-communication to receive the Gospel of Christ.

Benezet Bujo, 17-37.

Ibid., 18.

Ibid. 11-12.


Benezet Bujo, 75.


This should not imply that Justin S. Ukpong’s particular proposal indicates in any way how African cultures are to relate to New Testament Christology. His proposal is at the level of discernment, whereas Bujo’s synthesis is an advanced step proposing the theological foundations for a local theology. The “difference” thus mentioned refers to different modes of conceptualization by the two authors.

Congregation for the Clergy, “Pedagogy of God, Source and Model of the Pedagogy of the Faith” in *General Directory for Catechesis*, 136. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 6-16. In both of these documents for instance, the official Church’s teaching makes it explicit that every aspect of the faith is patterned on the economy of salvation.

Benezet Bujo, 80,

‘Theory’ refers to the explanations and meanings he attaches to the Proto-Ancestor Christology, and ‘method’ is the means he adopts to articulate his proposal as a whole. We shall begin with his theory basing the argument on the root meaning of prot(o).

Benezet Bujo, 83.


Benezet Bujo, 83.
M. L Daneel, 31.

Ibid., 79.

Ibid.

Ibid., 53.

Ibid., 53-55.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 49-50.

Ibid., 52 ff.

Ibid.

Ibid., 55.

Ibid.

Ibid., 50 & 55.

Ibid., 55. Otherwise see the entire section, 49-66.

Ibid., 55.

Ibid., 55.


Chapters III to IV speak about the meaning of Christ. This is must be understood in the traditional sense of a person and the meaning of Christ for the Christian faith as the subject of Christology. The nuances in its usage in this study, however, lie in recognizing and amplifying that certain basic meanings and functions of the Christian faith are intrinsic to Christology. These are so basic, because they help in clarifying the basic direction of Christianity and consequently of a contextual theology.


Ibid., 22.

Ibid., 23.

Notice that Bujo does not say the *community of the early church*, but rather the *community of the church*. The first meaning is implied in the second. The author refers briefly to the early church having developed scriptural traditions by reflecting on the person of Christ. According to him the issue of the historical Jesus
is relevant for the emergence and development of local theologies. This partly explains why Bujo does not make use of scriptural themes, but rather prefers to speak in terms of the person of Christ, especially in reference to the Johannine Christology of the incarnation. By insisting on making direct reference to the person of Christ, he avoids the challenges posed by complex matters in the Catholic tradition.

86 Benezet Bujo, African Theology in Its social Context, 75.


88 Ibid., 82. Pobee does not see that the biblical claims presuppose a metaphysical basis; a topic Chapter III deals with. For now we shall observe in passing that the formative effects of culture, as in the case of African cultures, have attuned the African psyche to be preoccupied with the concrete, sensual realities. Though a good experience and theologians explore its potential for theology, they do so one-sidedly. African Christianity has not yet come to understand that the exclusive cultural focus on concrete, sensual realities also inhibit the full development of all human faculties (material and spiritual aspects of human being) in the living of the Christian faith. For example, Christian imagination is a ramification of the intellect as the faculty of the soul and one that fosters an understanding of the Christian realities that cannot be completely captured by the sensual experiences, and so on.

89 Benezet Bujo, African Theology in Its Social Context, 73.

90 Ibid., 81.

91 Ibid., 32. The context of this statement is African eschatology but like all argument it is geared toward bolstering his argument for the religious authenticity and integrity of ATRS.

92 Ibid., 16.


94 Refer to Chapter II and III where this theme is treated in detail.

95 Robert Kaggwa, 57.

96 This phrase is used here in the very sense of classical philosophy to distinguish between the “being of God” and that of “human being.” God as “pure act” and a human being as both “potency and act” denote different ways of being and the dependence of humankind on God. Hence, by assigning the role and function of Christ to the ancestors Bujo is challenging the very being of God expressed in Christ as the basis of the Africans coming to a fuller understanding of God’s self communication in the world. Ultimately, it is an approach that condemns Africans to the limits of human experience and insights; in this case, the past experiences of traditional Africa. See the following author for a detailed reading on the subject of being and existence as it relates to God and man. Gerald Smith, S. J, Natural Theology: Metaphysics II (New York: McMillan Company, 1951).


98 These insights are a result of reflecting on the experiences of having been a direct participant in Christian Muslim dialogue in Uganda, a ministry championed by the Missionary of Africa (White Fathers).

99 Ibid., 82. Bujo has drawn upon Karl Rahner to bolster his arguments on the meaning of the incarnation for the ancestral schema. The most profound and compelling critic of Karl Rahner’s anonymous Christianity was carried out by his student, Johann Baptist Metz. See for instance, Johann Baptist Metz,
“Political Theology” in Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies.* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 21-88. Beyond that Bujo’s theology in no way gets close to Rahner’s profound reflections on the incarnation and its meaning for theology. See Chapter Three of this study.


101 A general argument that permeates Iniobong S. Udoidem’s reflection is that the reality of the incarnation is already present in all cultures. According to him, this has implications for missionaries, whose task now consists basically in identifying the signs of Christ’s presence in the cultures to which they are sent. Iniobong, like Bujo, uses the Christology of incarnation selectively and apart from other dimensions of the Christ event and Pneumatology. Detailed reading on this topic by the same author can be found in his work entitled: *Pope John Paul II on Inculturation: Theory and Practice* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc, 1996). See especially, 53.


103 This refers to the simultaneous interpretation of scripture, tradition or doctrine and culture depending on the issue at hand and other factors that may be called into consideration.

104 The reflections presented so far should not give the impression that there is only one way of grounding a Christian theology. There are many human needs requiring different theological approaches. Most of contextual theologies in Africa are grounded on the Christian faith at the level of “working definitions,” i.e., theologians locate a working theme and use it as an organizing principle. That said, all theological foundations must have Christ as the ultimate frame of reference. The problem with Bujo’s synthesis is that it challenges Christ as the foundation for an African Christian theology.

105 Engelbert Mveng, “A Historical Background of the African Synod” in *African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, 30. The author of this article is one of the theologians who was directly involved in the preliminary processes toward the formulation of the proposal for an African Council. He, therefore, writes from a first hand experience.


107 Ibid., 61.

108 Ibid., 64.

109 Engelbert Mveng, 23.

110 Ibid, 20-30

111 Ibid., 27.

112 Ibid.


114 Engelbert Mveng, 23.
Note that inculturation is patterned on the theology of the Incarnation. The paschal mystery is one dimension of the Incarnation and whose translation into theological and missionary methodologies is dependent on the other dimensions of the Incarnation, namely; the actual taking on the human flesh by the Son of God, his development into an human being, his proclamation of the Gospel, his death and resurrection. In other words, a Christian cannot know how “to die” to inhuman cultural values before understanding the Word of God.


In preparation for the Synod the Lineamenta mainly outlined the “tasks of future evangelization, and mentioned the historical realities in terms of the history of evangelization in Africa.” Justin S. Ukpong is concerned about the fact that the Lineamenta simply recounted the “history of evangelization” in Africa without “interpreting” those facts. Interpretation would have meant a critical presentation of this history; i.e, mentioning what was done and what ought to have been done. But given that Ukpong is at par with Benezet Bujo in their view of the African reality, interpretation would not have included a critical study of African cultures.


Congregation for the Clergy, General Directory for Catechesis, 137-143.


Harvey J. Sindima, 13.

Benezet Bujo, African Synod, 140.


M.L. Daneel, 27.


Ibid., 1.

Details concerning the exact nature of economic afflictions can be easily obtained from many existing sources, some of which are cited in this study. The presentation overview is not, therefore, an elaborate explanation of nitty-gritty details of specific economic problems.

Paul Gifford, 15-16.

The author is cited by Paul Gifford on page 15 of the same work cited above.


Ibid.

Carlos Lopes, *Enough is Enough: For an Alternative Diagnosis of the African Crisis* (Discussion paper Five) (Uppsala, Sweden: Motala Grafiska, 1994). The author “is a sociologist from Guinea-Bissau who earned his Ph.D. from University of Paris, Pantheon Sorbonne. He was the founder and first director of Guinea Bissau National Institute for Studies and Research (INEP) before joining UNDP.” Apparently at the time of writing this paper, he was the “deputy resident representative in Zimbabwe.” This information is obtained from the back cover of the same book.

Ibid., 27.


Ibid.


Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959), 21. Tempels himself misunderstands a lot of African cultural dispositions. The errors in his judgment do not, however, diminish the accuracy and importance of some of his observations such as those cited from his work.

Ibid, 21. There is a sense in which this claim is accurate. The adherents of the traditional religions, i.e., those who have no direct knowledge of Christian faith cannot provide a systematic account of traditional philosophies such as the ones we find in theological writings today. Whether or not this is acknowledged, Christianity has offered African Christian theologians the vantage point or horizon from which to synthesize and articulate the traditional world views, certain presumptions notwithstanding.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 28.
153 Ibid., 21.


155 Ibid., 1.

156 Ibid., 1.

157 Placide Tempels, 24-25. Tempels perceptively considered that just as everything in African cultures was not bad, in the same way everything in African ontology was not entirely good. On the same pages cited, he also humbly acknowledged that due to lack of sound knowledge of the same cultures then “It was impossible to distinguish what is commendable from what is pernicious for lack of any criterion to enable us to keep not only some good things in native custom, but all that is good therein, cutting out all that is evil….Only if we sent out from what is good and the stable can we be able to lead our Africans in the directions of a true Bantu civilization.”

158 See Herb Thompson, 3: on the North American version of the colonial attitudes.

159 This is not to imply inactivity on the part of Africa for example. Policies have been enforced by Western governments as much as Africa continues to be a willing imitator of developmental structures and policies from developed and developing countries.

160 Ibid., 1

161 Bernard Lonergan’s celebrated critique of the Western view of culture illustrates the difference between the former and the Vatican Council II teaching. According to Stephen B. Bevans, Lonergan “distinguishes between a classicist notion of culture and one that is empirical. For the classicist notion of culture, there is only one culture, [the Western Culture] and is both universal and permanent.” This classic view, still current in the West, defines culture in “intellectual and esthetic” terms to connote “erudition, refinement of spirit, artistic and literary improvement.” Ary Roest Crollius has correctly termed this view “A univocal conception of culture which accepts only one way of understanding cultural reality and measures all according to the standards of this culture.” See the same author under the topic, “Inculturation: Newness and Ongoing Process” in Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency (Kampala-Uganda: St. Paul’s Publications-Africa, 1986), 62. It is not surprising, therefore, that “Within this understanding of culture, one became ‘cultured,’” when one “nourished oneself on the great human achievements of the West.” See Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual theology, Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 7.


163 Ibid.

164 Ibid., 7.

165 Bruce Kapferer, 4.


167 There is convergence in thought between Kapferer, Thompson, Marcus and Fischer.
Where the meaning of a person is included, it is most likely to take a specific cultural slant. While this is expected given the impact of social experience on the perception of reality, the question remains as to whether the meaning of culture and person in Africa can be conceived outside specific social experiences. The answer to this important question lies within the ambit of religion, according to this study. And it is to that realm of human experience that the next sections must treat the cultural-religious factor in the perception of what it means to be a person.

This statement is in reference to the African theological stance.

This means that we take into account those notions that speak to unity in diversity in a globalizing world. These include but not limited to inclusive notions such as; the meaning of person, history, cultural diversity, etc.

George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, 7.

Ibid., 7 and 8.

Thierry Verhelst, “Cultural Dynamics in Development: A Tool to Define the Notion of Culture” in Network Cultures, 2000, South-North Network Cultures and Development, 1.

Ibid.

Ibid. This particular article contains a lot of important insights, most of which apply else where in the study. Otherwise the use of this article at this point in limited to the meaning of culture.

Aylward Shorter, M.Afr, uses the same phraseology, but against a multi-dimensional concept of culture that captures Vatican II teaching. He says, “Culture is a pattern of values and meanings expressed through images and symbols, which is transmitted by a human society, and which enables human beings to communicate and develop their understanding of life.” He delineates these elements under the practical and the noetic levels. See “New Attitudes to African Culture and African Religions” in Toward African Christian Maturity (Nairobi-Kenya: St. Paul Publications Africa, 1990),17-28.

However it ought to be noted, the actions as described are more associated with the “ritual” aspects of
culture than with all cultural meanings. In the realm of rituals, objective representation either overshadows
the meaning or is synchronized with the overall purpose of the ritual symbol. One only needs to look at the
over all social structure of any collectivity to understand the falsity in White and Dillingham’s explanation.
Many social ideas are less compact than those immediately associated with ritual-related symbols. For
instance, the ethical statutes are not arbitrary but normally result from the conscious experiences of society.
Not every meaning in culture is imposed.

In the same work cited in this paper, Herb Thompson makes a point that redeems the physical approach
to culture. “All human behavior plus all forms of external expressions are dependent upon the human
capacity for learning and transforming knowledge.” Refer to Chapter III in which ontology clarifies the
importance of Thompson’s view as quoted here.

Under the title, “The Church’s Presence in Africa,” Ogbu U. Kalu expresses a more theologically sound
and realistic understanding of African cultures weighed against a Christian view and contemporary
realities. His specific views seem not to have impacted African theological interpretation of African
cultures. Refer to African Theology En Route, Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds. (Maryknoll, NY:

Fr. Nwachukwue S.S. Iwe, Christianity and Culture in Africa: Organized Religion and Factors in a
Developing culture-A Historical and Cultural Analysis (Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1977),
17.

T. M. McFadden, “Anthropology, Theological” in New Catholic Encyclopedia (Washington, DC: The
Catholic University of America, 2003), 509. The author’s reference to the crucial significance of “social
historical process” should be seen as a necessary corrective to the perspective(s) that sees culture as one
time event, or a finished product to be handed down to descendants.

Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes, no. 2.

T. M. McFadden, 509.

See Michael Gallagher, S.J, Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture (New York/
One must take care to observe that whereas Christianity emerged through the medium of Jewish culture, it is not a product of human culture. Its divine origin places Christianity above all cultures. For this same reason, the validity of particular religious beliefs is dependent upon the moral content of a religion. The moral content cannot be determined and defended in thin air, i.e., apart from an understanding of a person in relation to individual and collective destiny.


Matters related to the purpose of culture are treated from Chapter III onwards.


David B. Barrett, Schism & Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand contemporary religious Movements (Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1968), 99. It is also very possible that there are more tribes in Africa than Barret was able to understand.

Ibid., 45.

Ibid., 44.

For details reading see John S. Mbiti, 99.

The generic term people would rightly suggest that the Black People comprise one race. However, the tribal anthropological views suggest the contrary. Each tribe understands itself as a distinct racial entity created by God as we shall see in the subsequent analysis.

John S. Mbiti, 100.

Ibid.

Michael Paul Gallagher, 25. Note that the author uses here the work of Mary Douglas, “who did most of her initial field work in Africa in the 1950s, particularly in Zaire,” 24.

Ibid., 25

Ibid.

Ibid., 2

Ibid.

Aylward Shorter offers another important perspective on the fact of “African society” being a closed system. Details are in his article entitled “Obstacles to Liberation in African Religious Traditions” in Towards African Christian Liberation (Nairobi: St. Paul’s Publications Africa, 1990), 11-20. The same work includes Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike’s response disputing the assertion made by Shorter, 21-23. The current author admits, however, that Nasimiyu did not recognize the philosophical-theological level at which Shorter critiqued African cultures. A close reading reveals that Shorter based himself on some central “human values” necessary for “opening up” and “enlarging” social horizons. Shorter rightly perceived that once the perception of a certain human being is skewed, social development becomes a muddle.
Leonardo Boff, *New Evangelization: Good News to the Poor*, Trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 7. We should note, however, that Boff is simply stating the general orientation of the human psyche. Matters related to whether or not a human being is basically ordered to definitive self-explanation within the historical plane is a subject deferred to Chapter III.

John S. Mbiti, 1.

It ought to be clear that the Second Vatican Council did not forge the philosophy of culture out of the blue. The teaching is rooted in the biblical view of the human being which takes into account the total context of human existence.

This experience is not exceptional to Africa. In fact the geographical East, with the exception of the Jewish biblical culture, still exhibits the tendencies described in the current section. To found culture on something else other than the right concept of man is characteristic of human civilizations through the passage of human history. This is also evident in the Pre-Christian Greek culture which is known for its sophisticated intellectual genius. All these express the inherent limitation of the human capacity to know truths in its fullness outside explicit revelation—a subject matter for Chapter III.

Bartholomew Abanuka, C.S.Sp, *Two Inquiries in African philosophy* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Spiritan Publications, 2003). In this work the author presents the Igbo ontology. It reveals the traditional Igbo’s attempt to make an ontological differentiation between different realities using the idea of “chi” as the individuating principle in Igbo tribal philosophy. Having said that, following the perspective taken by this paper one finds that it is not necessarily this lofty ontology that guides an Igbo person in daily life. The Igbo person is as prone as other Africans to the shortcomings in traditional African cultures.

Compare with the ontological implications of Benezet Bujo’s argument regarding the centrality of ancestry in the tribal cultures. See *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Translated from German by John O’ Donohue M.Afr. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 79.


Bartholomew Abanuka, 28-29.


John S. Mbiti, 4.

Ibid.

The second point should not be confused with the emphasis in contemporary Catholic theology, such as the one made in *Gaudium at Spes*, no. 12, that everything else in the universe should be related to man.

We shall take note in passing that the serious anthropological problems emanating from Western culture and about which the church has been concerned since the Second Vatican Council are very rife in Africa. The only difference is that in Africa they arise from a difference source, i.e., from the ontological set up of
the traditional cultures. Hence, the statements often heard in contemporary Africa that the materialistic attitudes in present Africa are rooted in the influence of Western culture are not completely accurate. In traditional Africa, even as recent as the 1960s, a person’s worth was greatly measured by how many women and property one had. This tendency was also counter balanced by insistence on the individual’s contribution to the community.

238 Let it be clear that ontology and anthropology are related and interdependent: One always implies the other. For one cannot speak about “being” without evoking the reality of God in relationship to a human being. However their usage in this text depends on the context and need for clarity, and also because Africa propounds multiple ontologies and anthropologies.

239 Take note that due to the fact that ancestry is the basis of African tribal cultures, we can accurately speak about African cultures having a “common basic structure of existence.” At the same time, this is where a basic commonality stops. Since biological ancestry was transformed into the category of human nature, then, ancestry is not merely the foundation of culture: biological ancestry became the defining point of human nature. As a result, there are over 1000, 000 different human natures in Africa. It is no small thing or exaggeration to say that this is the self-understanding characteristic of every Black person in Africa; non-Christian, Christian-clergy and laity alike. So when the proposals are made that ancestor or clan become the basis for the self-understanding of the local church, for instance, which tribal ancestor or clan can provide such basis-technically speaking?


241 Ibid.

242 Ibid.

243 Ibid.


245 Ibid.


247 Ibid., 73-74.

248 Ibid., 70-73.

249 Ibid., 70.

250 There is a general lack of understanding the differences as well as the relationships between human nature, race and ethnicity. Scientific knowledge has so far developed in such a way that it does not help us to deepen our understanding of the intrinsic relationship between the spiritual and transcendent dimension of a person and the bodily aspects. There are however some helpful findings, particularly the fact that when genes are confined within a particular familial or social heritage for a very long period, they take on some permanent characteristics different from others within the same race. Perhaps this is the most plausible reason by which we can account for evident differences in the genetic heritages within the Black race.

251 See John S. Mbiti 3. He explains the point on the freedom in the interpretations and usage of religious beliefs. He also recognizes that this freedom implies less unanimity in beliefs and practices.
It is also very important to admit that as life situations changes, especially the political and economic situations, many African people are caught between remaining loyal to their tribal ethos and making decisions for themselves. Because the cultural traditions do not prepare persons for a reasonable measure of true rational reflection, many young people resort to violence and moral recklessness.

This factor contributed to the distance between believers in ancestral religions and God. The people with whom Africans are connected by ties of blood are usually those who are also known intimately. But granted that God is not connected to anyone by ties of blood, it becomes difficult to know God at all. Knowledge through blood relationships is a natural way of knowing but does not necessarily fit into the ordained scheme of understanding temporal realities in relation to the transcendent. Incapacitated, therefore, by this natural way of knowing, the need for the ancestor as a mediator became more and more acute, as people also become more and more dependent on mediated spiritualities.

The degrees and intensity of the use of strangers differs from tribe to tribe. There are tribes with an over developed sense of stranger, while others seem not to be too concerned about its value. I cite my own heritage which does not have a concept of a stranger. The closest one comes to the latter is the term “omutende or omusuku,” meaning “enemy.” But this term is specifically used to describe someone who is known to cause harm to a community or individuals. Because such a person is known to have a dark heart, he is a liability to the community.

Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, The Origins and Development of African Theology (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 17. Citing Swailem Sidhom’s position regarding the African view of humanity published in 1969, Gwinyai H. Muzorewa adds his own convictions, convictions which at best tell about the general African social and religious psyches. “Foreigners are considered enemies because their motives are likely to be alien to the local tribal interests. Moreover, their loyalties are bound to be elsewhere. All these unknowns threaten peace in the community. One can easily turn out to be an enemy.” Ibid. The possibility that one outside the tribe can bring new ideas does not, therefore, arise in this social setup.


Ibid., 401. A detailed discussion of this important point is deferred to Chapter III.


The concept of tradition-directed is not intended to provide a definitive view that once any community is tradition-directed it becomes a closed social system. Human existence cannot be sustained without a “living tradition.” Without such a tradition persons concerned become rootless and have to cope with deep anxiety since they must continually search for the rational basis of their existence. The correspondence between a tradition directed and a closed social system is meant to express a possible anthropological anomaly. A human being can only develop his or her full capacity by continually reflecting on the past in light of the present and vice-versa. Where this human dynamic is absent, genuine rational reflection ceases.

Ary Roest Crollius, John Mary Waliggo, and Aylward Shorter, 15.
Vatican Council II: *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36. This section ought to be understood against the background understanding of the Conciliar treatise of “The dignity of the human person: Man as the image of God,” nos. 12-18.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the 1994 African Synod (no.106) acknowledged that the “cults of spirits as substitutions for God.” They are indeed indicators of the remoteness of God in people's lives. But neither the working document nor the Synod message gave a technical explanation of the causal factors for this anomaly. At the end of it all, one gets a sense that African Catholicism is still a long way from grasping the theological, spiritual, moral, and ethical implications of the remoteness of God in the traditional mindsets.


Thierry Verhelst, 5.


Because the scope of this study is delimited by its method of analysis, the meaning of Western social philosophy is also limited to basic “underlying structures of meaning,” namely, the human being as the foundation of social order. From a specifically Christian viewpoint, this chapter delves into important dimensions of a human being so that the true value of Western social philosophy can emerge clearly.


Ibid. 52.


Ibid., 30.

Ibid.

David Walsh, 32.


Ibid. 59. This is also true for Plato who treated the relationship of the soul to the body as if the former was burdened with a heavy cloak that it sought to shed. But Aristotle held that there was a type of unity in the person: the soul is the animating principle of the embodied person.

Ibid., 49.

David Walsh, 32.

Ibid., 32-33. Comblin also gives a complementary explanation. Because the followers of Aristotle believed in the “existence of a single soul,” it affected the concept of individual rationality and of the universal. “[Since] the soul is the principle of reason, and reason is the same for all, then there is no basis for positing the multiplicity of souls.” 66.

One of the contradictions in Greek philosophical anthropology is the failure to establish the relationship between soul and body. Despite the fact that philosophy assigned a much lesser status to the body, it is to the same that it assigned the principle of individuation. For the Christian Church, as Comblin observes, the eschatological implications are immense. The body housed the soul, at the same time being subject to corruption and death. The implication is that the death of a body automatically meant the death of a soul. The Fifth Lateran Council condemned such interpretation. See Jose Comblin, 65ff.

David Walsh, 32.

Ibid., 30.

Ibid., 35.

Ibid., 35.

Ibid. The same article contains some important facts about the development of Western society toward recognizable social and political unity. See the details, pp. 363-366.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

See also pertinent analyses by Thomas E. Woods, 52-54.

Ibid., 53, emphasis mine.

The basic idea is that by reinterpreting the meaning of a human being, it becomes impossible to see the connection which Jesus Christ has to the human race as a whole. The Enlightenment also made it impossible to see the essential relationship the Western culture has to Christianity. Otherwise, refer to Christological discussions in the last major section.

David Walsh, 78.

Ibid., 79.

Pamela R. Winnick “Science Friction,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Sunday, December 11, 2005), J-3. Winnick is a lawyer by profession. She is the author of *A Jealous God: Science’s Crusade Against Religion*.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

David Walsh, 31-32.

Ibid.

David Hollenbach observes insightfully that, “[T]he limited conditions of nature and history are the context within which personal dignity is realized. The human body and its immersion in the world of nature, the concreteness of personal relationships, and the structures of social organization are all essential for the preservation of man’s historical life as a person. They limit and condition the human personality. They are not, however, to be understood primarily as constrictions of the expansiveness of the human spirit. They become constrictive and oppressive when they are not properly ordered, but in their primary structure, bodiliness, interpersonal relationships and social organization are positive possibilities in and through which human dignity is realized.” See *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition*, 73. See pertinent topic: “From Faith and Reason to Christianity and Culture” in the same work, pp. 119-131.

See Pope John Paul II’s encyclical which treats in detail the relation between faith and reason in relation to culture; i.e., *Fides et Ratio*: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason (http://www.vatican.va/hol_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_15101998_fid… See also *John Paul II’s Address to the University Community of Combra*, Portugal, May 15, 1982. This encyclical is
a synthesis of the major concerns at the heart of the Second Vatican Council theology of Church and mission. See especially the treatises on the primary theme of faith and reason in the context of philosophical and theological anthropology.

315 David Walsh, 77.

316 David Hollenbach, 72-73.


318 This statement has to be understood in the sense that during Christendom, Western Christian world view and existence were basically informed by the church’s teaching. Fidelity to the truth guaranteed a common Christian world view. It is this kind of experience which converts to Christianity in young churches encountered in their missionaries. That the generation that composed of Christendom is no more, young churches now encounter Western Catholics who hold differing beliefs. The latter is an indicator, as Vatican II understood, that even Western Christianity needs to be re-evangelized.

319 John Paul II’s encyclical, Fides et Ratio is very lucid on this key point. Gaudium et Spes, no.58 also sums up these observations well. “[T]he Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nations, to any one particular way of life, to any customary practices, ancient or modern. The Church is faithful to its tradition and is at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby, enriching both itself and the cultures themselves…” Cf. no. 15.

320 The paragraph mentioned summarizes a specific tract of Karl Rahner’s basic ideas. See Gerald A. McCool. Ed., 66-74.

321 The role of the Protestant theological tradition in contributing to a self-defeating brand of liberalism in contemporary Western social and moral ethics is well treated in detail by David Walsh in his work cited in this paper.

322 David Walsh, 52-56

323 Ibid.

324 Ibid.

325 On the same subject Rahner points out that there was then a mentality in Catholic theology that when theology is not expressed through the Thomistic ideas and method its validity is somehow lessened. See Gerald A. McCool, ed., 66ff.


327 Like David Walsh, Rahner incorporates his anthropology in the matrix of the Thomistic metaphysics of being. See Gerald A. McCool, ed., 3ff.

328 We need to be clear about what constitutes the limits of the fact that all persons, regardless of their faith Creed, can listen to God’s revelation. Rahner apparently translated this important insight into his controversial idea of anonymous Christians. However, if this idea is not understood against the corpus of Rahner’s Christology, it can be applied in contradiction to the universal significance of Jesus Christ for the ultimate human salvation. By his incarnation, preaching, death and resurrection, plus Pentecost, Jesus
Christ offers the grace that fallen human beings cannot afford by their own efforts. This includes the fact of human finitude which naturally limits the scope of the human capacity to know any reality in its completeness.


331 Ibid.

332 The source, *Rahner Reader*, from which I have cited Karl Rahner’s work, is an assemblage of the different pieces of his theological writings. On this particular point, this anthropological perspective is very evident in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. It is common knowledge that Rahner is one of the key theologians who had a big influence on the thinking and direction of the Second Vatican Council. What this suggests is that the current Rahnerian anthropological line of thought antedates the Second Vatican Council.


334 Ibid., 66.

335 Ibid., 67. This quotation must be understood in continuity with the following statement where he says, “A purely a posteriori Christology [is] unable to integrate Christology correctly into an evolutionary total view of the world…would not find it easy to dismiss the suspicion of propounding a mythology.” Ibid. In other words, if the best Christology can do is to appeal to the historical revelation in Christ when responding to questions arising from existence, without an equal attempt to expound the ontological connection between Jesus and human existence, Christianity would increasingly lose its dynamic presence in the changed world.

336 Ibid., 66.

337 Ibid., 67.

338 Rahner is critiquing the pre-Vatican II dogmatic theological framework on the ground that it ignores the significance of concrete self-understanding as a necessary springboard for comprehending the fundamental significance of Christology. Instead, theology presumes that real human beings simply bypass previous self-understandings and cloak themselves in the Jesus persona.

339 David Walsh’s reflections on the Greek philosophical experience of “Being” lends itself well to Karl Rahner’s treatise on “being” relative to the “Being of beings.” See page 29ff by the same author.


341 Ibid. Gabriel Moran’s reflections on the differences between natural and supernatural knowledge in light of historical Revelation is in agreement with Rahner. He says, “supernatural knowledge is life at its fullest.” See, “The Nature of the Apostolic Experience” by the same author, 85.


343 Ibid.
In theological anthropology, human finitude is not synonymous with being restricted, fixed, set, or predetermined as would be construed today. It simply means openness to the future as the end of human life, or the point to which human beings are drawn by the source of our being.

Gerald A. McCool, Ed., 11. There is a Rahnerian echo in the following philosophical anthropological work. Battista Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology: Man an impossible Project* (Rome: Urbanian University Press, 1985). On p. 96, Mondin states: “Man is a finite being: he is cognizant that his “I” does not coincide with the Being” (Guardin). He goes on to add that: “in man there is a profound distinction between that which is and that which can be; he has consciousness that that which he is now is not all that he can be” (Heidegger, Block).

We shall note briefly that this particular point echoes the Aristotelian philosophy of being. He, for that matter, represents one of the highest points in Greek philosophical anthropology.

It is clear that the medieval concept of image and resemblance differ from the contemporary dictionary understanding where their meanings somewhat converge. For example, image in the dictionary tends to be associated with close likeness, and resemblance to similarity. There is, however, a strong nuance in the medieval use of the same concepts in respect of *imago Dei*. Image is understood in light of ontology as a realm of ultimate possibility. Resemblance needs to be understood more or less with reference to Rahner’s view that only in a perfect being does knowledge and being converge. In other words, resemblance is the authentic actualization of the image of God in us. This needs to be clear in order to grasp the point of departure from Augustine by the Franciscan tradition.

Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ, 5.

Ibid., 5ff.
Some qualification is necessary. In the early Church through the Patristic period was an age marked by a direct correspondence between knowledge and love. This is precisely because the early Church and the early Fathers of the Church understood that intimate knowledge of God was only possible through the Holy Spirit who makes transformation possible. As a result, these were periods of intense holiness, so much so that those who had knowledge of God were also very “authentically loving people.” The present age is very different in that there is a dichotomy between knowledge of God and authentic Christian love. Due to the existing relativistic view of life and other factors, it is possible for Christians today to have a mere intellectual assent to the Christian truths without being truly involved with the transcendent mystery—that is God.

Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ, 7.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

In his attempt to salvage valid elements in Thomas Aquinas’ theology of grace, especially on the topic of nature and grace, Stephen Duffy relativizes St. Bonaventure’s insights to those of Aquinas. According to this author, and based on the presentations in this chapter, St. Bonaventure’s theology of grace is a better advance of Thomas Aquinas’ thought. See Stephen J. Duffy on the topic: “Friar Thomas D’Aquino: Grace Perfecting Nature, 123ff.

Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ, 7.

Ibid., 5.

Ibid.

Ibid., 7-8.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid., 10.

Mary Beth Ingham provides sufficient account of *haecc*, an idea which Scotus uses to explain the significance of an individuating principle in the understanding of the reason why each person is different from another, regardless of being made in the same image of God. See pp. 12-16.

Ibid., 10.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 18.
384 Ibid., xi.
385 Ibid., 17.
386 Ibid.
387 Ibid.
388 Ibid.
389 Ibid., 18-19.
390 Ibid., xi.
391 Ibid., 18-19.
392 Ibid.
393 Ibid., 28-29.
394 Ibid., 29ff.
395 Ibid., 30
396 Ibid.
397 Ibid., 28.
398 Ibid.
399 Ibid., 27.
400 Ibid.
401 See Ingham’s detailed discussion on the same topic, 27-28, 32-35.
402 Ibid., 27.
403 Ibid.
404 Ibid.
405 Ibid., 33.
406 Ibid.
407 Ibid., 23.
408 Ibid., 21.
409 For instance, see John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nos, 8, 11, 14, etc.
410 Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ, 20.
411 Ibid., 19.
Pope John Paul II, at that time known as Karol Wojtyla, published the following book which is not only very essential to the concerns about human nature and its teleological ends. It is also very comprehensive in treating complex topics on the meaning of a human being at various levels of the existence. See Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II). *The Acting Person: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, Vol. X, Andrzej Potocki, trans. (Boston, USA: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

This particular objective is not exhaustive given the limited scope of a dissertation paper. Other principles can be drawn from the subject in the other four chapters.

There is a terrible phenomenon in school education whereby when you speak about “Basic Human Needs,” the answers always come in a straight jacket: food, clothing and shelter.


World English Dictionary conveys the sense in which the term “scientific” is used in the scholastic sense: “proceeding in a systematic and methodical way,” with clear fundamental metaphysical principles in view. The theological methodology which John Duns Scotus and Rahner employ fits this description.


To “become” in Johannine Christology does not imply deficiency in human nature, so that Jesus had to become what he was not. Rather, having become human, Jesus had to undergo the normal process of development in accordance with historical existence. Hence, Jesus’ life does not point to an existence different from our own. The only but fundamental difference is that his life unfolded within and in accordance with the true structure of human existence, a constant journey of transformation rooted in the life of God. As a result, he exceeded self-understanding and expressed it beyond any human being ever known. His entire life, passion, death, and, resurrection testify to his superior personhood. For these same reasons, he emerges as the ideal human being who deserves universal recognition and imitation.

Gerald A. McCool, Ed., 147,
J. Thornhill presents a succinct article on “Anthropocentrism” in which he explains the tendency in philosophy to make a person the measure of all things and for theology to make God the measure of all; i.e., without incorporating the meaning of a human being. The need to reconcile anthropocentrism with theocentrism, as the central theme of his article, is continued by T. M. McFadden in his article on “Anthropology, Theological.” Both authors draw upon Karl Rahner’s insights and the philosophical context of his work to achieve their separate but related goals. See Catholic Encyclopedia, 2003 Edition, (Washington DC: Gale, 2003), 508-510.

Gerald A. McCool, Ed., 66.

Ibid., 67.

Ibid., 69.

Ibid.

J. Thornhill, 508.

Gerald A. McCool, Ed., 69.

Ibid., 67.


This is precisely the basis for grasping the root of the cultural blind spot that prompts Bujo to identity the African world view with Christianity and Jesus Christ with the ancestors. Bujo identifies everything one can speak about concerning the elements common to biblical faith and the African cultures. This is a general limitation and points to the need for principles in fundamental theology as enunciated by Pope Benedict XVI. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology, Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D, trans. (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1987).


See Chapter I, Sections I. & III.

The recommendations that follow are made with the following in mind. There is great need at this point in history to re-interpret the colonization of Africa. This event was, no doubt, a brazen attack on the integrities of colonized peoples. But as real as that may have happened, a truly Catholic African Church must steer toward compassion knowing too well we are all broken human beings in need of each other to forge a collective future for all of us. Regardless of human brokenness, all have the obligation to exist as
wounded-healers. There is, therefore, need to step back and reinterpret this phenomenon with the purpose of identifying the work of providence that unfolded simultaneously with the messiness stemming from human weakness. That is, rather than justify the actions and attitudes of colonizers, we must recognize and learn from the colonizer’s actions that are pivotal to present-day human aspirations in Africa. And these are as many and as diverse as the nations of Africa. The need for re-interpretation is not for its own sake. One of the greatest virtues of the human spirit is the ability to take an honest look into the past mistakes, within and without, with the aim of healing wounds that abide within. Absent such healing, persons can continue to operate in a limited moral horizon susceptible to new sources of conflicts.

444 Emmanuel Martey, 36.

445 Emmanuel Martey observes correctly that inculturators in Africa tend to view culture in terms of symbols, customs and art. Notice that Martey’s concept of culture is just as confusing as those he criticizes. For instance, in the citations that follow, he does not seem to realize that the various elements he enumerates are contained in culture. Instead, he cites culture “as one of its components.”

446 Emmanuel Martey, 126. See a background discussion on pages, 39-46. Seen as a whole, his recommendation cannot co-exist with the concept of restoration which involves capturing the ancestral glory in its entirety. This study takes a different position: technological development requires some measure of changes in the structures of meaning erected by the ancestors.

447 Ibid., 63ff.

448 Emmanuel Martey’s insights at once converge and diverge, at many points, from the main stream of thought in African contextual theologies. That is to say, his views are not entirely free from the blind spots in African theology in general. For instance, unlike Benezet Bujo, Martey realizes that “Our world today is not that of our ancestors. There is a need to redefine contemporary African culture which is veritably not exhaustible by ‘traditionalism.” Ibid, 128.

449 Emmanuel Martey, 80.

450 Ibid., 71.

451 Protestant theologians, for instance, were required to stay away from the actual and final preparations for the 1993 African Synod. See the article by Engelbert Mveng., “Historical Background of the African Synod” in The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives, Maura Browne, S.N.D., ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996).

452 This is not to suggest that non-Catholic theologians cannot make use of Catholic teachings. The issue is deeper than this; i.e., the issue has to do with the lurking potential to not hold the Catholic doctrine in balance. African Catholic theologians and their counterparts are united by the common bond of African brotherhood and sisterhood. This is not the same as practicing one’s theology under the same theological tradition. Hence, should non-Catholic theologians err in the process of participating in Catholic contextual theologies, for instance, they are not subject to immediate correction by the Magisterium or African Catholic bishops for that matter. They have the right to uphold what they believe, even when they err in matters of faith and doctrine. This is not so for Catholic theologians who practice theology knowing that they are subject to the scrutiny of the higher authority of the Church and of the universal body of theologians. It is precisely for this reason and the reality of differing concepts of “a Church” that it would be wise and practical for Catholics and non-Catholic theologians to be committed to separate contextual theologies, while remaining open to mutual enrichment. But as of now, Catholic contextual theology in Africa stands in the watersheds of doctrinal and methodological quagmire. It is partly because of this situation that the teaching of the Second Vatican Council has not made much impact on African theological thought. In short, Catholic theologians ought to feel bound to remain faithful to the common agenda.

Emmanuel Martey, 78.

John Paul II’s *Address to the University Community*, Combra, Portugal, May 15, 1982. Iniobong also makes reference to this same teachings in his work cited in this chapter. Emphases mine.


Ibid., 52.

Ibid., 53.


The notion of the Promised Land is both a historical and a spiritual symbol of the God-given aspirations of his chosen people. On the historical plane the notion refers to the specific portion of land to be occupied by Israel. On the spiritual level the notion refers to the collective destiny of those redeemed through biblical faith.


An immediate example is “an eye for an eye” in the Old Testament… It is transformed into “love your neighbor as you love yourself” in the New Testament. Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments into the first two for the same reason given in the current section.

This statement was made by Father Sean Kealy during one his lectures on the New Testament studies (Theology Department, Duquesne University, 1999).

Review especially Chapter I, Section II. Benezet Bujo is more explicit and emphatic in a manner that better reflects African Traditional Religious consciousness.

The present argument should not be construed as a basic opposition to a recognized value system and a rule of law. One can not imagine of any society, religious or cultural, that can exist without value systems and the rule of law to guarantee peace and order, to say the least.

See T. M. McFadden in his article on “Anthropology, Theological” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 509.

Ibid., 509-510.

Ibid., 509.

Ibid.

Ibid. In the footnotes of this article, McFadden indicates that he is building his thoughts on Karl Rahner’s work.
Gregory Baum has treated well the significance of “a common reason” in relation to the meaning of history. This treatise develops in a series of concomitant themes that illuminate the contemporary social issues and how they impact theological reflection and the Church’s mission today. See Essays in Critical Theology (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward. 1994).

It is not clear yet whether it is by divine ordinance or accident that Catholic dioceses in Africa, for the most part, follow ethnic boarders. In some instances there exists practical justification for diocesan demarcations. Some ethnic groups are quite large and occupy very large expanses of land. However, the general African anthropological and ontological posture is, more often than not, extended to the Church’s institutional life. African Catholics tend to identify the church’s structures or patrimony with the tribal patrimony thus creating serious obstacles for the universal mission of the church.

The notion of “deeply ingrained” should not be equated with actual practice of the Christian virtues contained in the social system. That said, the presence of those virtues always hold the promise of renewal.


Refer to David Walsh, The Third Millennium Reflections on Faith and Reason. (Maryknoll, New York: Georgetown Universal Press, 1999). From Walsh’s content and structure of argument, it is obvious that the climax and goal of his work has to do with the Western world having abandoned the human being as imago Dei, which is moral basis for spreading its civilization through dialogue.

This really means that the real threat to contemporary Africa is not the West about which it is possible to recognize its Christian roots. The real threats are imperial powers like modern China. David Walsh’s observations are well supported by Stephen Mark, “a freelance writer and researcher specialising in development and human rights.” I cite at some detail his observation on China’s growing influence in Africa. He has this to say under the topic, China in Africa-The New Imperialism? “From oil fields in Sudan to farms in Zimbabwe, China’s presence in Africa can be seen and felt everywhere. In recent times . . . China’s relationship with Africa has shifted from Cold War ideology to a more classical pursuit of economic self-interest. But its not all negative – as the global economic giant bulges, opportunities also arise for Africa. China’s increased presence in Africa is part of a wider effort to ‘create a paradigm of globalisation that favours China’ [1]. In the past China’s African presence benefited from a shared history as an object of European imperialism and its ideological commitment to anti-imperialism and national liberation. China’s declared principles of respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs appealed not only as a contrast with the suspect motives of former colonial powers, but for less elevated reasons to rulers threatened with internal dissent. But more recently China’s policy has shifted from Cold War ideology to a more classical pursuit of economic self-interest in the form of access to raw materials, markets and spheres of influence through investment, trade and military assistance - to the point where China can be suspected of pursuing the goals of any classical imperialist.” This article accessed at Pambazuka news, through editor@pambazuka.org.

In reference to Chapter I, Section IV on “A Legend of the Reactionary Approach to Contextual Theology.”

The statement was made by Dianne Bergant, a renowned biblical scholar at a seminar organized by the Franciscan Sisters of Peace, which I attended in July, 2007.

With traditional cultural symbols in stiff competition with their Western cultural counter parts, many Africans experience a crisis of identity. The individuals find themselves pulled between the symbols of modern Western forms of identity and the tribal ones. The degree and intensity of this crisis differs from tribe to tribe, depending on the extent to which ethnocentrism nurtured egoism. While in the past some tribes aimed at taming egoistic life-styles, others appear to have encouraged the building of self-esteem through relentless competition that forever seeks self-esteem in the accumulation of material goods, and by the latter becoming the measure of personal worth. In a situation of poverty, a relentless search for identity
is visible in many forms, the most obvious being invasive behavior and a reckless pursuit of monetary gains within and without one’s country. These are growing realities and cannot be simply ignored for the sake of preserving obsolete traditions.

Perhaps no African Christian theologian exemplifies this inclination better than Benezet Bujo. Review Chapter I: The Hermeneutic for Translating the Gospel into Cultural Categories

Church in Central Africa @Zenit.org (Koenigstein, Germany: September 25, 2007), 1.

Benedict XVI, “Prophetic Signs of a Humanity Freed from Rancor and Fear” (Vatican City, January 27, 2006), 1.

One of the greatest merits of African cultures is the spirituality of mourning the dead and dealing with suffering. It is probable that if Africa adopts contemporary Western attitude to suffering, it would be a worse disaster than what is going on in other sectors of life. This is one those many important aspects of life that the contemporary West needs to learn from Africa. A strong aversion to any form of suffering breeds the inability to face the reality of death. Psychotic illnesses that can emerge from this condition are innumerable.

It ought to be clear that a person who is transformed by a superstitious world view does not necessarily think that his experience is the sheer outcome of delusional thought. This kind of person is also different from one who consciously adopts superstitious practices for material gains so that people can come to him or her to seek for advice. This second group simply exploits the masses.

It is important to Catholic faith in Africa that any claims about the existence of traditional healers outside medicinal healers have to be examined in the light of an authentic Catholic theology of grace. Naturally, the theology of grace lies in the wider context of the Redemption in Christ.

While respective tribal members are crucial to the process of theological discernment, especially in the interpretation of concepts and specific customs, non-tribal remembers are equally important. Because tribal cultures forever exist by asserting their superiority, the likelihood of reflecting on the impact of tribal attitudes and actions on others is alien to Africa. It is therefore the non-tribal members who must, with charity, bring their observations to a dialogue forum. In other words, inter-cultural dialogue is extremely important for pinpointing the cultural blind spots, however uncomfortable this may be. Besides, it is through inter-ethnic dialogue that tribes can recognize the need for mutual exchange of ideas. This is extremely important, since it is taken for granted that ancestry guaranteed homogeneous development of moral values. The opposite seems to be the case. Tribal cultures developed moral values in varying degrees. In some in instances, if not many, it is possible to find that certain tribes are totally lacking in certain moral values than others.

For details on the importance of philosophical inquiry refer to John Paul II’s Encyclical, Fides et Ratio.

This is well addressed by John Paul II, Catechesi Tradendae (16 October, 1979), no. 17. His entire encyclical, Fides et Ratio also deals with the need for continued progress in self-understanding. It presupposes that such cannot be without a felt need for constant revision of cultural beliefs and values.

Refer to Chapters I-III on this topic.


There is an interesting “Essay” written by Avery Dulles, S.J., which “Addresses the Question of Universal and Particular Churches.” Its main topic reads as: Cardinal Dulles Weighs in on Ratzinger-Kasper Debate. http://Zenit.org/English. Dulles’ aligns his position with that of Pope Benedict XVI, then, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who rightly maintained that the universal Church ontologically precedes


494 Review Chapter III, on the relationship between Christology and theological anthropology. This contains basic underlying systems of closely interconnected meanings that form the foundations for bringing the gospel message into a cultural milieu. They offer the standard by which the local Church can reformulate its self-understanding beyond the traditional heritages.


496 On the role of the Pope see, for instance, Cardinal Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*. The Catholic Church contains a political element ordered to centering different ecclesial communities around the See of Peter. This political aspect of the Church is dynamic in the sense that it is expressible in the many local churches that “make up” the one local Church. The notion of “make up” must be read with an understanding found in Benedict XVI’s work cited above. In this work he makes a sound argument that the Catholic Church is not a product of particular communions—did not come about as a result of the amalgamation of many Churches. For the Pope, universality and communion are rooted in specific metaphysical assumptions. Obviously, the Pope’s position is very different from the one expressed by the German Lutheran theologian, Jurgen Moltmann. He says, “The “Church” with its structures, organizations, and powers exists exclusively for the sake of the congregation. All ministries of the “Church” are related to the congregation and are put to the test by the mature congregation. From its side, the congregation is mature to the degree that it no longer experiences itself as being taken care of ecclesiastically and tended to by ordained officials but rather becomes the independent, responsible subjects of its own history with God. Only then can Christian freedom be experienced in the congregation…. See the back cover of his book: *The Open Church: Invitation to a Messianic Life-style Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

497 It ought to be clear that whether or not one or more of the traditional images of the church is consciously selected for the use of a local theology, all comprise an intrinsic component of any Catholic ecclesiology.


499 Ibid.

500 Ibid.

501 Ibid., 85-6.

502 The Pope gives a profound discussion of these aspects in the same work, under the subtopic, “Tradition and Humanity,” 86-94.

Although many of the major points the Pope talks about in this book are well defined in the *Principles of Catholic Theology* cited above, the former is very important in understanding the development of the Pope’s ideas of the importance of history. One could rightly term Benedict XVI’s treatment of history as a systematic theology and philosophy of history. Another important writer is a German historian and philosopher, Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation: An Interdisciplinary Debate and Anthology*, William M. Thompson and David L. Morse, eds. (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2000). This is also an outstanding piece of work on the role of “Revelation in Israel” in the understanding and emergence of contemporary human history. These and many other authentic thinkers are essential for a notion of history which must accompany contemporary Catholic theological thought. But the Pope’s treatises of history are particularly critical in discerning the specific principles for the development of a fundamental Catholic theology.

Because Biblical revelation springs from God as the source of all being, it must follow that that there can be no concept of history without reference to a general ontology. Contemporary Catholic systematic theology cannot avoid the subject of history without doing itself a disservice. Pope Benedict provides a very insightful discussion on the extreme significance of history in the understanding of tradition. Taking Scripture and tradition as theological principles for Catholic theology, he develops this extremely important subject in direct relations to the meaning of history for a Catholic theology. See also the work of a Protestant theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg. *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*, vol. I, George H. Kehm, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). Wolfhart also presents a compelling view of history that resonates with the current concerns of the present study.

This assumption does not disregard the fact that revelation in Israel also falls under “particular experience.” However, the difference between revelation in Israel and general revelation in cultures lies in a correct understanding of salvation history in relationship to Jesus Christ. This is the basis for pursuing a specific understanding of history when it comes to a Christian theology that is Catholic. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 85ff.

An immediate example has to do with an attitude common in the contextual theological circles. It claims that if one does not have immediate knowledge of a particular culture, such a one cannot understand a contextual theology that arises from that culture, let alone comment on the contents of that theology. There is an alternative view. If a contextual theology is grounded in the one Christian message of salvation, then it is also possible that those who believe in that message can comprehend contextual theologies developed in other cultural contexts other than one’s own.

For example, although the ethnic, racial identity and history of Israel is essential to the understanding of salvation history, it is not that which gives substance to meaning of history as salvation history. Rather, biblical Israel understood that it is God’s initiative to reveal Himself to Israel that gives substance to history as salvation history and to Israel’s racial history. In this way, Israel experience of history is normative for human history.

I borrow this phraseology from Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ, on John Duns Scotus cited in the subsequent chapters where its meaning is already clarified. Otherwise see *The Harmony of Goodness: Mutuality and Moral Living According to John Duns Scotus* (Quincy, Illinois: The Franciscan Press, 1996).

I use the term *tradition* in the sense that Pope Benedict XVI used in his work already cited above, i.e., *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*. Refer to this book for an in depth reading of this terminology as it relates to the *mission* of the Church. What Pope Benedict says here can easily be translated into specific principles for fashioning a local theology.

The notion of history is changing in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized. Chapter II, Section II indicated that globalization is imparting new meaning to the understanding of history and consequently to the way in which societies structure different forms of existence and international relationships. The phenomenon presents itself as a new interpretive framework for a concept of human history. Although there are many areas still to be explored beyond what this study has accomplished, it suffices to recognize one serious obstacle to contextualization and inculturation (i.e., what it means to be a local Catholic Church). The notion of history informed by globalizing phenomena contains many forces with great potential to impede the ability of any local church to gather all things into one. The potential obstacles do not detract from the concept of any church as a gathering community.


*Concilium: Globalization and Its Victims*, Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred, eds. (London: SCM Press, 2001), 35. The author concurs with Etienne Perrot, who also gives an accurate appraisal of the changes being ushered in by globalization. He largely maintains that “economic development will no longer be under the control of nation-states. The availability and flow of goods from industrialized nations lead to the disregard of less versatile good in recipient countries. The most visible effects of the social disorder produced by economic globalization are the growth of economic insecurity and the precarious nature of employment, both of which are linked to the instability of the markets. All this is bound up with a disparity in revenues. These phenomena are the consequence of the selectivity of the markets and lead to a decline of the economic value of unskilled labour and an increase in the value of skilled labour. The corollary is a displacement of economic power.” Etienne Perrot, “The General Dimension of Globalization and Its Critics: The Ambiguities of Globalization” in *Concilium: Globalization and Its Victims*, 18. All in all, the available means of producing and disseminating goods in the globalizing context take priority over basic human values. This is a point at which one ought to locate the nature of the unholy marriage between contemporary social theory and globalization. They both embody and enforce the “economic principle” as the most fundamental drive behind “development.” They put in force the internal mechanisms that have the power of leveling the cultural landscapes of global nations. They simultaneously cultivate and inculcate a narrow view of the concept of development. What matters most in contemporary social theory and in the globalization drive is the economic aspect of human life and the most efficient means of realizing it.

Let it also be clear that the process of gathering is not limited to people, but to everything humanly good, within and outside African cultures. One such important item in modern African history is the Western social system. The Christological interpretive framework for “gathering” that which is of ultimate value in the Western social system is already provided in Chapter III & IV.

In this particular aspect of Dulles’ discussions, he is applying a “typology”, which H. Richard Niebuhr put forward for working through the challenges posed to Catholicity by inculturation. The typology is presented in form of four models, of which I have omitted a “confrontation model,” because as Dulles mentioned, it has not found valid use in Catholic theology. See Avery Dulles, S. J., *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of the Church*, 38.

Although Dulles cites specific examples from *Ecclesia in Asia*, the content of discussion is applicable to all cultural regions in which the Church finds itself. It is with this understanding that these concluding summaries ought to be read.

Ibid., 42.

This statement ought to be read in light of the material covered in Chapters II & III.

Note that Bernard Lonergan’s assumption is that, since divine love is open to all, it is experienced with the same quality, degree and intensity. Needless to say, Lonergan’s position ignores the fact that personal disposition to the divine and social circumstances have a direct bearing on the experience of divine love, for better or for worse.

These statements should, in no way, be interpreted as a negation of a synthesis model. The latter has its place in the Christian cultural encounter as indicated in certain documents from official teaching. John Paul II is cited by Avery Dulles to have made the following official statement regarding the value of a synthesis model for the Christian mission. Quote: “The synthesis between faith and culture is not only a demand of culture but also of faith…A faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully received, not entirely pondered, not faithfully lived.” Ibid., 40. Understood this way, a synthesis, properly conceived, enables Christian faith to become “a way of life” for any cultural group. In other words, a valid synthesis should be ordered to making biblical faith become a culture of any people.


